

# The Island of Dr. Moreau



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF H. G. WELLS

Herbert George Wells was born the son of professional cricket player—a low-paying occupation at the time—and a housemaid, the youngest of four children. As a child, Wells suffered a badly broken leg that left him bedridden for several months. To pass the time, his father loaned a stack of novels from the public library which Wells tore through, losing himself in the tales of far-off worlds and beginning his lifelong love of literature. Wells's family had always struggled financially, and as a teenager Wells apprenticed in a number of trades, all of which were miserable. Wells eventually managed to escape the apprentice's lot by getting himself into a grammar school, where he studied as a senior student and worked as a mentor to younger students. Excelling in academics, Wells won a scholarship and went on to study biology at what is now the Imperial College in London. During this time, Wells joined a debate society which kindled his interests in social reform, and later, socialism. During his time in college, Wells also began dabbling in fiction writing, prototyping an early version of [The Time Machine](#) in a school magazine. Wells left the Imperial College, continuing to teach at various schools—as a teacher, Wells instructed A. A. Milne, author of the *Winnie-the-Pooh* series—and finally finished a degree in zoology. While living with his aunt, Wells earned a living writing short articles and humor pieces for various journals, which he was quite successful at. This success emboldened him to try his hand at novel-writing, and he produced his first novel, [The Time Machine](#), in 1895. This marked the beginning of a prolific writing period in which Wells wrote [The War of the Worlds](#), [The Island of Dr. Moreau](#), [The Wonderful Visit](#), and [The Wheels of Chance](#), all within a two-year period. Although Wells is most remembered for his science fiction novels—a genre that he played a significant role in pioneering—he also wrote several utopian novels, such as *A Modern Utopia*, and eventually shifted to writing political and intellectual pieces. With these, Wells garnered a reputation for himself as a reformist and a futurist, a visionary of humanity's future development. Indeed, much of his work seems almost prophetic, predicting tanks, space travel, nuclear weapons, and even surmised an early concept of the Internet. During his later years, Wells's reputation as writer declined as he continued to promote his socialist ideals to a Western audience that was less and less interested. Wells was married multiple times and had four children, two of whom were out of wedlock (throughout his life, Wells had numerous affairs, including a brief one with American activist Margaret Sanger). He died of unknown causes in London in 1946.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Medical science and practice underwent a revolution in the nineteenth century. As tools and methods were developed and improved, it became clear that there were great gaps in the scientific understanding of the human body, and many of the standard operating procedures were not based on science at all, but simply dubious traditions that had no proven benefit. The need for research became obvious, leading to the practice of vivisection, the dissection of live creatures to observe how the organs and anatomy functioned in tandem. Though vivisection was mostly practiced on animals rather than people, it provoked a moral outrage and stoked fears of what horrors the future may hold if humanity were allowed to reshape what nature or God had made. The debates and movements for and against vivisection inspired the basic concept of *The Island of Dr. Moreau*. Influencing these discussions, and also Wells's story, was the publication of Charles Darwin's Theory of Natural Selection, which suggested that there was nothing exceptional about human beings other than that they had evolved much further than any other species on Earth. This theory provoked a similar outrage, contradicting the long-standing religious tradition that humanity was created by God to be exceptional above all the animals, a bearer of the divine image. This breaking down of the divide between humans and animals features heavily as a theme in the story and likely would have made vivisection seem slightly more permissible, since scientists would only be tampering with a long-running natural process, rather than God's finely wrought creation.

## RELATED LITERARY WORKS

H. G. Wells was a pioneer in the realm of science fiction. He is often regarded as setting much of the precedent for the genre as it currently exists alongside French novelist Jules Verne, author of *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* and *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, and even Mary Shelley, author of [Frankenstein](#), who, like Wells, envisioned the dark possibilities of scientific progress. This tradition of anticipating the future risks of science and technology was carried on by dystopian authors such as George Orwell ([1984](#); [Animal Farm](#)) and Aldous Huxley ([Brave New World](#)). Wells was also among the first authors to write about concepts such as alien invasion and time travel, paving the way for contemporary acclaimed science fiction authors such as Arthur C. Clarke ([Childhood's End](#)). *The Island of Dr. Moreau* itself has become a cultural icon, spawning numerous books, a number of film adaptations, and even an episode of *The Simpsons*.

## KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Island of Dr. Moreau*
- **When Written:** 1890s
- **Where Written:** Woking, England
- **When Published:** 1895
- **Literary Period:** Victorian
- **Genre:** Science fiction novel
- **Setting:** An island in the Pacific Ocean, somewhere off the coast of South America
- **Climax:** Dr. Moreau and Montgomery are killed, leaving Edward Prendick to survive alone amongst the Beast Folk.
- **Antagonist:** Dr. Moreau
- **Point of View:** First person, narrated by Edward Prendick

## EXTRA CREDIT

**By Any Other Name.** Since the term “science fiction” did not exist during Wells’s day, he called his stories “scientific romances,” nodding to their dramatic arcs and influence from the pre-Victorian literature of Romanticism.

**Strangely Prescient.** As he often did, Wells seemed able to envision where humanity was headed in the writing of his story. Although vivisection did not turn out exactly as he thought (as far as the public knows, there are no half-human, half-animal hybrids running about), modern advances in biological and genetic engineering pose similar ethical dilemmas for humanity’s near future.



## PLOT SUMMARY

The story begins with the narrator, a biologist named Edward Prendick, describing how after being shipwrecked and lost at sea for days, he is rescued by a small trading vessel. A man named Montgomery revives him and begins nursing him back to health, with the aid of his small, beastly servant, M’ling. Prendick is repulsed by M’ling’s appearance, though he can’t quite discern why until he notices a greenish gleam in M’ling’s eyes at night, much like that of an animal. Montgomery and M’ling are traveling with a host of caged animals, including many rabbits and a Puma, though they will not tell Prendick what their purpose is. As they near the island that Montgomery and M’ling are traveling to, Captain Davis, owner of the vessel, is set into a drunken rage and abuses M’ling, provoking an altercation between himself and Montgomery. Prendick intervenes and averts a brawl, but earns the captain’s disdain in the process. They reach the island and the captain demands that Prendick leave the ship as well, either putting himself overboard or joining Montgomery and his employer, a scientist named Moreau, who owns the island. Montgomery and Moreau initially refuse to let Prendick join them on the island, but after Prendick is set adrift at sea for the second time by

Captain Davis, they take pity on him and bring him to the island.

Prendick is interned in a small room, with a door to Moreau’s laboratory on one side and the island forest on the other. The door to Moreau’s workplace is always locked, and Prendick is impressed by the secrecy of the place. Prendick recognizes the name Moreau, and though it takes him some time to place it, remembers that Moreau had, a decade before, been a subject of great public outrage: the scientist had been discovered to be practicing vivisection on a live dog after the creature escaped his lab, flayed open. The public was horrified, and though Moreau could have repented of his work and maintained his place in society, instead he opted to follow his research and exile himself instead. From his room, Prendick can hear that Moreau has started his work, assumedly vivisection once again, on the Puma, and the screams are so pained that Prendick cannot stand to remain. He leaves his room and wanders into the forest.

While exploring the island, Prendick happens upon a man with the same strangeness of features as M’ling, crouching on all fours and sucking water from a stream, like an animal. The man sees that Prendick has spotted him drinking and acts ashamed. Confused and continuing to wander, Prendick also comes upon a group of individuals who seem human but have strangely swine-like features, and one of them briefly sets upon all fours like an animal. Prendick grows more disturbed and decides to venture back to his room as night begins to fall. On his journey, he realizes that a creature is stalking him. Prendick, panicked, runs and the creature pursues him down to the beach. As the creature closes in, Prendick strikes it in the head with a rock and knocks it unconscious. Although Prendick is too fearful to approach it, he senses that, like the others he has seen, it is some hybridized cross between an animal and a man, presumably a man that has somehow been given beastly qualities. Prendick makes it safely to his room and accosts Montgomery, demanding an explanation. Montgomery will not relent, but does manage to convince Prendick to drink a sleeping draught, explaining that the rest will calm his shattered nerves.

Prendick awakes the following day to find that the door in his room to Moreau’s work place has been left open accidentally. Prendick ventures inward, finding a human-looking being that is mutilated but very much alive, strapped to an operating table. Moreau discovers Prendick in his operating room and forces him out, but Prendick has already seen enough. He feels certain that Moreau is vivisectioning human beings to give them animal-like qualities and that he himself will be the next subject strapped to the operating table. Prendick, horrified, fashions a crude weapon from a strap of metal and flees into the jungle.

He meets another creature-like human, the Ape Man, who is enamored of the fact that Prendick has five fingers like he does, and takes him to a community of hovels built by other creaturely humans, the **Beast Folk**. The Beast Folk all seem

able to speak English to varying low degrees and are loosely led by a large, grey-furred humanoid creature they call the Sayer of the Law. The Beast Folk and the Sayer of the Law teach Prendick the **Law**, a series of religious-sounding incantations that prohibit the Beast Folk from behaving in any way like animals—each prohibition ending with the incantation, “Are we not Men?”—and deifies Moreau as a figure of ultimate authority. Though the Beast Folk are welcoming to Prendick, it seems that they believe he is one of them, augmented as they are. Moreau arrives at the Beast Folk’s community, demanding that they hand over Prendick. Prendick flees again into the forest, this time making his way to the ocean where he intends to commit suicide by drowning rather than let Moreau make him into one of the Beast Folk. However, wading partway in, Prendick realizes that he is cannot bring himself to do it. Moreau and the Beast Folk find him standing in the ocean and Moreau explains that Prendick has misunderstood what is going on—that he is not experimenting on humans at all. As a show of good faith, Moreau gives Prendick a pair of revolvers, managing to convince Prendick to return to his room so Moreau can explain in full.

Sitting down together, Moreau explains to Prendick that he has spent the last decade on this island continuing his research in vivisection, and that the Beast Folk are not humans turned to animals, but animals who have been made into humans—at least partially. Moreau has yet to reshape an animal entirely into a human, which is his ultimate goal, but so far he has been able to reshape animal bodies into humanoid form and alter their brains to allow for greater intelligence, though still quite low compared to an average person. However, Moreau’s creations tend to revert back to their animal nature over time, which is why he taught them the Law to repress their natural instincts. Though Moreau disdains the creatures he has made and often kills the ones who represent the greatest failure to him, Montgomery seems to have a shameful fondness for them, preferring the company of the Beast Folk to the humans he meets in his annual trips to the coast of Chile for supplies. Montgomery himself is an alcoholic, and though kind, seems to Prendick unfit for human society and thus well-suited to his life on the island as Moreau’s assistant.

Days later, Montgomery discovers the remains of a rabbit, eaten presumably by one of the Beast Folk. This is a disturbing find, since the Beast Folk are absolutely forbidden by the Law from eating meat or tasting blood, which could make them revert to their animal instincts. Moreau gathers the Beast Folk together, and they identify the Leopard Man, the creature that had chased Prendick on the beach, as the culprit. The punishment to be meted out is a return to Moreau’s operating table—which the Beast Folk call the House of Pain—but the Leopard Man disobeys and flees instead. The humans and the Beast Folk give chase. Prendick is the first to find the Leopard Man cowering in fear among some bushes, and, pitying him,

shoots the creature in the head so that he will not have to undergo more vivisection, which angers Moreau. Prendick suspects that the Leopard Man was not the only member of the Beast Folk behaving like an animal; the Hyena-Swine—the most powerful and fearsome of the Beast Folk—has also been tasting blood, stalking game, and running on all fours.

Six weeks into Prendick’s stay on the island, the Puma that Moreau has been working on breaks free from the operating room and escapes into the jungle with Moreau in pursuit. Moreau catches up to the Puma, who attacks him, and the two end up killing each other. Prendick, Montgomery, and the Beast Folk find the bodies, which causes the Beast Folk to doubt the Law and Moreau’s power that they had once believed in. Prendick, thinking quickly, manages to convince the Beast Folk that Moreau has not truly died, but simply given up his body so that he can watch them from the sky. The Beast Folk are wary of this, but the ruse is enough to maintain the Law for the time being.

Prendick plans to leave the island, but Montgomery, becoming hysterical after Moreau’s death, gets the Beast Folk drunk with him and sets fire to the boats. In the revelry, the Sayer of the Law kills Montgomery and M’ling, leaving Prendick as the last human on the island. At the same time, Moreau’s workplace and the rooms adjacent catch fire by a spilled oil lamp and burn to the ground, leaving Prendick with no place he can lock himself safely away from the Beast Folk. With no other alternatives, Prendick ingratiates himself into the community of the Beast Folk, even as the order and structure of it crumbles.

