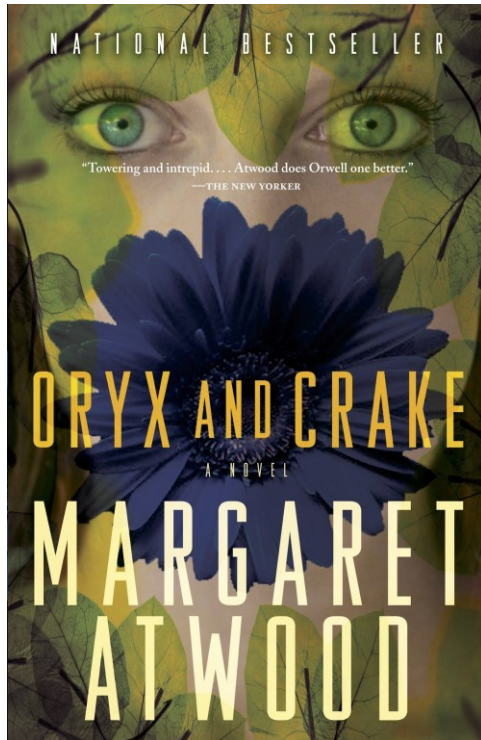


ORYX AND CRAKE



Adult

By Margaret Atwood

ISBN: 0-385-50385-7

9781400078981

CONTENT WARNING

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Book Summary:

In a post-apocalyptic world, he helped destroy, a young man recalls his past involving his best friend girlfriend whom they found on a child pornography website.

Summary of Concerns:

This book contains alcohol use and abuse; drug use; sexual activities; sexual nudity; profanity; suicide; violence; inflammatory religious commentary; and inexplicit bestiality.

4 /5

Not For Minors
BookLooks Review Rating

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4	<p>He's stashed some mangoes there, knotted in a plastic bag, and a can of Sveltana No-Meat Cocktail Sausages, and a precious half-bottle of Scotch- no, more like a third- and a chocolate-flavoured energy bar scrounged from a trailer park, limp and sticky inside its foil.</p> <p>... They would have been told to wear solar topis, dress for dinner, refrain from raping the natives. It wouldn't have said raping. Refrain from fraternizing with the female inhabitants. Or, put some other way...</p> <p>He bets they didn't refrain, though. Nine times out of ten.</p>
8	<p>After a few minutes of hesitation the children squat down in a half-circle, boys and girls together. A couple of the younger ones are still munching on their breakfasts, the green juice running down their chins. It's discouraging how grubby everyone gets without mirrors. Still, they're amazingly attractive, these children- each one naked, each one perfect, each one a different skin colour- chocolate, rose, tea, butter, cream, honey- but each with green eyes.</p>
11	<p>And the temporary oblivion of sex.</p> <p>"Don't even think about it," he tells himself. Sex is like drink, it's bad to start brooding about it too early in the day.</p> <p>... A woman's voice says caressingly in his ear, Nice buns! It isn't Oryx, it's some other woman.</p> <p>...Oh, nice abs! comes the whisper, interrupting him. Honey, just lie back. Who is it? Some tart he once bought. Revision, professional sex-skills expert. A trapeze artist, rubber spine, spangles glued onto her like the scales of a fish.</p> <p>...Pretty soon he'll be seeing beautiful demons, beckoning to him, licking their lips, with red-hot nipples and flickering pink tongues.</p> <p>...Creatures with the heads and breasts of women and the talons of eagles will swoop down on him, and he'll open his arms to them, and that will be the end.</p> <p>Brainfrizz.</p>
23	<p>Old enough for what? To drink, to fuck, to know better?</p> <p>... Her hair was soft and dark. Jimmy's mother's hair was what she herself called dirty blonde. ("Not dirty enough," said his father...)</p>
38	<p>"Someone who?" Jimmy hated him, this someone- faceless, eyeless, mocking all hands and dick, now singular, now double, now a multitude- but Oryx had her mouth right next to his ear and was whispering, Oh, oh, some, one, and laughing at the same time, so how could he concentrate on this stupid old hate?</p>
40	<p>Let's pretend I'm here with you, big butt and all, getting ready to suck your brains right out your dick.</p>
42	<p>Double-entry on-screen bookkeeping, banking by fingertip, using a microwave without nuking your egg, filling out housing applications for this or that Module and job applications for this or that Compound, family heredity research, negotiating your own marriage-and-divorce contracts, wise genetic match-mating, the proper use of condoms to avoid sexually transmitted bio-forms: those had been the Life Skills.</p>
54	<p>He'd moved on from the chimpanzee act and was into fake vomiting and choking to death- both popular- and a thing where he drew a bare-naked girl on his stomach with her crotch right where his navel was, and made her wiggle.</p>

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55	What well-to-do and once-young, once-beautiful woman or man, cranked up on hormonal supplements and shot full of vitamins but hampered by the unforgiving mirror, wouldn't sell their house, their gated retirement villa, their kids, and their soul to get a second kick at the sexual can?
57	"Take some pills if you're so fucking depressed!"
58	At least he wasn't a drunk or an addict like a lot of boys his age, so touch wood. ...Several years passed. They must have passed, thinks Snowman: he can't actually remember much about them except that his voice cracked and he began to sprout body hair. Not a big thrill at the time except that it would have been worse not to. He got some muscles too. He started having sexy dreams and suffering from lassitude. He thought about girls a lot in the abstract, as it were- girls without heads- and about Wakulla Price with her head on, though she wouldn't hang out with him.
59	He shouldn't have had Righteous Mom weeping in the kitchen because her ovaries had burst; he shouldn't have done that sex scene with the Monday Special Fish Finger, 20% Real Fish- Evil Dad falling upon it and tearing it apart with lust because Righteous Mom was sulking inside an empty Twinkies package and wouldn't come out.
63	Now I'm going into the Twinkies package. No sex tonight!
65	Life took on a different pattern, which involved bouts of giggly, growly sex going on behind doors that were closed but not soundproof, while Jimmy turned his music up high and tried not to listen. ...Once there was a difficult encounter in the upstairs hall, Jimmy's father in a bath towel, ears standing out from the sides of his head, jowls flushed with the energy of his latest erotic tussle, Jimmy red with shame and pretending not to notice. The two hormone-sodden love bunnies might have had the decency to do it in the garage, instead of rubbing Jimmy's nose in it all the time.
67	Sometimes she would watch DVD movies with him, sitting beside him on the couch , making them a bowl of popcorn first, pouring melted butter substitute onto it, dipping into it with greasy fingers she'd lick during the scary parts while Jimmy tried not to look at her breasts.
71	Her name was Melons- that was a nickname used among the boys in the class- but Snowman can't remember her real name. She shouldn't have bent down so closely over his Read-A-Screen, her large round breasts almost touching his shoulder. She shouldn't have worn her NooSkins T-shirt tucked so tightly into her zipleg shorts: it was too distracting. ...He liked to imaging that if he hadn't been a minor, and she his teacher and subject to abuse charges, she'd have been gnawing her way through his bedroom walls to sink her avid fingers into his youthful flesh
72	Here's the gym, here's the library, those are the readers, you have to sign up for them before noon, in there's the girls' shower room, there's supposed to be a hole drilled through the wall but I've never found it. If you want to smoke dope don't use the can, they've got it bugged; there's a microlens for Security in that air vent, don't stare at it or they'll know you know.