Over the next ten months, Prendick lives with the Beast Folk and watches as they slowly regress back into their true animal forms. The Dog Man becomes his loyal companion and defender until he is killed by the Hyena-Swine, whom Prendick kills with his revolver. Although Prendick makes several attempts to build a raft, he finds that he is useless as a carpenter. However, a dingy with two corpses, men who died at sea, washes on the beach and Prendick sets out to sea in it himself. After three days, he is rescued by a passing ship and returns to human society after a year on the island of Dr. Moreau.

However, when he returns to England, Prendick finds that he cannot cope with the bustle of cities and the constant presence of other humans, whom he sees a potential animalism in that he fears they will lapse into. Though he understands that this is primarily an illusion, the fear persists, and Prendick withdraws to the countryside for the rest of his life, living as a recluse committed now to studying chemistry and astronomy. As he watches the stars, Prendick reflects that it is in their capacity to wonder at the cosmos that human beings seem most distinguished from animals.



## CHARACTERS

**Edward Prendick / The Narrator** – Prendick is the protagonist and narrator of the story. A presumably wealthy and well-educated gentleman, Prendick took up natural history as a way to bring some adventure back to his independent, comfortable, domestic life in England. In the midst of his travels, Prendick is shipwrecked and rescued by Montgomery, bringing him to reside for one year on the island of Dr. Moreau. Prendick is a man of strong morals—for example, he is a lifelong abstainer from alcohol—and though he is at least intrigued by the science behind it, the cruelty of Moreau’s work and the pain of the **Beast Folk** initially repulse him. However, as the weeks drag on, his sympathy toward the Beast Folk is replaced by repugnance, and he is less affected by Moreau’s cruelty. When Moreau and Montgomery are killed by the Beast Folk, Prendick becomes desperate to survive and adopts many of the behaviors that he had once despised in Moreau and Montgomery. Where he had once detested Moreau’s brainwashing of the Beast Folk with the **Law** or the company that Montgomery kept with them, Prendick lives amongst the Beast Folk and encourages them to believe in Moreau’s god-like power and uphold the Law, knowing that the narrative of the Law aids his survival. Though he had once been horrified by Moreau’s cruelty, Prendick remorselessly kills any Beast Folk that he deems a possible threat. In this way, Prendick demonstrates that even for one with as strong a conscience as his, morality is defined more by circumstances than by any universal rules. When survival is at stake, Prendick quickly adjusts his moral guidelines and does things that previously would have been unthinkable. Prendick ultimately escapes the island, being picked up by another ship, but upon returning to human society finds that he sees too much of the same animalism of the Beast Folk in human beings as well. Thus, he withdraws to the countryside and lives a reclusive life, studying chemistry and astronomy.

**Dr. Moreau / The White-Haired Man** – Moreau is a vivisectionist (someone who operates on live animals) who embodies the dark potential of scientific research when it is unrestrained by ethics or accountability to society. After his disturbing research in vivisection was discovered, Moreau chose to exile himself from London society rather than give up his lifework. Establishing his island with the disgraced Montgomery, Moreau set to work creating the **Beast Folk**—his attempts to produce a perfect human being by vivisectioning and hypnotizing animals. By the time Prendick arrives on the island, Moreau has been at this work for eleven years. Moreau, removed from society, is remorseless and cruel in his pursuit of scientific knowledge. He views pain as an irrelevant evolutionary byproduct and chides Prendick for his squeamishness at the suffering of other creatures. Though Moreau is convinced of the value of his own work, Prendick finds it pointlessly cruel and without value to anyone else,

illustrating the danger of removing scientific research from the ethical guidance of society. To control the Beast Folk and encourage them to resist their animal natures and behave like humans, Moreau has created the **Law**, a set of rules and prohibitions that establish him as a god-like absolute authority on the island. However, when Moreau is killed by the Puma, the authority of the Law breaks down. The society of the Beast Folk and their human behavior, which was held together by the guidelines of the Law and the deity of Moreau, also crumble, demonstrating the necessity of a moral authority to maintain order in society and keep individuals from regressing to their basic primal urges.

**Montgomery / The Young Man** – Montgomery is Moreau’s assistant on the island and rescues Prendick and nurses him back to health after Prendick is shipwrecked and lost at sea. Montgomery, being a degenerate and an alcoholic, contrasts sharply against Prendick’s dignity and virtue. Though he trained as a biologist, Montgomery was cast out of human society due to a crime he drunkenly committed as a younger man, leading him to take up residence on the island with Moreau. Though he maintains some semblance of human dignity while Moreau is alive, Montgomery develops such a kinship with the **Beast Folk** that he prefers their company and simplicity to that of other human beings. Indeed, Prendick observes that Montgomery seems “unfitted for human kindred,” occasionally seeming more beastly than human. Removed from human society, Montgomery’s character indicates how thin the delineation between human and animal truly is, dependent more on social conditioning than any biological reality. This kinship with the Beast Folk becomes Montgomery’s demise, however. After Montgomery foolishly teaches M’ling how to skin and cook a rabbit, the Beast Folk redevelop their taste for blood, sending them into a frenzy and bringing them one step closer to throwing off their humanity altogether. When Moreau is killed, it becomes clear that his authority and the purpose he lent Montgomery was all that held the degenerate back from shamelessly regressing to his most basic urges. Within a day, Montgomery throws himself into a drunken fit, getting many of the Beast Folk drunk with him, and is killed in a brawl with the Sayer of the Law. It is fitting, then, that the degenerate, animalistic human is killed by the Beast Folk’s paragon of humanism and religious order.

**M’ling / The Strange-Looking Man** – M’ling is Montgomery’s manservant and the most sophisticated of the **Beast Folk**. M’ling is aboard the ship on which Montgomery rescues Prendick, and is thus the first of the Beast Folk that Prendick meets. Although Prendick does not initially realize that M’ling is not human, he finds the beast hideously ugly and strangely off-putting. M’ling, aside from being Montgomery’s closest friend on the island, is unique among the Beast Folk in that, despite the fact that he is a creation of Moreau, is not truly a member of their society. Rather than live in the ravine with his fellows,

M'ling sleeps in a kennel in Moreau's enclosure. M'ling is most often with the humans and several times carries a hatchet as a weapon, being the only member of the Beast Folk to use such a tool. In this way, he is the most humanized beast on the island. However, this all eventually unravels. After M'ling tastes blood, even his well-repressed animalism begins to return. M'ling finds that he prefers to use his teeth as weapons rather than the hatchet, and after Moreau is killed, M'ling chooses to join the rest of the Beast Folk and sleep on the beach rather than return to the enclosure with Montgomery and Prendick. Although M'ling is killed defending Montgomery from one of the Beast Folk, his regression to animalism suggests that even the most refined and humanized animal is, at its core, still an animal. M'ling, though he seemed relatively human, is aware that he still has more in common with the Beast Folk than with any human.

**The Sayer of the Law** – The Sayer of the Law is a sort of priest amongst the **Beast Folk**, the religious leader responsible for teaching the **Law** and venerating its commandments. Upon Prendick's initial arrival in the Beast Folk's community in the ravine, he is mistaken for one of Moreau's creations and the Sayer of the Law instructs him in the ways he should act and how he must resist his animalistic desires. After Moreau dies, the Sayer of the Law is one of the first to ask Prendick if the Law has died with him, implicitly understanding the connection between Moreau's authority and his own as the religious leader. When Montgomery gets the Beast Folk drunk with him after the death of Moreau, the Sayer of the Law kills him on the beach and is killed himself. This is symbolically fitting: the religious leader of the Beast Folk—and thus, the most aspirational to be human—dies in combat with the most degenerate human, who was the closest to regressing to the state of an animal.

**The Puma** – The Puma is the only character in the story who is depicted undergoing the transformation from animal to **Beast Folk**. For most of the story, only the Puma's screams are heard as it undergoes vivisection. Even so, Prendick can sense those screams becoming more and more human as the process goes on over several days, initially leading him to believe that Moreau is vivisectioning human beings. Ultimately, the Puma breaks free from Moreau's laboratory and kills Moreau, leading to the collapse of the Beast Folk's society.

**The Ape Man** – The Ape Man discovers Prendick when he is hiding from Moreau for fear that he will be vivisected. The Ape Man initially believes Prendick to be one of the **Beast Folk**—since he is not carrying a **whip**, the symbol of human authority—and takes him to the Sayer of the Law to be educated. After Moreau has died and society has largely collapsed, the Ape Man vainly sees himself as Prendick's equal and superior to the other Beast Folk on account of his having five fingered-hands like a human. In this way, the Ape Man demonstrates that the silly vanity of human beings is just as

present in the Beast Folk.

**The Leopard Man / The Beastly Man** – The Leopard Man is the first of the **Beast Folk** that Prendick sees exhibiting animal-like behavior and, during Prendick's first foray into the forest, chases him down the beach. The Leopard Man seems to be the first of the Beast Folk to lapse into animalism, hunting rabbits and running on all fours. While the Leopard is being hunted by everyone on the island to be punished in the House of Pain, Prendick sees human-like fear in its eyes and decides to kill it, mercifully saving it from the torment of further vivisection.

**The Hyena-Swine** – The Hyena-Swine is the most powerful and fearsome of the **Beast Folk**, and with the Leopard Man, swiftly regresses back into an animal. With the death of Moreau, the Hyena-Swine understands that there is no more society, no more masters, and no more **whips**, becoming a fearsome predator and the greatest threat to Prendick. After the Hyena-Swine kills the Dog Man, Prendick shoots it dead.

**The Pink Sloth Creature** – The pink sloth creature is the closest thing to a child among the **Beast Folk**, being small and mute and looking rather like a “flayed child.” After it has almost entirely regressed to animalism, the sloth creature leads Prendick to the place where the Hyena-Swine has killed the Dog Man, giving Prendick the opportunity to kill his nemesis.

**The Dog Man** – The Dog Man becomes a loyal companion to Prendick, believing in his authority and the **Law** even after the other **Beast Folk** have abandoned it. After society has crumbled, the Dog Man protects Prendick from the others until it too regresses into a complete animal and is eventually killed by the Hyena-Swine. Prendick's association with the Dog Man bears a light narrative parallel to Moreau and his hound.

**Captain Davis** – Davis is the captain of the *Ipecacuanha*, the ship which Montgomery and M'ling are traveling aboard when they rescue Prendick. Davis is a raging drunk and a tyrant. He declares that he is the “law and prophets” aboard his own ship and thus can do whatever he wants, including abusing M'ling and setting Prendick adrift in the ocean.



## THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



### SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE AND ETHICS

H. G. Wells's novel tells the tale of Edward Prendick, a natural historian (a type of biologist), who, after surviving a shipwreck, arrives on Dr. Moreau's island. There, Moreau is carrying out experiments in

vivisection—the dissection of live organisms—in secret, safely away from the prying eyes and petty ethics of human society. The scientist is consumed with his “research,” brutal experiments in which he tries to make human beings out of animals by reshaping their bodies and excising their brains, teaching them to repress their animal instincts and behave like humans. The results are predictably grotesque: an island’s worth of part-animal, part-human **Beast Folk**. Through Moreau’s unregulated experimentation, Wells raises questions about the ethical cost of scientific experimentation—and, even more specifically, whether scientific knowledge is valuable in and of itself. Ultimately, the novel seems to warn against unchecked scientific experimentation, suggesting an ethical boundary that prevents such curiosity from becoming needlessly cruel.

On the one hand, the fact that Moreau has been effectively exiled from for his work suggests that societal squeamishness often holds back scientific research—and, it follows, the potential for human progress. Moreau, a pioneer in the field of vivisection, has been cast out of society for daring to push the limits of anatomical research by vivisectioning a live dog. Although he could have remained in society by sacrificing his research, he instead chose to sacrifice his place in society so that he could continue his experiments on the island. Moreau argues that no one else is doing innovative work in vivisection because they do not have the stomach for it, particularly for the pain of other creatures. Prendick confirms this by his initial revulsion at the pain induced by Moreau’s experiments. The conscience of human society simply will not permit such brazen and disturbing experimentation. Despite the grotesque nature of Moreau’s work, he is allegedly furthering the bounds of scientific knowledge. Prendick, himself a scientist, cannot help but sympathize, briefly, with Moreau’s quest for progress once his revulsion has abated. Thus, Moreau’s self-imposed exile from society seems worthwhile and his research is justified, at least through his own lens of scientific advancement above all else.