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73	<p>They'd wait until some parent was away, then get right down to business- they'd swarm the place, waste themselves with loud music and toking and boozing, fuck everything including the family cat, trash the furniture, shoot up, overdose.</p> <p>...LyndaLee was on the rowing team and had muscular thighs and impressive pecs, and had smuggled him up to her bedroom on more than one occasion. She had a foul mouth and more experience than Jimmy, and every time he went with her he felt as if he'd been sucked into a Pachinko machine, all flashing lights and random tumbling and cascades of ball bearings. He didn't like her much, but he needed to keep up with her, make sure he was still on her list. Maybe he could get Crake into the queue- do him a favour, build up some gratitude equity.</p> <p>...So Jimmy and Crake played a few games of Three-Dimensional Waco in the arcade and had a couple of SoyOBoyburgers - no beef that month, said the chalkboard menu- and an iced Happicuppichino, and half a Joltbar each to top up their energy and mainline a few steroids.</p> <p>..."You think he's got his hand on her ass?" he said.</p>
74	<p>"All potential hand positions must now be considered. Waist, ruled out. Upper right cheek, ruled out. Lower right cheek or upper thigh would seem by deduction to be the most likely. Hand between both upper thighs a possibility, but this position would impede walking on the part of the subject, and no limping or stumbling is detectable."</p>
78	<p>The Blood side played with human atrocities for the counters, atrocities on a large scale: individual rapes and murders didn't count, there had to have been a large number of people wiped out.</p>
80	<p>(Pollution, habitat destruction, credulous morons who thought that eating its horn would give them a boner.)</p>
81	<p>When they weren't playing games they'd surf the Net — drop in on old favourites, see what was new. They'd watch open-heart surgery in live time, or else the Noodie News, which was good for a few minutes because the people on it tried to pretend there was nothing unusual going on and studiously avoided looking at one another's jujubes.</p> <p>Or they'd watch animal snuff sites, Felicia's Frog Squash and the like, though these quickly grew repetitious: one stomped frog, one cat being torn apart by hand, was much like another. Or they'd watch dirtysockpuppets.com, a current-affairs show about world political leaders.</p> <p>...Or they might watch hedsoff.com, which played live coverage of executions in Asia. There they could see enemies of the people being topped with swords in someplace that looked like China, while thousands of spectators cheered. Or they could watch alibooboo.com, with various supposed thieves having their hands cut off and adulterers and lipstick-wearers being stoned to death by howling crowds, in dusty enclaves that purported to be in fundamentalist countries in the Middle East. The coverage was usually poor on that site: filming was said to be prohibited, so it was just some desperate pauper with a hidden minivideocam, risking his life for filthy Western currency.</p>
83	<p>Shortcircuit.com, brainfrizz.com, and deathrowlive.com were the best; they showed electrocutions and lethal injections. Once they'd made real-time coverage legal, the guys being executed had started hamming it up for the cameras. They</p>

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	<p>were mostly guys, with the occasional woman, but Jimmy didn't like to watch those: a woman being croaked was a solemn, weepy affair, and people tended to stand around with lighted candles and pictures of the kids, or show up with poems they'd written themselves. But the guys could be a riot. You could watch them making faces, giving the guards the finger, cracking jokes, and occasionally breaking free and being chased around the room, trailing restraint straps and shouting foul abuse.</p> <p>...The viewers wanted to see the executions, yes, but after a while these could get monotonous, so one last fighting chance had to be added in, or else an element of surprise.</p> <p>...There was an assisted-suicide site too nitee-nite.com, it was called — which had a this-was-your-life component: family albums, interviews with relatives, brave parties of friends standing by while the deed was taking place to background organ music. After the sad-eyed doctor had declared that life was extinct, there were taped testimonials from the participants themselves, stating why they'd chosen to depart. The assisted-suicide statistics shot way up after this show got going. There was said to be a long lineup of people willing to pay big bucks for a chance to appear on it and snuff themselves in glory, and lotteries were held to choose the participants.</p>
84	<p>Or they would watch At Home With Anna K. Anna K. was a self-styled installation artist with big boobs who'd wired up her apartment so that every moment of her life was sent out live to millions of voyeurs. "This is Anna K., thinking always about my happiness and my unhappiness," was what you'd get as you joined her. Then you might watch her tweezing her eyebrows, waxing her bikini line, washing her underwear. Sometimes she'd read scenes from old plays out loud, taking all the parts, while sitting on the can with her retro-look bell-bottom jeans around her ankles.</p>
85	<p>But the body had its own cultural forms. It had its own art. Executions were its tragedies, pornography was its romance.</p> <p>To access the more disgusting and forbidden sites — those for which you had to be over eighteen, and for which you needed a special password — Crake used his Uncle Pete's private code, via a complicated method he called a lily pad labyrinth. He'd construct a winding pathway through the Web, hacking in at random through some easy-access commercial enterprise, then skipping from lily pad to lily pad, erasing his footprints as he went. That way when Uncle Pete got the bill he couldn't find out who'd run it up.</p> <p>Crake had also located Uncle Pete's stash of high-grade Vancouver skunkweed, kept in orange-juice cans in the freezer; he'd take out about a quarter of the can, then mix in some of the low-octane carpet sweepings you could buy at the school tuck shop for fifty bucks a baggie. He said Uncle Pete would never know because he never smoked except when he wanted to have sex with Crake's mother, which — judging from the number of orange-juice cans and the rate at which they were getting used up wasn't often.</p>
86	<p>So they'd roll a few joints and smoke them while watching the executions and the porn the body parts moving around on the screen in slow motion, an underwater ballet of flesh and blood under stress, hard and soft joining and separating, groans</p>