On the other hand, though making scientific breakthroughs, Moreau is inevitably cruel to the beings he creates. Without any sort of social conscience, there is nothing to hold him, or other scientists, back from pursuing scientific knowledge at any cost. Moreau admits to himself that he is not bothered by the ethics of what he is doing, and chastises Prendick for his initial squeamishness. Moreau is trying to create human beings from animals, but will not treat them as actual people. Not only is the procedure horrifyingly painful, but he also commonly executes those creatures who represent a failure to him; he dehumanizes his would-be humans. At the same time, he is kind enough to Prendick and to Montgomery, his assistant, indicating that he is not simply a soulless individual, but that his quest for scientific knowledge drives his cruelty; his test subjects only represent data to him, not living beings. Moreau,

with no sense of shame or ethics, is guided only by his research. Without the conscience of society to judge his work, nothing else stands in the way of his own progress. There is no external judge to hold him to an ethical standard.

Ultimately, Prendick finds Moreau’s work not to be scientifically enlightening, but disturbingly pointless. All of the research dies with Moreau, and the decade of suffering of the Beast Folk comes to nothing. Though Wells could have shown Moreau’s work to have some sort of benefit to human society and thus possibly be ethically defensible, he depicts it as utterly fruitless, the obsession of a madman. The cruelty far outweighs the potential benefits; the ethical dilemma of Moreau’s unflinching quest for knowledge becomes a one-sided argument. Upon his return to human society, Prendick gives up his prior field of biology—to which vivisection belongs—for chemistry and astronomy. Rather than tinkering and altering living beings, Prendick sets himself to the safer study of the cosmos and the substances of the Earth, where no pain or suffering is caused, implying that perhaps humanity’s efforts would be better suited there than in the ethical quandaries of vivisection.

As a futurist and one of the pioneering authors of science fiction, Wells was certainly not against scientific progress. However, it seems that considering the possibilities of vivisection and research into anatomy, he was particularly wary. The story especially condemns research done outside the bounds of human society with no clear end, such as Moreau’s work that was simply an end in itself. Over a century after the story’s publishing, Wells’s dire warning against the pursuit of scientific knowledge over and above any consideration of the ethical implications considered is still remarkably relevant. Progress in biological engineering and genetic editing poses many of the same ethical quandaries.



### RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY AND ORDER

Surprisingly, Moreau’s island, populated entirely by **Beast Folk** save for three humans, begins as a relatively civil place (aside from Moreau’s work).

The Beast Folk live in a peaceful society, despite the constant animalistic urges they feel to let loose and hunt prey. This civility is due entirely to the **Law**, a system of rules and beliefs that Moreau has devised to govern their behavior. The Law effectively functions as a religious authority on the island; when this authority is removed, society breaks down and chaos ensues. This dependence on the Law suggests that the existence of some type of religious or moral authority is critical to maintaining order in human society as well.

In creating the Law, Moreau essentially establishes himself as the ultimately authority over the Beast Folks’ lives. Moreau encourages them to act “morally” and resist their animal instincts, further establishing the Law a clear symbolic parallel of organized religion. The Law teaches the Beast Folk to act

“morally”—which in Moreau’s mind is to act like humans and not like animals—by demanding that the Beast Folk walk on two legs, not eat raw meat, not chase prey, speak English rather than make animal noises, and so on. When the Beast Folk all follow the law, the order of their society is maintained. The Law, taught by recitation and repetition, sounds much like the Ten Commandments and functions as a religious teaching. Moreau deifies himself through the law, effectively placing him in the role of God and giving him authority in the minds of the Beast Folk. Through the Law, the Beast Folk see Moreau as their creator and sustainer, as well as their ideal model for how to speak and behave. This motivates them to want to adhere to the Law to be more like Moreau (that is, more human). The deification and idealization of Moreau through the Law works much like the deification of Christ in Christianity, in that his followers are given both someone to please and someone to imitate. The Law also comes with the threat of punishment. Those who break the Law must go back to the House of Pain—what the Beast Folk call Moreau’s vivisection room—to face the anger of Moreau, ostensibly through the literal pain of undergoing more vivisection. The House of Pain bears an obvious similarity to the threat of Hell with its physical torment, which itself serves to motivate human beings not to follow through on their base urges. The Law, as the moral authority of the Beast Folk, thus clearly reflects the religious or moral authority in human society—it provides moral teaching, a positive ideal to aspire to, and the negative enforcement of punishment. With all of these combined, the presence of the Law ensures that order is maintained on the island. The Beast Folk respect Moreau’s authority, act like humans, and do not hunt or fight with each other just as, under organized religion—or a comparable moral authority—human beings do not steal, murder, or fight each other, acting on their own primal instincts.

When Moreau’s authority is questioned and the religion of the Law crumbles, the ordered society of the Beast Folk breaks down. This suggests that in human society, without the presence of religious or moral authority the maintained order would similarly fall into chaos. When Moreau is killed, the importance of the Law is immediately questioned by the Beast Folk. Since Moreau embodied the authority of the Law and its ideal, that authority now seems to be dead as well. This suggests that a religion or moral order can only be sustained as long as its symbol of authority is intact. As the Law fades in the minds of the Beast Folk, society breaks down. The Beast Folk reject Moreau’s “morality” and regress to their animal instincts once again, running on all fours, hunting each other, and losing their ability to speak. The Beast Folk cease to be a society and devolve into a group of feral animals. This argues that religion and its moral authority are necessary to maintain order in human society, for without it they will throw off morality and resort to their most basic urges, inviting chaos. A primary function of religious authority, then, seems to be to prevent

human beings from following through on their most primal instincts.

When Moreau died, so did the authority of the Law. Without Moreau’s presence to sustain and enforce the religion of the Law, the moral order that held the Beast Folk’s society together ultimately falls and the Beast Folk act out their base primal urges. Through this, Wells argues that religion and its moral authority—involving teachings, an ideal to strive toward, and threat of punishment—are thus critical to maintaining order within human society and keeping people from regressing to their own most basic urges.



## HUMANS VS. ANIMALS

Moreau’s whole life has become devoted to creating perfect human beings out of animals through the practice of vivisection. Though it seems a tall order, by the time Prendick arrives, the rogue scientist has already created enough **Beast Folk** to form a small society of creatures who blur the line between human and animal. They possess animal body parts nipped and tucked to resemble the human form and are capable of rudimentary thought and speech, yet are conflicted by their underlying animal instincts. Playing on contemporary science and Charles Darwin’s controversial observations of evolution, Wells suggests, through the development of the Beast Folk, that humans and animals are less rigidly separated than many people in his day would have liked to believe.

Moreau, in his experiments, seeks to make animals into fully developed human beings. He is partially successful—the Beast Folk he creates can stand upright and have a limited ability to speak English—suggesting that, at least biologically, human beings and animals are not entirely distinct from each other. Not only is Moreau able to change an animal’s physical form to make it humanoid with roughly human proportions, facial structure, and the ability to walk upright, he is also able to adjust their mental capacity. By excising and restructuring portions of the brain, Moreau gives his creations enough intelligence to be capable of very basic speech and simple problem solving—though they are only given the *capacity* for such things, and still must be actively taught them. This suggests that, biologically, animals have the potential to reach a human level of development, or at least something close to it. The fact that Beast Folk are enabled to speak like humans through biological changes defies the common belief that speech and intelligence are utterly unique to humans, God-given faculties that separate humanity from the natural world. However, though they biologically come to resemble humans, Moreau’s Beast Folk always retain their animalistic urges, which must be actively repressed and replaced with human behaviors. This suggests that these human behaviors are not primarily biological but social. The Beast Folk are able to produce offspring, but those offspring are born merely as

animals. They inherit none of the human faculties of their parents—no intelligence, no speech, no inclination to walk upright—and live as animals until Moreau vivisects and trains them as well. This suggests that there is more that separates humans and animals than mere biology, since the Beast Folk’s animal instincts cannot be conquered merely through rearranging their physiology. Although the **Law** is evidence of the Beast Folk’s natural inclination to animalism, it is also proof that those animal instincts can be overcome—for a time—through social pressures. The Law forbids the Beast Folk from practices that seem animal rather than human, such as walking on all fours, chasing others, eating meat, and so on. Each incantation of the law ends with the enthusiastic refrain, “Are we not Men?” This indicates that although the Beast Folk are beset with animalistic urges, they aspire, as a society, to be human. Through teaching and social development, the Beast Folk are able to maintain a semblance of humanity. Whatever stunted human nature the Beast Folk are able to absorb is trained into them by threat of pain and hypnosis through the chanting of the Law. The Beast Folk thus learn to act like humans in the same way that a dog might learn to do tricks or a parrot might learn to talk, and these behaviors are socially reinforced by the Law. However, once the Law falls apart, so do the Beast Folk’s human traits. Without that social pressure, and in spite of their vivisected biology, the Beast Folk completely regress back into animals. This suggests that despite the biological similarities between animals and humans, it is primarily the social pressures of human society that encourage individuals to rise above their basic instincts and develop human qualities.

Prendick observes not only human qualities in the Beast Folk, but also animalistic qualities in human beings. This, too, points to a common biological ancestry and suggests that, although humans and animals do not seem intrinsically the same on every level, humans do seem just as capable of regressing to animalistic behavior. Prendick observes that Montgomery favors the company of the Beast Folk to that of other human beings. Indeed, he seems “unfitted for human kindred” after all the years spent on the island, outside of human society. This suggests that Montgomery, though still civilized, has more in common with the Beast Folk than he does with human beings, again narrowing the distinction—though not obliterating it—between animals and humans. When he escapes the island and rejoins human society, Prendick believes he sees the same animalistic potential in the eyes of other human beings. This would suggest that away from society, without the social pressure to act human and repress certain desires and urges, human beings could be as capable of acting like animals as the Beast Folk are of acting like humans. Perhaps humanity is merely a socially trained, socially fueled set of behaviors that contradict latent animal instincts.

In *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, Wells maintains a tenuous

distinction between humans and animals, but argues that it is much slimmer than many would like to believe. He recognizes their common ancestry by observing that humans are often capable of animalistic behavior and animals may be trained to imitate humans, which suggests that the distinction between animal and human is more socially constructed than people would perhaps like to think.



## MORALITY, SURVIVAL, AND CIRCUMSTANCE

Although Prendick is initially horrified by Moreau’s actions and the cruelty with which he treats the **Beast Folk**, when it becomes a matter of survival, Prendick commits many of the same acts. This suggests that, especially in survival situations, morality is relative to one’s circumstances, rather than a rigid set of universal dictates.

Initially, Prendick is presented as a man with a firm moral conscience. In the first chapters of the story, having been shipwrecked and then rescued by the *Ipecacuanha*, Prendick intervenes to prevent a brawl between the captain of the ship, Davis, and Montgomery, even though it brings the ire of both men down on him. Although the captain is raging drunk and Prendick is weakened from his time lost at sea, he stands up to the man, indicating that he is courageous in the face of wrongdoing. Prendick is also sickened by both the physical and mental anguish that Moreau inflicts on the Beast Folk. Moreau’s vivisections cause physical torment, and his **Law** compels them to defy their beastly natures and fear human beings, which causes them much mental suffering. Although Prendick is himself a scientist, his initial moral compass compels him to value the well-being of the Beast Folk more highly than Moreau’s own desires or the scientific potential of his experiments.

As Prendick spends time on the island, he finds himself becoming increasingly complacent towards the suffering of the Beast Folk and the anguish inflicted on them. This suggests that as Prendick’s circumstances change, so too does his sense of morality—or rather, that his morality is relative to the situation at hand. Prendick is dependent on Moreau’s hospitality for survival—though Prendick briefly contemplates suicide, he realizes that he is desperate to live—and so cannot risk disrupting Moreau’s operations. He is forced to adjust to Moreau’s work, despite how grim it initially seems. Prendick becomes “habituated” to the appearance of the Beast Folk over time, finding their mutilated appearances and twisted psyches less repugnant as well as less sympathetic. Although they were once a symbol of Moreau’s indifference to others’ suffering, provoking Prendick’s ire, his sense of moral outrage fades. The mutilation of other living beings becomes just another circumstance of the island. This suggests that Prendick’s sense of morality could be adjusted to find any such atrocity commonplace under the right circumstances and with the



proper motivation.

When the order of the island collapses and Prendick fears for his own survival, he commits many of the same acts that his initial sense of morality had previously condemned in Moreau, often without remorse. This shift in morality suggests that morality is much more circumstantial than universally rigid. When Moreau dies, Prendick perpetuates the myth of Moreau's deification, convincing the Beast Folk that Moreau now watches them from the sky. For as long as he can, he also maintains his own deification—as a human with a **whip**—in the Beast Folk's minds. Although he previously had despised Moreau's brainwashing of the Beast Folk with the Law, once it seems necessary for his own survival, Prendick quickly embraces it. Furthermore, although Prendick had previously resisted violence as often as he could, after Moreau dies, he and Montgomery immediately go to Moreau's laboratory and kill all the animals they find alive inside, even though many of them, assumedly, possess at least a moderate amount of human intelligence. Prendick also sets the Beast Folk upon each other when it suits his purposes and kills several of them himself whenever he deems them a threat to his own safety. Prendick even takes up residence among the Beast Folk he so despises, seeing it as his best chance at survival and his only available companionship after Moreau and Montgomery have been killed. Though he had once detested the way that Montgomery fraternized amongst the creatures, when it becomes his best odds at survival, Prendick wastes no time ingratiating himself with their society. Under the right conditions, what once seemed detestable may come to seem morally justified.

Though organized religion or cultural tradition may view morality as a fixed set of rules, universal for all people, dire situations of life and death often contradict that notion. Prendick, though seemingly a man of conscience, is forced to adjust his sense of right and wrong to the circumstances at hand, discovering that, in desperation to live through the day, morality may be far more circumstantial than he had once believed.

prohibits animal behaviors—and their latent animal urges to run on all fours, hunt prey, and eat flesh. In the same way, human beings, especially understood in light of Darwinian theory, are haunted by similarly animalistic urges to hunt, kill each other, and procreate. Although humans have reached a level of civilization that far exceeds the Beast Folk, the biological impulses to hunt, kill, and procreate still persist deep in the human psyche.

The Beast Folk, in this way, point to the similarity between humans and animals, arguing that the primary difference between the two—what makes humans civilized and intelligent—is social rather than biological. The Beast Folk's dignified human qualities of speech, semi-intelligent thought, and organization all seem to be socially imbued. Although their biology has been surgically reshaped, they still must be taught by others to speak and behave. Without the social pressure of their organized society to adhere to the Law—and the social shame that comes with breaking it—the Beast Folk regress to complete animalism, losing all human qualities. As a parallel to human beings, this suggests that the qualities which make one human—civilized, intelligent, distinct from animals—are socially instilled, rather than biologically determined. Society teaches humans how to speak and behave; these are not inherent biological qualities. Thus, it stands to reason that removed from society, human beings would similarly regress to an animalistic state and be little different from the Beast Folk. This idea stands in sharp contrast with common, religiously based notions of human exceptionalism, which uphold that humans are different from and superior to all other beings. Through the Beast Folk, Wells suggests that if animals can be taught to speak or humans can become animalistic, then humanity's intelligence and civility are not God-given traits, but the product of social forces overcoming biological urges.



## THE LAW

The Law represents religious authority and its critical role in maintaining order in human society (in Wells's view). Moreau's Law maintains order on the island by requiring the **Beast Folk** to resist their animalistic urges, replacing them with human qualities. When the Law's moral authority is challenged and ultimately breaks down, the Beast Folk resort to their animal instincts and the order of society falls apart. This argues that, similarly, if the religious or moral authority of a human society is lost, human beings will cease repressing their most basic desires and the structure of civilization will break down.

Structurally, the Law works very similarly to Christianity. Moreau establishes himself as the ultimate authority, the creator of all things, occupying the same role as God. The Law's dictates teach the Beast Folk how to repress their basic urges and act with civility, sounding very similar to the biblical Ten



## SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



## THE BEAST FOLK

Moreau's Beast Folk and their self-contained island community provide a parallel to human society, specifically symbolizing the tension between each individual's primal urges and their desire to act like civilized members of society. The Beast Folk act like humans, yet are primarily animal in nature. They are conflicted between their dignified desire to uphold the **Law**—which encourages human behaviors and

Commandments in their recitation. The House of Pain serves as the threat of punishment, negatively enforcing obedience to the Law, much like the Christian idea of hell. With this similarity, the breakdown of Moreau's Law makes a distinctive point in the way that religion may lose its moral authority within human society. When Moreau—being both the embodiment of the Law and its source of authority—is killed, it effectively represents the death of moral authority. The Beast Folk instantly begin to doubt the Law and the most rebellious among them throw it off entirely, becoming animals once more. Though some of the Beast Folk want to maintain the Law even though they no longer believe in Moreau's authority, they are ultimately unable to maintain this; without the ideal to strive toward and the threat of punishment, everyone gives in to their repressed urges. Thus, in human society, if the authority that ties together a religious or moral system—in Christianity's case, the existence of God—is removed, the entire system may persist for a time but will ultimately crumble. Unless that moral system can be quickly replaced, the ordering of society will fall apart as human beings fall prey to their most basic, antisocial urges. This suggests that without a religious or moral system governing individuals, it may be impossible for human society to be anything more than a group of feral animals.



## WHIPS

Within the story, the whips function as the symbol of human authority over the **Beast Folk**. Although within the psyche of the Beast Folk Moreau is established as God, other humans still wield control over them in the hierarchy of the island. Montgomery is referred to as the "Other with a whip," indicating that though he is not Moreau, his possession of the weapon is something to be feared and gives him power. When Moreau goes missing, several Beast Folk rush Montgomery even though he cracks the whip, which is the first time any Beast Folk have ever defied the whip and the first indicator that the **Law** is breaking down altogether.

It is significant that the whip is a weapon and thus a mark of humanity. None of the Beast Folk use weapons—aside from M'ling, until he begins to regress—preferring their teeth and claws as animals do. The humans, however, having no fearsome teeth or claws to fight with, must almost always travel with weapons or they could not hope to defend themselves, since unarmed human beings are far less powerful than Moreau's creations. Tellingly, when the Beast Folk first meet Prendick he is not carrying a whip, and thus the Beast Folk do not even realize that he is human, assuming that he too was made by Moreau. This indicates that the authority accorded to humans by the whip is largely artificial, and nods to the similarity of man and animal in general, at least in the eyes of the Beast Folk. Without the presence of the whips, the Beast Folk cannot see what truly differentiates them from human beings.



## QUOTES



Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Dover Publications edition of *The Island of Dr. Moreau* published in 1996.

### Chapter 1 Quotes

●● I would not draw lots, however, and in the night the sailor whispered to Helmar again and again, and I sat in the bows with my clasp-knife in my hand—though I doubt I had the stuff in me to fight. And in the morning I agreed to Helmar's proposal, and we handed halfpence to find to the odd man.

**Related Characters:** Edward Prendick / The Narrator (speaker), Dr. Moreau / The White-Haired Man

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:**  

**Page Number:** 2

### Explanation and Analysis

After the *Lady Vain* has shipwrecked, Prendick is adrift at sea for days aboard a dingy with two other sailors. Having run out of food and water, they are considering cannibalism, drawing lots to decide who should be eaten.

Prendick's character arc during his time on the island sees him go from a man of courage and virtue in his initial days (despite his fears of being vivisected) to a man of desperation who kills without remorse. This vivid development of character suggests that morality is defined more by circumstances than by universal ideals, especially somewhere in a place as remote as the island. Thus, Prendick's position in the dingy works as a microcosm of his character arc as it will be developed, foreshadowing his transition from moral surety to moral relativity. Though Prendick is reluctant to resort to cannibalism—foreshadowing his virtuous early days on the island when he was utterly opposed to Moreau's cruelty—when his immediate survival is at stake, he relents and resorts to rather brutal behavior, foreshadowing his propagation of the Law to protect himself and his remorseless killing of the Beast Folk.

## Chapter 3 Quotes

☞☞ But certainly when I told the captain to shut up I had forgotten I was merely a bit of human flotsam, cut off from my resources, and with my fare unpaid, a mere casual dependent on the bounty—or speculative enterprise—of the ship. He reminded me of it with considerable vigor. But at any rate I prevented a fight.

**Related Characters:** Edward Prendick / The Narrator (speaker), Montgomery / The Young Man, Captain Davis

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 10

### Explanation and Analysis

Prendick, having been rescued by Montgomery and taken aboard Davis's ship, has prevented a fight between the two men, bringing the ire of both of them on himself.



This is another indication of Prendick's initial moral surety and courage. Though he is weakened by his time adrift at sea and living on the goodwill of a drunken captain, Prendick places himself between Davis and Montgomery to prevent them from brawling. The establishment of Prendick as a man of virtue and courage is critical to the progression of his character as his months on the island wear on. Though he is now an upright, firm man, the dire circumstances he faces on the island and his impulse to survive will wear away this moral surety and cause Prendick to reframe his moral sense. Thematically, this will argue that morality is defined more by circumstances than by any rigid, universal rules. Though Prendick is here shown protecting others and asserting his own beliefs about proper human behavior, within a few months he will become a man wholly devoted to his own self-preservation, no matter the costs. Had Prendick started out as a man of weak morals or little courage, this development of character would be far less affecting and the thematic argument for circumstantial morality would be weaker.

## Chapter 7 Quotes

☞☞ It was not the first time that conscience has turned against the methods of research. The doctor was simply howled out of the country...He might have purchased his social peace by abandoning his investigations, but he apparently preferred the latter, as most men would who have once fallen under the overmastering spell of research.

**Related Characters:** Edward Prendick / The Narrator

(speaker), Dr. Moreau / The White-Haired Man

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 23

### Explanation and Analysis

Having finally remembered how he knew Moreau's name, Prendick recalls that he was the subject of a great public scandal in London over a decade ago.



Moreau is a pure scientist, placing his pursuit of knowledge above all else, which often puts him at odds with society and its moral conscience. Prendick, observing that most scientists who delve deeply into their work would prefer to abandon society rather than their research, seems to be giving voice to Wells's own fear that leading scientists in such ethically hazardous fields as vivisection will become so lost in their pursuit of knowledge that they fail to recognize when they have gone too far. This danger is embodied by Moreau and fuels the warning that Wells offers through his novel: science should not be removed from the ethics of society; it should be accountable to society. While Wells does recognize that society's conscience may hold back certain areas of scientific research, the grave warning and negative argument he posits through Moreau's work suggests that he believed that the hindrance of some fields of research is worth the maintenance of ethical boundaries and accountability. Just as human beings become animalistic outside the influence of society, science can become needlessly cruel and a wicked end unto itself without society's moderating hand.

## Chapter 12 Quotes

☞☞ A horrible fancy came into my head that Moreau, after animalizing these men, had infected their dwarfed brains with a kind of deification of himself.

**Related Characters:** Edward Prendick / The Narrator (speaker), Dr. Moreau / The White-Haired Man

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:**  

**Page Number:** 43


### Explanation and Analysis


Prendick, fleeing Moreau, has found himself among the Beast Folk, who have mistaken him for one of Moreau's

latest creations and are attempting to teach him the Law. Moreau has implanted himself in the minds of the Beast Folk as a god-figure. Although this certainly serves a purpose in maintaining order on the island and keeping the Beast Folk from rising up against him, it also belies a massively warped ego. Moreau is not an authoritarian in his relationship with other humans, yet regarding his creations he acts with impunity. That Moreau feels justified in creating life and destroying it at his own whim, reshaping, reforming, and tormenting living beings against their will under the guise of scientific research, suggests that he does, in some sense, see himself as a god-like figure. More than simply implanting a convenient belief in the minds of the Beast Folk, Moreau seems to be reflecting his own self-concept in the structure of the Law. He has created the beings that walk his island. He decides who lives, who dies, and who faces tormenting punishment in the “House of Pain.” In the microcosm of the island, Moreau is quite like God. However, being that he does not act as an authoritarian towards other human beings, Moreau’s power-complex is unique from typical depictions of power-hungry villains in that he seems to understand his power is limited to the little world he has created.

“For every one the want that is bad,” said the grey Sayer of the Law. “What you will want, we do not know. We shall know. Some want to follow things that move, to watch and slink and wait and spring, to kill and bite, deep and rich, sucking the blood...It is bad. ‘Not to chase other Men; that is the Law. *Are we not Men?*’”

**Related Characters:** The Sayer of the Law (speaker), Edward Prendick / The Narrator

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:**  

**Page Number:** 44

### Explanation and Analysis

Still believing Prendick to be one of the Beast Folk, the Sayer of the Law explains that each of them must repress their animal desires, even though the impulse may be very strong.


This conflict—introduced here—between the Beast Folk’s animalistic urges and their desire to uphold the Law and act like humans becomes their defining feature, and indeed is the tension that ultimately pulls the island society apart.


There is a clear parallel here between the Beast Folk and human beings in “normal” society. Like the Beast Folk, human beings are beset by primal, irrational urges to defy the standards of decency, to be selfish, to kill, to steal, and so on. As the Law holds the Beast Folk back from entirely embracing their animal selves, so religion and government also hold human beings back from resorting to animalistic behavior. Although this concept of humanity’s struggle against its animal impulses is framed against a Darwinian understanding of human origin, classical religion observes the same struggle. Rather than referring to these base impulses as “animalism,” as Wells does, religions such as Christianity refer to them as “sins.”

## Chapter 13 Quotes

“But as I say, I was too full of excitement, and—a true saying, though those who have never known danger may doubt it—too desperate to die.”