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	<p>and screams, close-ups of clenched eyes and clenched teeth, spurts of this or that. If you switched back and forth fast, it all came to look like the same event. Sometimes they'd have both things on at once, each on a different screen. ...Jimmy on the other hand would wobble homewards, still fuzzy from the dope and feeling as if he'd been to an orgy, one at which he had no control at all over what had happened to him.</p>
89	<p>March, it must have been, because it was already hot as hell outside- the two of them were watching porn in Crake's room. Already it felt like old tim's sake, already if felt like nostalgia- something they were too grown-up for, like middle-aged guys cruising the pleebland teeny clubs. Still, they dutifully lit up a joint, hacked into Uncle Pete's digital charge card via a new labyrinth, and started surfing. They checked into Tart of the Day, which featured elaborate confectionery in the usual orifices, then went to Superswallowers; then to a Russian site that employed ex-acrobats, ballerinas, and contortionists. "Whoever said a guy can't suck his own?" was Crake's comment. The high-wire act with the six flaming torches was pretty good, but they'd seen things like that before.</p> <p>Then they went to HottTotts, a global sextrotting site. "The next best thing to being there," was how it was advertised. It claimed to show real sex tourists, filmed while doing things they'd be put in jail for back in their home countries. Their faces weren't visible, their names weren't used, but the possibilities for blackmail, Snowman realizes now, must have been extensive. The locations were supposed to be countries where life was cheap and kids were plentiful, and where you could buy anything you wanted.</p> <p>This was how the two of them first saw Oryx. She was only about eight, or she looked eight. They could never find out for certain how old she'd been then. Her name wasn't Oryx, she didn't have a name. She was just another little girl on a porno site.</p> <p>None of those little girls had ever seemed real to Jimmy — they'd always struck him as digital clones — but for some reason Oryx was three-dimensional from the start. She was small-boned and exquisite, and naked like the rest of them, with nothing on her but a garland of flowers and a pink hair ribbon, frequent props on the sex-kiddie sites. She was on her knees, with another little girl on either side of her, positioned in front of the standard gargantuan Gulliver-in-Lilliput male torso — a life-sized man shipwrecked on an island of delicious midgets, or stolen away and entranced, forced to experience agonizing pleasures by a trio of soulless pixies. The guy's distinguishing features were concealed — bag with eyeholes over the head, surgical tape over the tattoos and scars: few of these types wanted to be spotted by the folks back home, though the possibility of detection must have been part of the thrill.</p> <p>The act involved whipped cream and a lot of licking. The effect was both innocent and obscene: the three of them were going over the guy with their kittenish tongues and their tiny fingers, giving him a thorough workout to the sound of moans and giggles. The giggles must have been recorded, because they weren't coming from the three girls: they all looked frightened, and one of them was crying.</p> <p>...Oryx paused in her activities. She smiled a hard little smile that made her</p>

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	<p>appear much older, and wiped the whipped cream from her mouth. Then she looked over her shoulder and right into the eyes of the viewer — right into Jimmy's eyes, into the secret person inside him. I see you, that look said. I see you watching. I know you. I know what you want.</p> <p>Crake pushed the reverse, then the freeze, then the download. Every so often he froze frames; by now he had a small archive of them. Sometimes he'd print them out and give a copy to Jimmy. It could be dangerous it could leave a footprint for anyone who might manage to trace a way through the labyrinth — but Crake did it anyway. So now he saved that one moment, the moment when Oryx looked.</p> <p>...The joint he'd been smoking must have had nothing in it but lawn mowings: if it had been stronger he might have been able to bypass guilt.</p> <p>..."This a keeper?" Crake said. "You want it?"</p> <p>"Yeah," said Jimmy. He could barely get the word out. He hoped he sounded normal.</p> <p>So Crake had printed it, the picture of Oryx looking, and Snowman had saved it and saved it. He'd shown it to Oryx many years later.</p> <p>"I don't think this is me," was what she'd said at first.</p> <p>"It has to be!" said Jimmy. "Look! It's your eyes!"</p> <p>"A lot of girls have eyes," she said. "A lot of girls did these things. Very many."</p> <p>Then, seeing his disappointment, she said, "It might be me. Maybe it is. Would that make you happy, Jimmy?"</p> <p>...Jimmy had to think about that. He remembered himself watching. How could he have done that to her? And yet it hadn't hurt her, had it?</p> <p>...She sighed. "I was thinking," she said, tracing a little circle on his skin with her fingernail, "that if I ever got the chance, it would not be me down on my knees."</p> <p>"It would be someone else?" said Jimmy.</p> <p>"Who? What someone?"</p> <p>"You want to know everything," said Oryx.</p>
100	<p>Maybe this is the reason that these women arouse in Snowman not even the faintest stirrings of lust. It was the thumbprints of human imperfection that used to move him, the flaws in the design: the lopsided smile, the wart next to the navel, the mole, the bruise. These were the places he'd single out, putting his mouth on them. Was it consolation he'd had in mind, kissing the wound to make it better? There was always an element of melancholy involved in sex. After his indiscriminate adolescence he'd preferred sad women, delicate and breakable, women who'd been messed up and who needed him. He'd liked to comfort them, stroke them gently at first, reassure them. Make them happier, if only for a moment. Himself too, of course; that was the payoff. A grateful woman would go the extra mile.</p>
102	<p>A story is what they want, in exchange for every slaughtered fish. Well, I owe them, Snowman thinks. God of bullshit, fail me not.</p>
106	<p>After a long session of tossing, turning, and scratching, he climbs back down to seek out the Scotch bottle in his cache. There's enough starlight so he can get his bearings, more or less. He's made this trip many times in the past: for the first month and a half, after he was fairly sure it was safe to relax his vigilance, he got pissed out of his mind every night.</p>