**Related Characters:** Edward Prendick / The Narrator (speaker), Dr. Moreau / The White-Haired Man

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 48

### Explanation and Analysis

Prendick, believing that Moreau intends to vivisect him and reshape him into one of the Beast Folk, has fled the enclosure and now stands at the edge of the ocean, where he had intended to commit suicide by drowning himself.



This moment in Prendick’s character development is significant for two reasons: first, it shows that at one point in time, Prendick was dignified enough to prefer death over being malformed and misshapen into a horrifying creature and experiencing the indignity of becoming a beast. This seems to be a confirmation of his Prendick’s initial moral surety. Second, it marks the point in Prendick’s development where that moral surety begins to dissolve. Prendick finds that he values his survival more than his dignity or moral resolution. Over the course of the story, he will go on to mercilessly kill a number of the Beast Folk, uphold the lies that Moreau has taught them, and live much like an animal himself. Although it seems reasonable that given his initial stance, Prendick may have later chosen to commit suicide rather than stoop to such lowly behavior, Prendick here discovers that morality is far more


circumstantial than he may want to believe. When it comes down to life or death, the biological impulse to survive seems to overrule any moral absolutes. If suicide to maintain one's virtue and dignity is a distinctly human act, then survival at any cost is a decidedly animal reaction. Although he despises the Beast Folk's animalism and fears becoming one of them, in his struggle to survive, Prendick is already quite animal.

## Chapter 14 Quotes

“You forget all that a skilled vivisector can do with living things,” said Moreau. “For my own part I'm puzzled why the things I have done here have not been done before.”

**Related Characters:** Dr. Moreau / The White-Haired Man (speaker), Edward Prendick / The Narrator

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 52

### Explanation and Analysis

Moreau is sitting with Prendick, having now convinced Prendick that he is not in danger of being vivisected, and explains the purpose of his experiments on the island.

It is telling that Moreau does not seem able to understand the ethical objections to his work, though to Prendick they seem glaringly obvious. Moreau's work is cruel, inflicting physical and psychological torment on the Beast Folk, and yet Moreau is entirely indifferent to this pain. In this way, Moreau too seems to exhibit behaviors or qualities that are more animal than human. One of the defining characteristics of humanity is its empathy for other living beings—although this ideal is often unmet, it is relatively distinctive to human beings. Few animals exhibit signs of empathy. A predator does not feel for the pain of its prey, it simply takes what it needs. That Moreau feels none of the pain of his subjects seems to make him, at best, a psychopath, though he could just as well be described as animalistic.

Moreau's lack of understanding demonstrates how critical the presence and conscience of society is in scientific research. When one's moral conscience is so lacking or has been so reshaped by circumstance, the social conscience of the masses is a critical failsafe in guiding scientific research and setting healthy boundaries for it.

“So long as visible or audible pain turns you sick, so long as your own pain drives you, so long as pain underlies your propositions about sin, so long, I tell you, you are an animal, thinking a little less obscurely than an animal feels.”

**Related Characters:** Dr. Moreau / The White-Haired Man (speaker), Edward Prendick / The Narrator

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 54

### Explanation and Analysis

Moreau continues his exposition to Prendick, explaining the merits of his research and justifying the cruelty of his work by explaining that pain is merely an evolutionary byproduct, a mechanism of survival that will eventually be done away with, and is thus ultimately irrelevant.


Moreau argues that feeling sympathetic to the pain of others is actually a more animalistic response than disregarding it altogether. The argument here is quite interesting, since it is a feasible line of reasoning—especially within a Darwinian understanding that all living things are sophisticated accidents of fate and biology, rather than precious creations of God—and yet it also justifies extraordinary cruelty. This typifies the complicated tension between the religious and Darwinian views of the world that Wells presents in the novel. Wells takes a Darwinian view of humans being highly-sophisticated animals, and yet posits that the maintenance of religious authority is vital for maintaining order in society. Here too, Wells seems to argue both for and against a Darwinian approach to science, creating a plausible argument for why society could stand to be less squeamish about suffering before going on to show how cruel that approach may turn out to be.

This tenuous balance between religious and Darwinian ethics is likely reflective of Wells's own oddly-balanced view. Although as an intellectual, Wells framed his discussions of ethics against a Darwinian understanding of human beings, and although he refused to participate in organized religion himself, Wells maintained a belief in some sort of God for most of his life. Moreover, he seemed to appreciate the necessity of religion as a moral authority in society, even if he would not participate in it personally.

“It looked quite human to me when I had finished it, but when I went to it I was discontented with it; it remembered me, and was terrified beyond imagination, and it had no more than the wits of a sheep. The more I looked the clumsier it seemed, until at last I put the monster out of its misery.”

**Related Characters:** Dr. Moreau / The White-Haired Man (speaker), Edward Prendick / The Narrator

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 56

### Explanation and Analysis

Moreau tells Prendick of his first Beast Folk to survive the vivisection process, a sheep that he had reshaped to resemble a human.


Moreau, in his utter disregard for pain or even the right of other living things to exist, seems rather like a psychopath. Although he has explained his reasoning for such disregard and, in a way, it is a rational argument in light of his Darwinian view and quest for scientific knowledge, it is difficult to view his actions as anything but ruthless. Having created what is effectively a human being, though one with little intelligence, Moreau executed it because it represented a failure to him. The sight of it was a humiliation to him. This again suggests that Moreau is a man driven by his own ego and that he has warped his sense of morality to fit his circumstances.

In light of Moreau's depiction as a god-figure, his execution of a failed creation bears some parallel to the cataclysmic flood described in Genesis, where the Abrahamic God wipes out the population of the Earth because they have become too evil and he wants to start anew. In this case, Moreau's ruthlessness not only condemns himself, but also condemns traditional ideas about a ruthless God.

“[The Beast Folk] build themselves dens, gather fruit and pull herbs—marry even. But I can see through it all, see into their very souls, and see there nothing but the souls of beasts, beasts that perish—anger, and the lusts to live and gratify themselves...Yet they're odd. Complex, like everything else alive. There is a kind of upward striving in them, part vanity, part waste sexual emotion, part waste curiosity.”

**Related Characters:** Dr. Moreau / The White-Haired Man (speaker), Edward Prendick / The Narrator

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 59

### Explanation and Analysis

Moreau delivers his own verdict of his success in making humans out of the Beast Folk, stating that he has had limited success. Moreau once more occupies the place of God with the conviction that he can “see into their very souls,” positioning himself as the creator who knows his creations better than they know themselves.


Despite Moreau's contention that the Beast Folk are not human enough, his description of them is not far off from basic human experience—lives motivated by anger, lust, or self-gratification mixed with an upward striving, the quest for self-betterment motivated by pride as much as anything. Moreau's depiction of his creations once more narrows the margin between humans and animals, suggesting that their base motivations and ambitions are very much the same. It is not unreasonable to believe that, in their “upward striving,” the Beast Folk could reach a level of development indistinguishable from human society, if given enough time and able to sufficiently repress their animal instincts. After all, Homo Sapiens had hundreds of thousands of years to do so, and the Beast Folk have had less than a decade.

## Chapter 15 Quotes

“I say I became habituated to the Beast People, that a thousand things that had seemed unnatural and repulsive speedily became natural and ordinary to me. I suppose everything in existence takes its color from the average hue of our surroundings: Montgomery and Moreau were too peculiar to keep my general impression of humanity well defined.”

**Related Characters:** Edward Prendick / The Narrator (speaker), Montgomery / The Young Man, Dr. Moreau / The White-Haired Man

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 64

### Explanation and Analysis

Prendick, having been isolated from the outside world and human society for weeks, begins to lose his formerly strong

convictions about the differences between right and wrong, proper and improper, human and animal.

This demonstrates the way that circumstances may change one's perception, which sets the stage for the development of Prendick's character and the thematic argument that morality is circumstantial rather than universal and rigid. This period of relative peace is, in a way, vital for Prendick's development and the reframing of his morality that ultimately helps him to survive. Prendick's adaptation to the strange and the grotesque allow his moral sense to adjust to his new circumstances and lose the strictness that it once had. When the order of the island breaks down, Prendick will do many things he once considered horrific, including killing many of the Beast Folk. Were this all to take place before his sense of the outside world and his rigid morality faded to memory, it is possible that psychologically it would have been too much to handle. He could have fallen in to madness, as he does in the first chapter after very nearly resorting to cannibalism.



## Chapter 16 Quotes



“Hail,” said they, “to the Other with the whip!”

“There's a third with a whip now,” said Montgomery, so you'd better mind!”

“Was he not made?” said the Ape Man. “He said—he said he was made.”

**Related Characters:** Montgomery / The Young Man, The Ape Man (speaker), Edward Prendick / The Narrator

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:**  

**Page Number:** 65

### Explanation and Analysis

Prendick and Montgomery are walking through the forest when they meet the Ape Man and another of the Beast Folk, and Montgomery explains that now there is a third human who wields the same authority over the Beast Folk as Moreau and himself.

The whips are a symbol of human authority, the badge of power in the minds of the Beast Folk as well as suggesting some level of divinity, since Moreau has taken up the mantle of God. However, since Prendick first met the Ape Man without a whip and unaware of its symbolism, the Ape Man and many of the Beast Folk have assumed that Prendick is


another of Moreau's creations, on the same level as themselves. This is an ironic development, suggesting that as far as the Beast Folk are concerned, the only difference between them and the real humans are the possession of whips, as if they were a holy symbol like a priest's crucifix. The Beast Folk do not seem to be aware of the biological differences or the humans' obviously advanced mental capacity. This once again narrows the margins between humans and animals, suggesting that the difference is as much one of social positioning—since the humans occupy a different level of social power in the island's hierarchy—more than biological reality or even intellectual capacity.

“Who breaks the Law—” said Moreau, taking his eyes off his victim and turning towards us. It seemed to me there was a touch of exultation in his voice.

“—goes back to the House of Pain,” they all clamored; “goes back to the House of Pain, O Master!”

**Related Characters:** Edward Prendick / The Narrator, Dr. Moreau / The White-Haired Man (speaker), The Leopard Man / The Beastly Man

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:**  

**Page Number:** 70

### Explanation and Analysis


The Beast Folk have been gathered together and the Leopard Man has been condemned for eating flesh, which is strictly prohibited by the Law, meaning that he will be punished.



Both Moreau and the Beast Folk seem “exultant” at the delivered condemnation and the horrible fate that awaits the Leopard Man, being that he will be vivisected again. For Moreau, this once again suggests a level of psychopathy and even contradicts his earlier arguments about detachment from pain; rather than simply being unmoved by inflicting pain on others, it seems that he enjoys it. On the part of the Beast Folk, their religious fervor is both grotesque and shamefully human. Human society has time and again shown its joy in inflicting pain on others, particularly when the victim is seen as having broken some moral law. The Beast Folk's zeal in condemning the Leopard Man to further mutilation evokes such historical scenes as the stoning of

adulterers or the burning of witches; it is, in effect, a mob. Moreau has made the Beast Folk more human than perhaps even he realized. Though it arguably taps into an animalistic thirst for blood, such moralistic zeal for the suffering of others is not an animal behavior—it is exceptionally human. Even so, it is darker and more grotesque than any animalistic behavior could possibly be.

☞ A strange persuasion came upon me that, save for the grossness of the line, the grotesqueness of the forms, I had here before me the whole balance of human life in miniature, the whole interplay of instinct, reason, and fate, in its simplest form.

**Related Characters:** Edward Prendick / The Narrator (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:**  

**Page Number:** 74

### Explanation and Analysis

Prendick, having taken pity on the Leopard Man and killed it to prevent its torment in the House of Pain, wanders away from the scene by himself to reflect on what he has just seen.

This is one of the strongest symbolic statements in the entire story, and certainly confirms the Beast Folk as representative of humanity, specifically in the tension between primal animal instincts and the desire to act as rational, dignified beings. Through the depiction of the Beast Folk as actually being part-animal, Wells is able to emphasize the interaction of humanity's primal instincts and its reasoning faculties. The mob that chases the Leopard Man, for instance, is certainly animalistic in its thrill of the hunt and its thirst for blood, and yet rooted in a rational, moralistic, utterly human religious crusade to purge sinful behavior and those who differ from society's norm. Rather than simply being a flat argument of the contrast between animal and human nature, Wells instead interweaves the two, using the beastly appearance of Moreau's creations to draw attention to the animal within human society. They are not completely interchangeable, but neither are they utterly distinct.

## Chapter 17 Quotes

☞ [Montgomery] cracked his whip in some trepidation, and forthwith [the Beast Folk] rushed at him. Never before had a Beast Man dared to do that.

**Related Characters:** Edward Prendick / The Narrator (speaker), Dr. Moreau / The White-Haired Man, Montgomery / The Young Man

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:**   

**Page Number:** 78

### Explanation and Analysis

After Moreau has been missing for some time, Montgomery returns to the enclosure and tells Prendick what he has seen: the Beast Folk are going mad.

The Beast Folk's defiance of the symbolic authority of the whip is a critical step in the breakdown of society and an indication that the Law is in jeopardy. Rather than fearing the whip, with its connotations of human authority and proximity to the god-like Moreau, the Beast Folk are beginning to question its actual power, and indeed they easily overcome it. This is demonstrative of the precariousness of religious or governmental authority in general. It is only potent and effective so long as the masses of society believe in it, either in its moral authority or its ability to dole out punishment. However, since Wells cast religious authority as vital to maintaining order in general, it seems that civilized society stands on precarious legs.



It is worth noting that Prendick, when he believed Moreau was going to vivisect him, had tried to call upon the Beast Folk to make just such an uprising, though would certainly not encourage such an uprising now since he is protected by Moreau's power and the Beast Folk's submission. The uprising of the Beast Folk seems to play upon ideas of class struggle and the revolution of the underclass against a powerful religious government. Wells himself was respected as an advocate of socialism and social reform, and it seems likely that these ideas, while not the main thrust of the story, certainly have made their way into the narrative arc.





## Chapter 18 Quotes

☞☞ “Children of the Law,” I said, “He is *not* dead...he has changed his shape—he has changed his body,” I went on. “For a time you will not see him. He is...there”—I pointed upward—“where he can watch you. You cannot see him. But he can see you. Fear the Law.”

**Related Characters:** Edward Prendick / The Narrator (speaker), The Sayer of the Law, Dr. Moreau / The White-Haired Man, Montgomery / The Young Man

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:**  

**Page Number:** 80

### Explanation and Analysis



Prendick and Montgomery have just been shown the body of Moreau by a number of Beast Folk, and the Sayer of the Law is asking if the Law is dead as well. Prendick, realizing that all order will be lost if the Law dies, manages to create a myth of Moreau, turning him into a disembodied god, though this only convinces the Beast Folk for a short time.


Prendick’s mythologizing of Moreau as a disembodied god-figure once again bears a biblical parallel. Moreau, though he functions like God, also represents an embodied divinity, a physical, tangible ideal for the Beast Folk to aspire to—as Moreau is utterly human and sophisticated, so the Beast Folk also aspire to be human and sophisticated. In this way, Moreau is rather Christ-like, a god who walks the Earth and interacts with his creations. Thus, when Moreau is killed, Prendick clearly borrows heavily from Christianity, creating a myth that he has merely shed his human body and is still present, watching and listening, in the same way that Christ’s followers believed their master had been resurrected and was still present with them. However, the Beast Folk’s memory will eventually fade, and they will regress back into animalism. This poses a rather fatalistic question about the fate of Christianity: when the memory of Jesus Christ fades, what will become of the religion? And will human society be able to maintain order when such a significant moral authority has been lost?

☞☞ We locked ourselves in, and then took Moreau’s mangled body into the yard, and laid it upon a pile of brushwood.

Then we went into the laboratory and put an end to all we found living there.

**Related Characters:** Edward Prendick / The Narrator (speaker), Dr. Moreau / The White-Haired Man, Montgomery / The Young Man

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 82

### Explanation and Analysis

The Beast Folk have helped Prendick and Montgomery bring Moreau’s corpse back to the enclosure. After the Beast Folk depart, Prendick and Montgomery set themselves to killing anything Moreau may have worked on. This is particularly dark, since whatever caged creatures are in Moreau’s lab either possess some level of human sentience, thus making it akin to killing a person, or are merely dumb animals and do not pose any real threat. At best it is vindictive; at worst, murderous.


In the development of Prendick’s character and his shifting morality, this instance seems to be his point of no return. Mere hours before, he had viewed Montgomery’s shooting of one of the Beast Folk as it fled as “wanton” and needless. However, the death of Moreau has signaled the end of all organized society amidst the Beast Folk—anarchy is swiftly approaching. This clearly demonstrates the way in which morality can adjust to circumstances. When Prendick’s situation becomes dire and the stakes are raised, he quickly sheds all remorse. His transition from a virtuous, sympathetic character to one gripped with a ruthless desperation to survive is nearly complete.

## Chapter 19 Quotes

☞☞ I felt that for Montgomery, there was no help; that he was in truth half akin to these Beast Folk, unfitted for human kindred.

**Related Characters:** Edward Prendick / The Narrator (speaker), Montgomery / The Young Man

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 85

### Explanation and Analysis

Moreau is dead and Montgomery, nearly hysterical, has gone down to the beach to get drunk with the Beast Folk

while Prendick tries to form an escape plan.

Montgomery has been removed from human society for eleven years, having been exiled, and seems to have lost all sense of human decorum. Montgomery's similarity to the Beast Folk further minimizes the difference between human and animal, emphasizing the idea that humanity is socially imbued rather than biologically inherent. Without the civilizing pressures of human society, Montgomery has fallen into all manner of animalistic, undignified behavior. This is typified by his tendency to drink: one of the defining animalistic behaviors described in the story is giving into one's base urges. Not only does Montgomery constantly give into his addiction to alcohol—even though it caused him to commit the crime that saw him exiled from human society—his drunkenness further lowers his inhibitions, meaning that he is more prone to act on impulse and less likely to assert any self-control. Montgomery's alcoholism and animalistic behavior are self-reciprocating, drawing him ever downward into a more and more animal state.



## Chapter 20 Quotes


☞ I was perhaps a dozen seconds collecting myself. Then I cried, "Salute! Bow down!"

[The Hyena-Swine's] teeth flashed upon me in a snarl. "Who are you, that I should..."

Perhaps a little too spasmodically, I drew my revolver, aimed, and quickly fired...[and] knew I had missed.

**Related Characters:** The Hyena-Swine, Edward Prendick / The Narrator (speaker), Montgomery / The Young Man

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:**  

**Page Number:** 89

### Explanation and Analysis

Montgomery has just died on the beach and a trio of Beast Folk have submitted to Prendick, indicating that for the moment, he still holds some level of authority. The Hyena-Swine then emerges from the forest and accosts him.

Prendick intuits that the Hyena-Swine is his greatest threat of all the Beast Folk, not only because is the most fearsome, but because the Hyena-Swine has always indicated a defiance of the Law. In a sense, the Hyena-Swine is the first nihilist among the Beast Folk, immediately embracing the fact that Moreau, as the god-figure that held the Law together, is dead. Without any vestige of order remaining,


no central authority, and no threat of punishment, the Hyena-Swine has become the most powerful figure on the island. In the eyes of the Hyena-Swine, society and the Law were limiting factors.

The Hyena-Swine's anticipation of the Law breaking down indicates that although society is civilized and sophisticated, there are those who will actively wish for its demise. Individuals that stand to gain from such lawless chaos—usually those who are most physically powerful—represent the greatest threat to religious or moral order.

## Chapter 21 Quotes

☞ "We have no Master, no Whips, no House of Pain any more. There is an end. We love the Law, and will keep it; but there is no pain, no Master, no Whips forever again.' So they say."

**Related Characters:** The Dog Man (speaker), Edward Prendick / The Narrator

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:**  

**Page Number:** 93

### Explanation and Analysis

All of the Beast Folk except for the Dog Man have now utterly abandoned any concept of human authority, as the Dog Man himself says here.

Although it is short-lived, the Beast Folk intend to maintain the moral system of the Law without the authority figure or religious imagery that undergirded it. In light of the symbolic parallel between Moreau and God, the Law and organized religion, this seems akin to a form of secular humanism. The concept of secular humanism—effectively a moral system based on religious ideals but devoid of any over-mastering God—began making headway in Europe roughly fifty years before the publication of Wells's novel. It seems the author may have been responding to this recent cultural development.

However, the failure of the Beast Folk to maintain the Law for more than a month suggests that Wells believed secular humanism could not hold up society without a central authority figure in place. Although Wells did not participate in organized religion himself and believed it was often misguided, he did see it as a necessary component of society's structure.

## Chapter 22 Quotes

☛ There is, though I do not know how there is or why there is, a sense of infinite peace and protection in the glittering hosts of heaven. There it must be, in the vast and eternal laws of matter, and not in the daily care and sins and troubles of men, that whatever is more than animal within us must find its solace and its hope.

**Related Characters:** Edward Prendick / The Narrator (speaker)

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 104

### Explanation and Analysis

Prendick, having escaped to human society, finds that he cannot handle the chaos and noise of the city, for he sees too much of the animal impulse in the eyes of the humans around him. Thus, he retreats to the countryside to be alone and study chemistry and astronomy.

This reflection is unique in that it provides the most

definitive statement on what divides human beings from animals; that is, to contemplate the mysteries of the universe and set one's mind on concepts greater than daily toil. There is a clear logic to Wells's statement here: to be animalistic, according to the story, is to respond to one's basic urges and merely get through the day, as most people do to one degree or another. Thus, considering the universe beyond oneself would be the most potent antidote to such behavior, and a true embrace of humanity.

However, there is also an inherent statement about social class present in this train of thought. If the the height of humanity is to ponder the stars and the cosmos and rise above the daily toil, then the wealthy, well-educated scientist with the leisure to consider such grand thoughts is naturally more "human" than the common laborer. Prendick himself makes such an observation when looking at one of the Beast Folk tending to the boats, realizing that he cannot remember the difference between it and a common human sailor. The implication that poor people are effectively more beastly does not necessarily negate Wells's final reflection about humanity, but it does give it a rather dark hue.



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

## CHAPTER 1: IN THE DINGY OF THE LADY VAIN

The narrator lays out his intention: he will not contradict what the public already knows about the wreck of the *Lady Vain* after it crashed into a sunken vessel ten days from Callao. The narrator will, however, add his own bizarre account of what happened to the three men who floated out to sea in a small dingy. Although the testimony of the other, immediately rescued survivors was that four men drifted out to sea, the narrator clarifies that it was in fact three—a fourth man tried to jump into the boat, but missed and drowned.

The narrator and two other survivors float adrift for eight days, quickly running out of food and water. The other two propose cannibalism, [drawing lots](#) to choose which man shall be eaten. The narrator initially refuses to draw lots, but after spending a night awake, fearful that the other two survivors will simply eat him if he does not relent, he obliges. They flip coins to decide who shall be eaten, but rather than submitting to his fate, the losing man fights back, knocking himself and the third survivor overboard and drowning them both. The narrator is left lying in the dingy alone, laughing in a half-maddened state.

In his delirium, after what felt an endless time, the narrator sees a small ship approach him, feels himself lifted aboard, and has a memory of a nightmarish dark face looking at him before he passes out.

*This opening sets the tone for the entire story: the narrator (later revealed as Edward Prendick) is not going to tell the public what they have already heard, or even should want to hear, but the “real story.” The opening of the story with a shipwreck and three men lost at sea indicates that the story will principally be a survivor’s tale, one of endurance and hardship. Callao is a port city in Peru.*



*Prendick’s moral arc is foreshadowed in this brief encounter with cannibalism: Prendick, a man of strong morals, initially refuses to partake in such grotesque behavior. However, once it seems his rigid morality may inhibit his chance of survival, he concedes to participate in actions that he once considered unconscionable, seemingly proving that morality is circumstantial.*



*This is the first of three times in the story that Prendick is rescued from being lost at sea. This repeated circumstance depicts him as a man who finds himself constantly at the mercy of others and of fate, and thus forced to adjust to the circumstances and moral predicaments thrust upon him.*



## CHAPTER 2: THE MAN WHO WAS GOING NOWHERE

The narrator awakes in a cabin aboard the ship, being treated by a somewhat young man with blond hair and a drooping lower lip that gives him a “slobbering articulation” and a slight lisp. The man explains that they are aboard a small trading ship called the *Ipecacuanha*, helmed by a fool named Davis. Somewhere above, the narrator can hear what sounds like snarling dogs and the gruff voice of a man mixed together. The man tending him becomes enraged by the noise and storms out of the cabin, yelling at somebody outside before returning.

*The young man’s initial depiction is of someone who is reasonably intelligent yet rather pitiable. Prendick points out that the young man is offering medical treatment after his week spent starving at sea, but also goes out of his way to call attention to the young man’s drooping lip, which gives him a rather undignified appearance prevents him from speaking clearly.*



The narrator tells the young man that his name is Edward Prendick and that, looking for some adventure, he had left his comfortable domestic life to become a natural historian. The man tending him is intrigued by this, as he himself studied as a biologist in England a decade ago. The man implies that as a youth, he had made some grave error, but gives no details. The man leaves to find Prendick some food.