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	<p>...So every night had been party night, party of one. Or every night he'd had the makings, whenever he'd been able to locate another stash of alcohol in the abandoned pleebland buildings within reach.</p> <p>...He'd done cough medicine, shaving lotion, rubbing alcohol; out behind the tree he's accumulated an impressive dump of empty bottles. Once in a while he'd come across a stash of weed and he'd done that too, though often enough it was moldy; still, he might manage to get a buzz out of it. Or he might find some pills. No coke or crack or heroin — that would have been used up early, stuffed into veins and noses in one last burst of carpe diem; anything for a vacation from reality, under the circumstances. There'd been empty BlyssPlus containers everywhere, all you'd need for a non-stop orgy. The revelers hadn't managed to get through all the booze, though often enough on his hunting and gathering trips he's discovered that others had been there before him and there was nothing left but broken glass.</p>
107	<p>He slides open the cache, fumbles blindly within it, retrieves the third of Scotch. He's been saving it up, resisting the urge to binge, keeping it as a sort of charm- as long as he's known it was still there it's been easier to get through time. This might be the last of it.</p> <p>...Once up, he sits on his platform, gulping down the Scotch and howling at the stars- Aroo! Aroo!- until he's startled by a chorus of replies from right near the tree.</p>
110	<p>Sometimes he can conjure her up. At first she's pale and shadowly, but if he can say her name over and over, then maybe she'll glide into his body and be present with him in his flesh, and his hand on himself will become her hand. But she's always been evasive, you can never pin her down. Tonight she fails to materialize and he is left alone, whimpering ridiculously, jerking off all by himself in the dark.</p>
113	<p>"It wasn't the sex," he says to her.</p> <p>..."It wasn't just the sex." A dark smile from her: that's better. "You know I love you. You're the only one." She isn't the first woman he's ever said that to. He shouldn't have used it up so much earlier in his life, he shouldn't have treated it like a tool, a wedge, a key to open women.</p>
114	<p>There must once have been other versions of her: her mother's story, the story of the man who'd bought her, the story of the man who'd bought her after that, and the third man's story- the worst man of them all, the one in San Francisco, a pious bullshit artist; but Jimmy had never heard those.</p> <p>..."Did you ever scrub floors?" Jimmy asked her once.</p> <p>"Floors?" She thought a minute. "We didn't have floors. When I got as far as the floors, it wasn't me scrubbing them."</p>
116	<p>In the village it was not called "selling," this transaction. The talk about it implied apprenticeship. The children were being trained to earn their living in the wide world: this was the gloss on it. Besides, if they stayed where they were, what was there for them to do? Especially the girls, said Oryx. They would only get married and make more children, who would then have to be sold in their turn.</p>
117	<p>This man wasn't regarded as a criminal of any sort, but as an honourable businessman who didn't cheat, or not much, and who paid in cash. Therefore he was treated with respect and shown hospitality, because no one in the village</p>

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	<p>wanted to get on his bad side. What if he ceased to visit? What if a family needed to sell a child and he would not buy it because he'd been offended on a previous visit? He was the villagers' bank, their insurance policy, their kind rich uncle, their only charm against bad luck. And he had been needed more and more often, because the weather had become so strange and could no longer be predicted — too much rain or not enough, too much wind, too much heat — and the crops were suffering.</p>
119	<p>What Crake had to say was this: "Jimmy, look at it realistically. You can't couple a minimum access to food with an expanding population indefinitely. Homo sapiens doesn't seem able to cut himself off at the supply end. He's one of the few species that doesn't limit reproduction in the face of dwindling resources. In other words—and up to a point, of course- the less we eat, the more we fuck."</p>
121	<p>The mother of Oryx sold two of her children at the same time, not only because she was hard up. ...The other child was a boy, a year older than Oryx. Fewer boys were sold than girls, but they were not therefore more valued.</p>
130	<p>Something else would have to be found for the brother — some other occupation. He would have to be sold elsewhere. The older children in the room shook their heads: the brother would be sold to a pimp, they said; a pimp for hairy white foreign men or bearded brown men or fat yellow men, any kind of men who liked little boys. They described in detail what these men would do; they laughed about it. He would be a melon-bum boy, they said: that's what boys like him were called. Firm and round on the outside, soft and sweet on the inside; a nice melon bum, for anyone who paid.</p>
131	<p>"Will I be a melon?" she asked. "A melon-bum girl?" and Uncle En laughed and said where did she pick up that word. ...Next day the man appeared and asked Oryx if she would like some money, a lot more money than she could make by selling roses. ...He unlocked a door with a key and they went in, and he locked the door behind them, and they were in a mauve-and-gold-coloured room with a giant bed in it, a bed for giants, and the man asked Oryx to take off her dress. Oryx was obedient and did as she was told. She had a general idea of what else the man might want — the other children already knew about such things and discussed them freely, and laughed about them. People paid a lot of money for the kinds of things this man wanted, and there were special places in the city for men like him to go; but some wouldn't go there because it was too public and they were ashamed, and they foolishly wanted to arrange things for themselves, and this man was one of that kind. So Oryx knew the man would now take off his own clothes, or some of them, and he did, and seemed pleased when she stared at his penis, which was long and hairy like himself, with a bend in it like a little elbow. ...She could remember the singularity of his penis but not the singularity of his face. "It was like no face," she said. "It was all soft, like a dumpling. There was a big nose on it, a carrot nose. A long white penis nose." ..."I won't hurt you," said the man. His accent was so ridiculous that Oryx wanted to giggle, but she knew that would be wrong. She smiled her shy smile, and the</p>

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	<p>man took hold of one of her hands and placed it on himself. He did this gently enough, but at the same time he seemed angry. Angry, and in a hurry.</p> <p>...But out on the street he laughed and made jokes about the man hopping around in his snarled-up trousers, and told Oryx she was a good girl and wouldn't she like to play this game again?</p> <p>...But at the same time she enjoyed it. It made her feels strong to know that the men thought she was helpless but she was not. It was they who were helpless, they who would soon have to stammer apologies in their silly accents and hop around on one foot in their luxurious hot rooms, trapped in their own pant legs with their bums sticking out, smooth bums and hairy bums, bums of different sizes and colours, while Uncle En berated them.</p> <p>..."Little SuSu," Uncle En would say, as he set Oryx down on the street outside the hotel. "You are a smart girl! I wish I could marry you. Would you like that?"</p> <p>...She knew it was not a serious question but a joke: she was only five, or six, or seven, so she couldn't get married.</p>
134	<p>A year or so later, Oryx was told- by a girl who'd been with her the first weeks in the room with the mattresses, and had turned up again in her new life, her life of movie-making - that this wasn't the real story. The real story was that Uncle En had been found floating in one of the city's canals with his throat cut.</p>
135	<p>"And rivers. The rivers are so useful, for the garbage and the dead people and the babies that get thrown away, and the shit."</p>
136	<p>Oryx was sold to a man who made movies. She was the only one of them that went with the movie man. He told her she was a pretty little girl and asked how old she was, but she didn't know the answer to that. He asked her wouldn't she like to be in a movie.</p>
139	<p>Being in a movie, said Oryx, was doing what you were told. If they wanted you to smile then you had to smile, if they wanted you to cry you had to do that too. Whatever it was, you had to do it, and you did it because you were afraid not to. You did what they told you to do to the men who came, and then sometimes those men did things to you. That was movies.</p>
140	<p>Sometimes other people came to use the space, to make different kinds of movies. Grown-up women came, women with breasts, and grown-up men-actors. The children could watch them making those movies if they didn't get in the way. Though sometimes the actors objected because the little girls would giggle at their penises- so big, and then sometimes, all of a sudden, so small- and then the children had to back to their room.</p> <p>... Sometimes they'd be given a toke or a drink to calm them down- beer, maybe- but no hard drugs, those would shrivel them up; and they weren't allowed to smoke.</p>
141	<p>And the girls would laugh, because whatever else happened to them they would never be like him, a rope-haired clownish giant with a cock like a wrinkly old carrot.</p> <p>Oryx said she had many chances to see that old carrot up close, because Jack wanted to do movie things with her when there were no movies.</p> <p>..."You did it for nothing?" said Jimmy. "I thought you said everything has a price."</p> <p>..."He never did anything with me that you don't do. Not nearly so many things!"</p>

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	"I don't do them against your will," said Jimmy. "Anyway you 're grown up now."
142	"What did you do for him? You sucked him off?" ..."All right, pixies, rise and shine," he'd say. "Candy time!" He brought candies for them as a treat, sometimes. "Want a candy, candy?" he'd say. ..He let them see the movies for themselves if he felt like it, or if he'd just been doing drugs. They could tell when he'd been shooting or snorting, because he was happier then.
143	"His name was Jack. I told you. He told us a poem about it, in English. Jack be nimble, Jack be quick, Jack has got a big candlestick." ...Working was what Jack called what they did. Working girls, he called them. He used to say, Whistle while you work. He used to sa, Work harder. He used to say, Put some jazz into it, He used to say, Act like you mean it, or you want to get hurt? He used to say, Come on, sex midgets, you can do better. He used to say, You're only young once. ..."Did they rape you?" He could barely squeeze it out. ..."It wasn't real sex, was it?" he asked. "In the movies. It was only acting. Wasn't it?" "But Jimmy, you should know. All sex is real."
147	Once he wouldn't have had a hangover after so little booze, but he's out of practice now, and out of shape.
148	Eat, fuck, poop, screech, that's all they do. ... Then he opens up his cement-block cache, puts on his one-eyed sunglasses, drinks water from a stored beer bottle. If only he had a real beer, or an aspirin, or more Scotch. "Hair of the dog," he says to the beer bottle.
151	Cream with that? whispers a woman's voice. Some naughty, nameless waitress, out of a white-aprons-and-feather-dusters porno face. He finds himself salivating. ... He's sure there will still be a lot left, back there: not only canned goods, booze as well.
153	He whistles as he approaches them, as he always does to let them know he's coming. He doesn't want to startle them, strain their politeness, cross their boundaries without being invited- loom up on them suddenly out of the shrubbery, like some grotesque flasher exposing himself to schoolkids.
155	Into Snowman's head comes the image of a circle of naked car mechanics, each holding a wrench. A whole squad of Mr. Fix-its. A gay magazine centrefold.
157	God is a cluster of neurons, he'd maintained.
158	She's breastfeeding a year-old boy, who looks up at Snowman, lets the nipple pop out of his mouth, and begins to cry.
165	Their penises turn bright blue to match the blue abdomens of the females, and they do a sort of blue-dick dance number, erect members waving to and fro in unison, in time to the foot movements and the singing: a feature suggested to Crake by the sexual semaphoring of crabs. From amongst the floral tributes the female chooses four flowers, and the sexual ardour of the unsuccessful candidates dissipates immediately, with no hard feelings left. Then, when the blue

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	<p>of her abdomen has reached its deepest shade, the female and her quartet find a secluded spot and go at it until the woman becomes pregnant and her blue colouring fades. And that is that.</p> <p>No more No means yes, anyway, thinks Snowman. No more prostitution, no sexual abuse of children, no haggling over the price, no pimps, no sex slaves. No more rape. The five of them will roister for hours, three of the men standing guard and doing the singing and shouting while the fourth one copulates, turn and turn about. Crake has equipped these women with ultra-strong vulvas extra skin layers, extra muscles — so they can sustain these marathons.</p> <p>...Sex is no longer a mysterious rite, viewed with ambivalence or downright loathing, conducted in the dark and inspiring suicides and murders. Now it's more like an athletic demonstration, a free-spirited romp.</p> <p>...Under the old dispensation, sexual competition had been relentless and cruel: for every pair of happy lovers there was a dejected onlooker, the one excluded.</p> <p>...That had been the milder form: the single man at the window, drinking himself into oblivion to the mournful strains of the tango.</p>
166	<p>As a species we're pathetic in that way: imperfectly monogamous. If we could only pair-bond for life, like gibbons, or else opt for total guilt-free promiscuity, there'd be no more sexual torment.</p>
167	<p>"People can amuse themselves any way they like. If they want to play with themselves in public, whack off over doodling, scribbling, and fiddling, it's fine with me. Anyway it serves a biological purpose."</p> <p>..."So that's what art is, for the artist," said Crake. "An empty drainpipe. An amplifier. A stab at getting laid."</p> <p>"Your analogy falls down when it comes to female artists," said Jimmy. "They're not in it to get laid. They'd gain no biological advantage from amplifying themselves, since potential mates would be deterred rather than attracted by that sort of amplification. Men aren't frogs, they don't want women who are ten times bigger than them."</p> <p>"Female artists are biologically confused," said Crake. "You must have discovered that by now." This was a snide dig at Jimmy's current snarled romance, with a brunette poet who'd renamed herself Morgana and refused to tell him what her given name had been, and who was currently on a twenty-eight-day sex fast in honour of the Great Moon-Goddess Oestre, patroness of soybean and bunnies. Martha Graham attracted those kinds of girls.</p>
169	<p>And what would happen if he tried? If he burst out of the bushes in his filthy tattered sheet, reeking, hairy, tumescent, leering like a goat-balled , cloven-hoofed satyr or a patch-eyed buccaneer from some ancient pirate film- Aarr, me hearties! - and attempted to join the amorous, blue-bottomed tussle? He can imagine the dismay- as if an orang-utang had crashed a formal waltzfest and started groping some sparkly pastel princess. He can imagine his own dismay too. What right does he have to foist his pustulant, cankered self and soul upon these innocent creatures?</p>
174	<p>Shagging smaller boys, dabbling in black-market pharmaceuticals.</p> <p>..."Honey, we're so proud of you," said Ramona, who'd come decked out like a whore's lampshade in an outfit with a low neckline and pink frills. Jimmy'd seen</p>