Prendick spends the next day eating, sleeping, and chatting with the man, whose name, he discovers, is Montgomery. Montgomery reveals that the ship is on its way to Hawaii. However, it will be dropping Montgomery off on a nameless island that he seems reticent to give any description of.

*The young man's background as a biologist furthers his depiction as a man of reasonable intelligence, despite the impression he gives off. His implication that he is no longer welcome in society, however, fits his general appearance and lack of decorum.*



*Montgomery's reluctance to give any useful information sets up the mysterious tone that the book will maintain through its first half. Prendick is an unreliable narrator, and the reader is kept in the dark just as he is until details are slowly unveiled.*



### CHAPTER 3: THE STRANGE FACE

Prendick, having regained some strength, ventures out of the cabin he has been recovering in with Montgomery. As they both step toward the ladder leading to the upper deck of the ship, in their way stands a very strange-looking man—he is short and oddly shaped, with large teeth and an elongated face that looks rather like a muzzle, and dark eyes that have very little white around the edges. The man's appearance is a shock to Prendick, though also vaguely familiar, but Montgomery obviously knows him and berates him for not being in his place aboard the ship.

Climbing above the deck, Prendick observes that there are numerous caged animals on the ship: stag hounds, a Puma, several hutches of rabbits, even a llama. Prendick asks Montgomery what they are all for, but receives no answer.

As they are speaking, the strange-looking man appears, followed by the captain, Davis, who is cursing and shouting and hits the man hard enough to knock him to the deck. Montgomery angrily accosts the captain, who is clearly drunk, protesting that the captain must treat the strange fellow with the same respect that a passenger is due, since he has been abused and heckled over the entire trip. The captain obviously detests the strange-looking man and shouts, "Go to hell! Do what I like on my own ship."

*That Montgomery felt confident enough to bring his strange-looking friend, later revealed as M'ling (who is also later revealed to be one of the Beast Folk), anywhere where he would be seen by other humans is indicative of how passably human Moreau's Beast Folk are. Neither Prendick nor Davis ever suspect that M'ling is anything other than an ugly, but naturally-born human. This will make Moreau's indifferent cruelty towards them seem all the more villainous.*



*The ship filled with animals being taken to a new home is evocative of Noah's Ark, tying into the rest of the novel's biblical imagery.*



*Montgomery's indignation at Davis's drunkenness and abuse of M'ling is ironic and belies a severe lack of self-awareness, as it is later revealed that Montgomery also occasionally drunkenly beats M'ling. This contributes to Montgomery's characterization as a pitiful figure and predicts Prendick's future observation that the man often seems more beast-like than human.*



As Davis is complaining about how much he and his crew despise the strange-looking man and how much of a mess Montgomery's animals have made of his deck, Prendick interjects, sensing a fight. Montgomery is as angry as the captain, who is threatening to cut out the strange man's insides if he ever sees him again. Davis also drunkenly declares that since he is captain and owner of the ship, he is the "law and the prophets," the effective ruler. Prendick places himself between the two, berating both and bringing both men's anger down on himself. Despite this, Prendick is glad to have prevented a brawl.

*Davis's character foreshadows Moreau, particularly in the way that each man ascribes a god-like sense of authority to themselves while they are in their own domains. Davis sees himself as the god of his ship, which gives him the right to do whatever he pleases, including getting drunk and beating his passengers. Moreau, likewise, will literally establish himself as the god-figure of the Law and believes in his own impunity while on the island, creating life and destroying it as he sees fit.*



## CHAPTER 4: AT THE SCHOONER'S RAIL

Land is sighted that evening, after the sun has set. It seems that this is Montgomery's destination, and though Prendick is growing more curious about the purpose of the island and all the caged animals, he also sees that Montgomery is reluctant to divulge information. They talk about London for a time, which Montgomery seems to miss painfully. Although Prendick tries to thank Montgomery for saving his life, Montgomery replies that it was only "chance" and nothing more—the same sort of chance that caused Montgomery to have some accident that exiled him from society eleven years prior. Prendick offers to hear his tale, but Montgomery will not divulge anything more.

*Montgomery's refusal to take credit for saving Prendick is directly linked to his refusal to take responsibility for the crime that had him cast out of society (which he later reveals was a result of his alcoholism). This contributes to the idea that Montgomery acts more like an animal than a human, at least socially. Taking responsibility for one's own actions rather than simply attributing them to impulse and fate is a decidedly human characteristic. Animals react to biological impulses; humans moderate them and decide on their course of action, claiming responsibility for their result (at least in theory).*



Prendick spies Montgomery's strange-looking friend, who seems to be an assistant or servant. The man turns his head and Prendick momentarily catches a green luminescence in the man's eyes, which he finds unnatural and frankly disturbing. Soon thereafter, both Prendick and Montgomery return below deck to sleep. Prendick's rest is beset by strange dreams.

*Prendick's dreams almost seem to be a form of prescience, as the things he will soon see upon the island are stranger and darker than anything he could dream up. The strange luminescence of M'ling's eyes give just the briefest hint that something foul is afoot, as Wells continues to build a sense of mystery and dread.*



## CHAPTER 5: THE LANDING ON THE ISLAND

In the morning, as the animals are being off-loaded onto a smaller boat that will take them ashore to the island, the still-drunken captain demands that Prendick must leave his ship as well. Montgomery has been joined by a powerful, white-haired man with a resolute face, who has presumably come aboard from the island to assist the loading. Before Prendick can even ask to come to their island, the large man simply says that they cannot have him there. Prendick is aghast, but none seem sympathetic to him, and he is promptly thrown back into the dingy that he had been rescued from and set adrift in the ocean once more with no oars or food. Prendick, overwhelmed, sobs as he has not since he was a child.

*The white-haired man's characterization directly contradicts Montgomery's. Montgomery is young, inarticulate, rather undignified in appearance, and initially kind, at least enough to rescue Prendick and nurse him back to health. The white-haired man, however, is old, powerfully-built, confident, resolved, and unwilling to help Prendick—who for the second time finds himself set adrift in the ocean, presumably to die. It is interesting that Montgomery is more beastly and the white-haired man (later revealed to be Moreau) is very human, Montgomery is far more compassionate towards Prendick.*



## CHAPTER 6: THE EVIL-LOOKING BOATMEN

Montgomery and his companion, seeing that Prendick is doomed to drift upon the ocean once again, decide to rescue him despite their earlier refusal. On board their landing boat are not only Montgomery, the white-haired man, and the strange-looking man, but also three oddly-proportioned brutes (long torsos, short thighs) who cause an inexplicable sense of revulsion in Prendick. They are brown-skinned, though wrapped head to toe in white cloth, and have black hair that seems to be rather like horsehair.

The group makes their landing upon the shore, met by another bizarre-looking man with black skin and seemingly no lips. Prendick observes that the three swathed men walk awkwardly, as if the joints of their legs were not properly positioned. As they are unloading, the white-haired man offers Prendick breakfast and asks his occupation. When Prendick answers that he studied biology, the white-haired man seems intrigued, and replies that this island is also dedicated to the study of biology. Since they only see ships passing once a year or so, it seems that Prendick will be interned there for some time.

Prendick helps Montgomery to offload the rabbits, which Montgomery promptly releases into the island forest, evidently stocking the island. Montgomery is friendly, though still seems to be avoiding some subject of conversation. The white-haired man returns, seeming much friendlier than before, and offers Prendick some biscuits and brandy. Prendick eats the biscuits, but abstains from the alcohol, as he has for his entire life.

## CHAPTER 7: THE LOCKED DOOR

Montgomery and the white-haired man deliberate about what to do with Prendick until Montgomery remembers a room where they can house him. The white-haired man is eager to return to his work and admits to Prendick that, though Prendick is himself a scientist, they still feel the need for secrecy initially. The white-haired man refers to the island as a sort of “Bluebeard’s Chamber.” Though curious, Prendick is understanding of this.

*Prendick is once again set adrift and once again rescued by others. This continues Prendick’s characterization as a victim of terrible circumstances who is powerless to change them. Thus, Prendick will be forced to adapt. This sets the stage for Prendick’s morality to be forcibly adjusted to his circumstances for the sake of his survival as events unfold.*



*By casting all three human beings on the island as scientific, educated men, Wells increases the distinction between them and the Beast Folk, even though Montgomery has obviously regressed to more animalistic behavior. This raises a rather provocative implication from Wells: if the scientists, the educated, and the upper classes are more human, are the uneducated lower classes more beastly?*



*Prendick’s abstinence from alcohol is another indication of his moral resolution, a key component of his character that will be challenged over the course of the story. Prendick’s resolve and ability to repress his urges also contrasts him against both Montgomery and the Beast Folk, who constantly struggle to master their base desires.*



*“Bluebeard’s Chamber” is a reference to a 17th-Century fairytale about a young woman who marries a wealthy nobleman with a fabulous estate. The man’s house contains one chamber she is forbidden to enter—when she does, she discovers the tortured bodies of her husband’s past wives. This seems to be an oddly astute and foreboding reference for Moreau to make.*



Prendick is shown to his room, which is attached to a locked enclosure. The room is simple but contains a table, chairs, a hammock to sleep in, and several books in Greek and Latin. There are two doors—one which leads into the enclosure, and one that opens to the rest of the island. The white-haired man explains that the door leading to the enclosure must remain locked shut for “fear of accidents.” Montgomery, when he thinks he is out of earshot, calls the white-haired man Moreau, a name that nags at Prendick’s memory, though he cannot place it.

Prendick is reflecting on the utter secrecy of Montgomery and Moreau when the strange-looking man from the ship arrives to deliver food. Prendick notices, with some horror, that the man’s ears are pointed and covered with fur when not hidden by his long hair.

Prendick finally remembers how he knows the name Moreau—some decades ago, an exposé had been published regarding the work of the expert physiologist, Moreau. A vivisected dog, evidently one of his experiments, had escaped his lab and been discovered, leading investigative journalists to uncover Moreau’s horrifying research into vivisection (operating on live animals). The public had been so outraged—somewhat unfairly, felt Prendick—that Moreau had been forced to choose between giving up his research or giving up his place in society. Moreau chose to leave society, caught “under the over-mastering spell of research.”

Prendick realizes that Moreau has established the island as his new base of research and considers that such vivisection must be the fate of all the recently imported animals. Even so, vivisection, though grotesque, is a scientific pursuit and does not seem to Prendick worth all of the secrecy. His mind wanders to the possibilities of an infamous vivisectionist, the myriad of grotesque men, and this remote island.

*The location of Prendick’s room between the forest—being, in many ways, the domain of the Beast Folk—and Moreau’s enclosure is a symbolic statement. Over the arc of the story, Prendick will be caught between Moreau and the Beast Folk, loyal to neither. He is sympathetic to Moreau’s scientific crusade yet repulsed by his cruelty; he is sympathetic to the Beast Folk’s suffering yet repulsed by their animalism and grotesque appearance.*



*Despite earlier hints, this is the first overt clue that M’ling (still not referred to by name) may be something other than strictly-human. This also initiates one of the most terrifying sections of the story, where Prendick’s narration raises a whole host of grim possibilities as he tries to understand what the purpose of this island is.*



*This fully introduces the theme of the pursuit of scientific knowledge conflicting with the ethics of society. Prendick’s recollection of the public’s outrage, particularly that it was on some level unfair, indicates that he is sympathetic both to scientific progress and the need for ethical deliberation, making him an ideal lens through which to contemplate the conflict. Moreau, by contrast, is under the “spell of research” and thus has already shown his bias.*



*Here too, Prendick demonstrates that he understands both the value of vivisection as a scientific pursuit as well as the ethical argument against it. This makes him as neutral a judge as could be hoped for in the conflict between them, which Wells will explore as the story unfolds.*





## CHAPTER 8: THE CRYING OF THE PUMA

Montgomery and the strange-looking man arrive again with food, water, and brandy, announcing that Montgomery will eat lunch with Prendick, but Moreau is busy working. When Montgomery's assistant leaves, Prendick inquires about him, pointing out the strangeness of his ears. Montgomery pretends not to have noticed anything strange about the man, and dodges any questions about him or the men on the beach. When Montgomery notices that Prendick does not drink, he mentions that he wishes he had such self-control, since that was the source of his troubles in the first place. He ambiguously adds that now he needs it to steel his nerves.

As they are speaking, the Puma can be heard howling from the enclosure, and Prendick surmises that it is being vivisected. Once Montgomery has left, the Puma's pained screams become overwhelming, as if "all the pain in the world had found a voice." Prendick is driven out of his room to escape the noise and sets off to explore the island.