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	something like that on HottTotts once, only it was worn by an eight-year-old. Ramona's push-up-bra breast tops were freckled from too much sun, not that Jimmy was much interested in those any more.
178	They probably would have gone back to interactives and state-sponsored snuff, and porn, as relaxation after their final exams, but that was the summer the gen-mod coffee wars got underway, so they watched those instead.
180	As a rule they watched the unfolding of events on the Noodie News, via the Net, but for a change they sometimes watched fully clothed newscasters on the wall-sized plasma screen in Uncle Pete's leatherette-upholstered TV room. The suits and shirts and ties seemed bizarre to Jimmy, especially if he was mildly stoned. It was weird to imagine what all those serious faced talking heads would look like minus their fashion items, full frontal on the Noodie News.
181	He was pouring himself another Scotch.
186	Every once in a while the statue got its tits decorated or steel wool glued onto its pubic region- Jimmy himself had done some of this glueing- and so comatose was the management that the ornaments often stayed up there for moths before they were noticed.
187	Jimmy himself had put together a naked Pride and Prejudice and a naked To the Lighthouse, just for laughs, and in sophomore VizArts at HelthWyzer he'd done The Maltese Falcon, with costumes by Kate Greenway and depth-and-shadow styling by Rembrandt.
189	After he'd had a few girls up to his room- none of Bernice's business, and they'd been quiet enough, apart from some pharmaceutically induced giggling and a lot of understandable moans- she'd manifested her views on consensual sex by making a bonfire of all Jimmy's jockey shorts.
192	<p>Out of self protection, he concealed the intricacies of his sex life except for what he considered the minimum of hints. (These babes may not be able to count to ten, but hey, who needs numeracy in the sack? Just so long as they think it's ten, haha, joke.)</p> <p>...At HelthWyzer, Crake hadn't been what you'd call sexually active. Girls had found him intimidating. True, he'd attracted a couple of obsessives who'd thought he could walk on water, and who'd followed him around and sent him slushy, fervent e-mails and threatened to slit their wrists on his behalf. Perhaps he'd even slept with them on occasion; but he'd never gone out of his way.</p> <p>...As for sex per se, it lacked both challenge and novelty, and was on the whole a deeply imperfect solution to the problem of intergenerational genetic transfer.</p>
196	<p>Do the Survival Handbook of Dating and Sex!</p> <p>...A neon strip, with bars and girlie joints and what looked like an archeological-grade movie theatre.</p>
200	<p>"You know when people get their hair dyed or their teeth done? Or women get their tits enlarged?"</p> <p>..."No way fake tits feel like real tits," said Jimmy, who thought he knew a thing or two about that.</p> <p>"If you could tell they are fake, " said Crake, "it was a bad job. These butterflies fly, they mate, they lay eggs, caterpillars come out."</p>

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205	"So it's sort of like she's saying they could make it together if he only had the right kind of dick, which he doesn't?" said Jimmy, who'd been thinking hard.
209	They'd microwave popcorn, smoke some of the enhanced weed the Botanical Transgenic students were raising in one of the greenhouses; then Jimmy could pass out on the couch. ..."I'm game," said Jimmy. Actually he was sleepy- he'd had too much popcorn and beer- but he sat up and put on his paying-attention look, the one he'd perfected in high school.
215	It ws the picture of Oryx, seven or eight years old, naked except for her ribbons, her flowers. It was the picture of the look she'd given him, the direct, contemptuous, knowing look that had dealt him such a blow when he was- what? Fourteen? He still had the paper printout, folded up, hidden deep.
223	"...Want a beer?" "Is it cold?"
229	A half-bottle of bourbon; nothing else, only on a bunch of empties.
230	A Jacuzzi, ceramic Mexican mermaids on the walls, their heads crowned with flowers, their blonde hair waving down, their painted nipples bright pink on breasts that are small but rounded. ... Underwear, sex aids, costume jewelry, mixed in with pencil stubs, spare change, and safety pins, and a diary if he got lucky.
231	Once he'd read, Jimmy you nosy brat I know your reading this, I hate it just because I fucked you doesn't mean I like you so STAY OUT!!! ...Crack Cocaine, its label says in raised gold lettering. He thinks briefly about drinking it, but remembers he has the bourbon. ...Behind him in the glass the husk of the woman in the bed seems almost like a real woman; as if at any moment she might turn towards him, open her arms, whisper to him to come and get her. ...Oryx had a wig like that. She like to dress up, change her appearance, pretend to be different women. She'd strut around the room, do a little strip, wiggle and pose. She said men liked variety.
242	One of the men had tried suicide, which conferred on him- he implied- a special vantage. The other one had shot a lot of heroin and dealt it too, before taking up art instead, or possibly in addition.
243	"So, I guess that would do away with war," said Jimmy, "and we'd all have very thick kneecaps. But what about sex? Not so easy, packed into a tube like that."
249	His social life was- for the first time in many years- a zero: he hadn't been stranded in such a sexual desert since he was eight. ... Saggy boobs, ran the thought balloon in his head.
250	Now that he was climbing up the ladder he found a woman, and then another one, and another one after that. He no longer thought of these women as girlfriends: now they were lovers. They were all married or the equivalent, looking for a chance to sneak around on their husbands or partners, to prove they were still young or else to get even. Or else they were wounded and wanted consolation. Or they simply felt ignored. There was no reason he couldn't have several of them at once, as long as he was

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	<p>conscientious about his scheduling. At first he enjoyed the rushed impromptu visits, the secrecy, the sound of Velcro ripped open in haste, the slow tumbling onto the floor; though he figured out pretty soon that he was an extra for these lovers — not to be taken seriously, but instead to be treasured like some child's free gift dug out of a box of cereal, colourful and delightful but useless: the joker among the twos and threes they'd been dealt in their real lives. He was merely a pastime for them, as they were for him, though for them there was more at stake: a divorce, or a spate of non-routine violence; at the least, a dollop of verbal uproar if they got caught.</p>
252	<p>His energy level was sinking, and he had to watch his Joltbar intake: too many steroids could shrink your dick, and though it said on the package that this problem had been fixed due to the addition of some unpronounceable patented compound, he'd written enough package copy not to believe this.</p>
253	<p>Even sex was no longer what it had once been, though he was still as addicted to it as ever. He felt jerked around by his own dick, as if the rest of him was merely an inconsequential knob that happened to be attached to one end of it. Maybe the thing would be happier if left to roam around on its own.</p> <p>On the evenings when none of his lovers had managed to lie to their husbands or equivalents well enough to spend time with him, he might go to a movie at the mall, just to convince himself he was part of a group of other people.</p>
254	<p>Or there were sex scandals: sex scandals always got the newscasters excited. For a while it was sports coaches and little boys; then there was a wave of adolescent girls found locked in garages.</p>
257	<p>Three pantiless waitresses from a pleebland no-touching nookie bar- they threw that in for fun, and it did cause a waver on the neurula monitor, unnatural if it hadn't, and smiles and chuckles all around.</p>
259	<p>At first he sought out various lovers, but he was moody with them, he failed to be entertaining, and worse, he'd lost interest in sex.</p> <p>...He went to the Compound singles bar; no joy there, he already knew most of those women, he didn't need their neediness. He went back to Internet porn, found it had lost its bloom: it was repetitive, mechanical, devoid of its earlier allure. He searched the Web for the HottTotts site, hoping that something familiar would help him to feel less isolated, but it was defunct.</p> <p>He was drinking alone now, at night, a bad sign.</p> <p>... Live in the moment. He'd put that on a giveaway calendar once, some fraudulent sex-enhancement product for women.</p>
271	<p>Clothes hanging on hooks, the standard off-duty tropicals; a used towel on the floor, ditto a sock. A dozen downloaded printouts on one of the night tables. A skinny girl wearing nothing but high-heeled sandals and standing on her head; a blonde dangling from a hook in the ceiling in some kind of black-leather multiple fracture truss, blindfolded but with her mouth sagging open in a hit-me-again drool; a big woman with huge breast implants and wet red lipstick, bending over and sticking out her pierced tongue. Same old stuff.</p>
272	<p>"If you were ninety and you had the chance for one last fuck but you knew it would kill you, would you still do it?" Crake asked him once.</p>

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	<p>...Two bottles of beer, unopened-real beer! ...He opens the beer, downs half of it. Warm, but who cares?</p>
275	Looks like there's a sliver of bourbon-bottle glass still in there.
276	<p>He thumbs through the sex-site printouts. The women aren't his type- too bulgy, too altered, too obvious. Too much leer and mascara, too much cowlike tongue. Dismay is what he feels, not lust. Revision: dismayed lust. "How could you," he murmurs to himself, not for the first time, as he couples in his head with a rent-a-slut decked out in a red Chinese silk halter and six-inch heels, dragon tattooed on her bum. Oh sweetie.</p>
284	<p>Nobody wanted to be sexless, but nobody wanted to be nothing but sex, Crake said once. ...Jimmy considered getting out of bed, going to the kitchenette, opening a beer. ...He'd had a late night. One of his lovers, the woman who'd given him the clock in fact, had made her way through his wall of silence. She'd turned up around ten with some takeout- Nubbins and fries, she knew what he liked- and a bottle of Scotch.</p>
285	After that they'd finished the Scotch. After that they'd had more sex, and this time Jimmy had enjoyed himself but his lover hadn't, because he'd been too rough and fast and had not said anything flattering to her the way he usually did. Great ass, and so on and so forth.
286	After Jimmy had taken a leak and was getting the beer out of the fridge, his intercom buzzed.
289	Then they went to a couple of other places and ended up in a bar featuring oral sex on trapezes, and Jimmy drank something orange that glowed in the dark, and then a couple more of the same. Then he was telling Crake the story of his life no, the story of his mother's life — in one long garbled sentence, like a string of chewing gum that just kept coming out of his mouth. Then they were somewhere else, on an endless green satin bed, being worked over by two girls covered from head to toe in sequins that were glued onto their skin and shimmered like the scales of a virtual fish. Jimmy had never known a girl who could twist and twine to such advantage.
291	He poured himself a drink from the minibar, straight Scotch, as real as it came, then spent a while looking out the picture window at the view, not that he could make out very much except lights.
293	The BlyssPluss Pill was designed to take a set of givens, namely the nature of human nature, and steer these givens in a more beneficial direction than the ones hitherto taken. It was based on studies of the now unfortunately extinct pygmy or bonobo chimpanzee, a close relative of Homo sapiens. Unlike the latter species, the bonobo had not been partially monogamous with polygamous and polyandrous tendencies. Instead it had been indiscriminately promiscuous, had not pair-bonded, and had spent most of its waking life, when it wasn't eating, engaged in copulation. Its intraspecific aggression factor had been very low. Which had led to the concept of BlyssPluss. The aim was to produce a single pill,

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	<p>that, at one and the same time:</p> <p>a) would protect the user against all known sexually transmitted diseases, fatal, inconvenient, or merely unsightly;</p> <p>b) would provide an unlimited supply of libido and sexual prowess, coupled with a generalized sense of energy and well-being, thus reducing the frustration and blocked testosterone that led to jealousy and violence, and eliminating feelings of low self-worth;</p> <p>..."So basically you're going to sterilize people without them knowing it under the guise of giving them the ultra in orgies?"</p>
296	<p>"You've got this thing now?" said Jimmy.</p> <p>He was beginning to see the possibilities. Endless high-grade sex, no consequences. Come to think of it, his own libido could use a little toning up.</p> <p>"Does it make your hair grow back?" He almost said Where can I get some, but stopped himself in time.</p> <p>.... A couple of the test subjects had literally fucked themselves to death, several had assaulted old ladies and household pets, and there had been a few unfortunate cases of priapism and split dicks.</p> <p>...Of course the crank religions wouldn't like it, in view of the fact that their raison d'être was based on misery, indefinitely deferred gratification, and sexual frustration, but they wouldn't be able to hold out long.</p> <p>...He had no further wish to try it out himself, however: he had enough problems without his penis bursting.</p> <p>"Where do you get the subjects?" he said. "For the clinical trials?"</p> <p>Crake grinned. "From the poorer countries. Pay them a few dollars, they don't even know what they're taking. Sex clinics, of course — they're happy to help. Whorehouses. Prisons. And from the ranks of the desperate, as usual."</p>
307	<p>Enter Oryx as a young girl on a kiddie-porn site, flowers in her hair, whipped cream on her chin; or, Enter Oryx as a teenage news item, sprung from a pervert's garage; or, Enter Oryx, stark naked and pedagogical in the Crakers' inner sanctum; or, Enter Oryx, towel around her hair, emerging from the shower; or, Enter Oryx, in a pewter grey silk pantsuit and demure half-high heels, carrying a briefcase, the image of a professional Compound globewide saleswoman?</p> <p>...Jimmy hadn't spotted Oryx right away, though he must have seen her that first afternoon when he was peering through the one-way mirror. Like the Crakers she had no clothes on, and like the Crakers she was beautiful, so from a distance she didn't stand out. She wore her long dark hair without ornament, her back was turned, she was surrounded by a group of other people; just part of the scene.</p>
310	<p>"I gave you a printout. From HottTotts- you know."</p> <p>..."That show you used to watch. Remember?"</p> <p>"I guess," said Jimmy. "Sort of."</p> <p>..."Oh, right," said Jimmy. "Each to his own. You wanted the sex-kiddie look?"</p>
312	<p>He behaved as honourably as he could: he showed no interest in her, or he tried to show none. He took to visiting the pleeblands, paying for girls in bars. Girls with frills, with spangles, with lace, whatever was on offer. He'd shoot himself up with Crake's quicktime vaccine, and he had his own Corps bodyguard now, so it was quite safe. The first couple of times it was a thrill; then it was a distraction; then it</p>

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	<p>was merely a habit. None of it was an antidote to Oryx. ...But the official launch was looming closer, so he had his staff turn out some visuals, a few catchy slogans: Throw Away Your Condoms! BlyssPlus, for the Total Body Experience! Don't Live a Little, Live a Lot! Simulations of a man and a woman, ripping off their clothes, grinning like maniacs. Then a man and a man. Then a woman and a woman, though for that one they didn't use the condom line. Then a threesome. He could churn out this crap in his sleep.</p>
313	<p>"He lives in a world of idea. He is doing important things. He has no time to play. Anyway, Crake is my boss. You are for fun." "Yes, but..." "Crake won't know." ...Crake had never been a toucher, he'd been physically remote, but now he liked to have a hand on Oryx: on her shoulder, her arm, her small waist, her perfect butt. ... For that reason she had to make lots of trips, here and there around the world. Sex clinics, said Crake. Whorehouses, said Oryx: who better to do the testing?</p>
314	<p>Crakes sexual needs were direct and simple, according to Oryx; not intriguing, like sex with Jimmy. Not fun, just work- although she respected Crake, she really did, because he was a brilliant genius. ...They were in Jimmy's bedroom, lying on the bed together with the digital TV on, hooked into his computer, some copulation Web site with an animal component, a couple of well-trained German shepherds and a double-jointed ultra-shaved albino tattooed all over with lizards. The sound was off, it was just the pictures: erotic wallpaper. ...Then she let him lick her fingers for her. He ran his tongue around the small ovals of her nails. This was the closest she could get to him without becoming food: she was in him, or part of her was in part of him. Sex was the other way around: while that was going on, he was in her. I'll make you mine, lovers said in old books. They never said, I'll make you me.</p>
315	<p>"...Did that creepy old geezer make you have sex?" ..."No one made me have sex in a garage. I told you." "Okay, revision: no one made you, but did you have it anyway?"</p>
316	<p>"And she hated sex, is that it? Is that why she put up with you? You were getting the old goat off her back?"</p>
319	<p>"...He never wants sex when he's thinking."</p>
321	<p>"She'll commit suttee? No shit! Immolate herself on your funeral pyre?" ... "...Would Jimmy have to turn pimp, live off the avails?..."</p>
326	<p>He was drunk for sure; drunk, or on some pharmaceutical. ...It was porn with the sound muted, it was brainfrizz without the ads.</p>
328	<p>"She can't talk right now. I can't lift her up. I've had a few injuries. Now quit fucking the dog and let us in."</p>
333	<p>He went back to his room and drank some Scotch and then some more, as much as it took to conk himself out.</p>

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343	Did he set up the grand finale as an assisted suicide, had he intended to have Jimmy shoot him because he knew what would happen next and he didn't deign to stick around to watch the results of what he'd done?
346	Crake himself had developed a vaccine concurrently with the virus, but he had destroyed it prior to his assisted suicide death.
364	"We offered her flowers and signaled to her with our penises, but she did not respond with joy."
366	The Arawak Indians, welcoming Christopher Columbus with garlands and gifts of fruit, smiling with delight, soon to be massacred, or tied up beneath the beds upon which their women were being raped.
367	He should say that if these people should become violent- Oh Snowman, please, what is violent?- or if thy attempt to rape (What is rape?) the women, or molest (What?) the children, or if they try to force others to work for them...
373	What if they should see him? A hairy naked maniac wearing nothing but a baseball cap and carrying a spraygun.

Profanity	Count
Ass	8
Bitch	1
Dick	9
Fuck	30
Goddamn	1
Piss	19
Prick	1
Shit	59