*Once again, the contrast between Prendick and Montgomery is apparent. Prendick is a bold, forthright man in the practice of exercising self-control and resisting his own impulses—demonstrated by his total abstinence of alcohol—and is thus portrayed as fit for human society. Montgomery is evasive, apparently weak-willed, and so lacking in self-control that he was cast out of human society, now finding that he fits better amongst the Beast Folk than human beings, as will be revealed.*



*Since vivisection involves the dissection of a live, and apparently conscious, animal, it is a grim process regardless of whether its subject possesses human intelligence or not. By making Prendick's first interaction with vivisection rather gruesome, Wells inclines the reader to suspect the worst of Moreau's work, which contributes to the building terror that Prendick's narration delivers.*



## CHAPTER 9: THE THING IN THE FOREST

Walking aimlessly, Prendick wanders through the forest until he finds a stream. Crouching on the edge, on all fours like an animal, is another man, fully-clothed but with the same "grotesque ugliness" of the men on the beach. The man has his head lowered to the stream and is sucking water with his lips to drink, also like an animal. The man sees Prendick and, looking guilty, slinks off through the undergrowth.

Prendick is disturbed by the sight and unsure of what to make of it, but wanders onward. Shortly, he comes upon a rabbit's body with the head freshly torn off. There is blood, but no signs of struggle, as if the creature was quickly snatched up off the ground. Prendick's dread intensifies.

*The man's shame at being seen drinking like an animal juxtaposes his animal behavior with his human emotional response. This serves to further introduce the theme of human versus animal nature, suggesting that they may be in some way interrelated, both present in the same body.*



*The dead rabbit foreshadows the upcoming violence of the Beast Folk, both when Prendick is chased and further ahead in the story when the Beast Folk's society breaks down and they revert to aggressive, feral animals.*



Prendick continues his venture and, unseen, spies three more people through the brush. They are nearly naked, with oddly colored skin and distinctively swine-like features: chinless, fleshy faces with thin bristly hair. Though human, they look more bestial than anything Prendick has ever seen. The three are engaged in some sort of ritual, speaking unintelligibly and drooling, evidently excited. They begin jumping up and down and then one of them slips, catching itself briefly on all fours. Though momentary, the action confirms the animalism of the people to Prendick. He does not know what to make of such beastly-yet-human forms, but is horrified at the possibilities they imply.

Prendick turns to leave, since he is terrified and the sun is beginning to set. As he is walking, he becomes aware of a creature following him. Peering into the undergrowth, he spies the beastly man he had seen drinking at the stream. The creature disappears, but as Prendick continues his journey back to his room, he becomes aware that the creature is still stalking him. Prendick decides that his best chance is to escape the forest and make for the beach, since there will be less cover for his pursuer. He picks up a stone, making his way through the trees, and runs for the shore. Prendick's hunter gives chase, initially bounding on all fours. When the creature is close behind him, Prendick turns and strikes it in the head with the stone.

With the beastly man lying motionless in the sand, Prendick runs for the house and the safety of his room. Even the Puma's cries seem a relief from what he has just experienced. As he nears the building, Prendick can hear a voice calling out to him.

*Each person that Prendick sees appears more bestial than the last, like a house of horrors gradually increasing in intensity. In the mind of the reader, this progression serves to shift the perception of people Prendick sees on the island from human, though brutishly ugly, to more and more animalistic. This effectively develops both the horror of the story—especially since the reader is kept in the dark—and the thematic tension between the human and animal nature of the story's characters.*



*Prendick's striking of the beastly man with the stone is obviously in self-defense, yet is still significant in that it is the first of several times he will resort to violence throughout the story, despite the fact that he seems to often detest it when practiced by other people. This is an early indication that Prendick, despite his upright character, will come to view morality as circumstantial rather than universal and that the impulse to survive will justify all manner of behavior he may otherwise be opposed to.*



*The Puma's cries being a source of relief demonstrates the way that perception can change with circumstance. This is a sub-theme that will be developed over the course of the story and play directly into Prendick's moral re-positioning in his fight to survive.*



## CHAPTER 10: THE CRYING OF THE MAN

Montgomery meets Prendick as he arrives and escorts him to his little room. Prendick is nearly hysterical, demanding to know what it was that chased him. Montgomery still gives no answers, but convinces Prendick that his nerves are frayed. He gives Prendick a sedative and helps him crawl into the hammock to sleep off his terror.

Prendick sleeps until midday, waking with a hangover from the sedative. Montgomery briefly checks on Prendick but then leaves, evidently busy. In his passing, however, he neglects to lock the door leading to the interior of the enclosure from which the Puma's screams emanate. The screaming itself has changed, sounding much more human than it had before, and Prendick, with horror, realizes that it must be a human that is being vivisected rather than the Puma as he had thought.

*The narration, which has been growing more frantic with each successive encounter with the Beast Folk, lulls the reader into the same brief false sense of security that Prendick experiences before witnessing another horrifying scene.*



*It will later be revealed that the screams are not from a human, but from the Puma, whom Moreau has made to be like a human. However, Wells's use of an unreliable narrator draws the reader into Prendick's horror and ultimately increases the dread of the story, reinforcing the dire possibilities of unchecked scientific progress.*



Prendick bursts through the unlocked door into an operating room. There is blood in the sink, the smell of medical chemicals, and a live figure fastened to a board, flayed open and obviously mutilated. However, within seconds, Moreau's powerful arms lift Prendick off the ground and throw him out of the operating room, raging that Prendick is ruining "the work of a lifetime." Prendick, in his room, is horrified. It seems that Moreau is vivisecting human beings.

*Due to the unreliable narrator, this is the most viscerally terrifying scene in the book. Although Prendick will realize that he was mistaken and that it is not a human being vivisected, the possibility of human vivisection has now been raised. This will color the subsequent discussion on scientific freedom versus ethical safeguards, inevitably tilting the balance in favor of ethics.*



## CHAPTER 11: THE HUNTING OF THE MAN

Prendick determines that he must escape, and, fashioning a crude club from the arm of one of the chairs in his room, runs out toward the forest. Montgomery tries to stop him, telling him that he is being a fool, but is unable. Prendick runs in a different direction than he had been the night before, sprinting roughly a mile before taking shelter in a thicket of bamboo. Prendick lays there for an hour, considering his options, which are few—he has no real place to hide, and no way in which to acquire food or water. From where he is lying, he can hear the ocean.

*Just as he was when adrift at sea, Prendick is once again left in a dangerous situation, largely powerless, without food or water. This again pushes him toward the possibility of uncharacteristic violence, even towards Montgomery, who has now saved his life twice. In his right mind and in circumstances that did not seem so dire, Prendick likely would be horrified to consider attacking the man to whom he owed his life multiple times.*



After that hour, Prendick can hear both Moreau and Montgomery calling his name, evidently with a hound and each carrying revolvers. This drives Prendick further into the forest, wading through a stream to throw off the hound's nose. As Prendick is considering the possibility of drowning himself to escape Moreau's torture, he realizes he is being watched by a black face in the brush. It is the man who met the boats on the beach, who now seems rather ape-like. The Ape Man emerges and begins speaking coherent yet very simple English, seemingly excited by the fact that Prendick has five fingers on each hand like the Ape Man, since, as Prendick would later discover, most of the **Beast Folk** have rather crudely shaped hands and most often three or four fingers.

*This again points to the way in which circumstances may change perception. When Prendick was not being hunted, the sight of the Beast Folk was disturbing to him, causing revulsion more strongly than any other emotion. Now that Prendick is being hunted by men, however, the sight of the Ape Man seems a relief. Still, the fact that the Ape Man is wrought of a creature naturally much closer to human beings likely results in features that, though strange, are less alienating and disturbingly out of place than the swine-like people Prendick encountered the night before.*



The Ape Man leaves, but Prendick follows after, asking the Ape Man where he might find food. The Ape Man replies that he will bring Prendick to the huts, since Prendick is, by his own description, "new." As they travel, Prendick attempts to ask questions but soon realizes his companion is "little better than an idiot." The Ape Man leads him through a cave and into a gloomy ravine filled with crudely-built lean-tos.

*Prendick's constant helplessness—in this case his inability to find food for himself—puts him often in the position of being dependent on others for survival. This predicament helps develop the concept of circumstantial morality—an utterly independent, self-reliant figure can set their own morals and stick to them; a dependent person, however, must constantly adapt to new overwhelming circumstances and change their own morality to suit.*



## CHAPTER 12: THE SAYERS OF THE LAW

Prendick, still clutching his weapon, is brought into a hut, where, along with the Ape Man, a little sloth-like creature—“looking more like a flayed child than anything else in the world”—and several other **Beast Folk** have gathered. They offer him food.

The Ape Man seems exuberant that a “man” has come to live with them. A large figure, whom Prendick cannot quite make out, declares that Prendick must be taught the **Law**. The figure proceeds to recite a series of verses, incantations against animal-like behavior such as walking on all fours, insisting loudly that Prendick repeat each one. Each verse ends with the phrase, “Are we not Men?”

All of the gathered **Beast Folk** join in the recitation with a ritualistic zeal. After the prohibitions of various animal actions, a new set of verses follows: “His is the house of pain. His is the hand that makes. His is the hand that wounds. His is the hand that heals,” and so on. In its midst, Prendick surmises with some horror that Moreau, having created these creatures and their stunted intelligence, has instilled them with a god-like reverence for him. As Prendick’s eyes adjust, he sees that the Sayer of the Law, the evident leader of the group, is a great grey-furred creature with a talon of a hand.

Moreau, Montgomery, and the hound arrive in the **Beast Folk**’s community. Prendick flees again, pursued by Moreau and the Beast Folk, who have obeyed him and joined the pursuit. Prendick makes his way out of the ravine and through the forest before he finds a hot spring that will lead him to the ocean, where he intends to kill himself now that he knows the Beast Folk will not shelter him from Moreau.

## CHAPTER 13: A PARLEY

Prendick reaches the ocean and wades in, but quickly realizes that he is “too desperate to die.” As an alternative, he decides to work his way round the island to beat his pursuers back to the enclosure, where he might find a real weapon to fight with. However, soon Moreau, Montgomery, the hound, and the **Beast Folk** arrive, cutting off any escape.

*Following Prendick’s unreliable narration, the Beast Folk seem compassionate in the face of Moreau’s monstrous evil, since it appears to Prendick that he has even vivisected a child.*



*This introduces the theme of religious authority and its role in maintaining order in society, clearly symbolized by the role of the Law in the Beast Folk’s lives. That the law functions primarily to keep the Beast Folk from acting on primal urges suggests that organized religion in human society serves much the same purpose.*



*No religion is complete without a central deity to be its authority figure and hold the system together. If Moreau takes the place of God, then the Sayer of the Law is the priest, teaching the Law and encouraging obedience to it. For a community so religiously inclined as the Beast Folk seem to be, it is fitting that their priest should also act as their leader, a secondary figure of authority mediating between them and “God.”*



*Prendick’s intention to kill himself once again indicates an initially dignified persona. He would rather die than live on in a tortured, degraded form of himself. In his current idea of morality and dignity, survival by any means seems beneath him. However, this will change as his time on the island passes.*



*This is a major development in Prendick’s character, the point at which he realizes that his impulse to survive is stronger than any dignity or moral surety he may possess. Though he will continue to be disturbed by the things he sees, never again does he attempt to intervene as he had aboard Davis’s ship. That moral resolution is being worn away by Prendick’s desperate circumstances and his powerlessness to affect them.*



Prendick begins wading into the sea, again seemingly resolved to kill himself, when Montgomery asks what he is doing. Prendick explains that he is obviously going to kill himself to escape becoming Moreau's next experiment, and briefly shouts at the gathered **Beast Folk** that they should not fear the two humans but rise up against them. Moreau and Montgomery shout him down, and then explain—in Latin so that the Beast Folk cannot understand—that there has been a major misunderstanding, which Moreau will explain if Prendick comes ashore.

Prendick refuses until Moreau and Montgomery drop their weapons in the sand, offering to let Prendick have them if he will only come ashore and listen. They point out that they could have easily killed Prendick earlier, had that been their intention, or restrained him in his sleep. This is enough for Prendick, and he warily emerges from the ocean after Moreau and Montgomery have retreated up to the tree line. One of the **Beast Folk** briefly begins to follow Prendick again until Montgomery cracks the **whip** he has been holding.

*If Prendick's resolve failed the first time, it seems likely that it would fail again, though Montgomery offers a way out. Prendick's call to the Beast Folk to rise up against their rulers has a distinctly class-oriented ring to it. Wells, as a committed socialist, worked such ideas into his fiction on multiple occasions, perhaps most notably in his classic, [The Time Machine](#).*



*Moreau is an authoritarian figure through the eyes of the Beast Folk, yet he is remarkably trusting towards a fellow human. This complicates his position as the story's villain, since, though cruel to the Beast Folk, he is quite accommodating of Prendick. By avoiding a simple caricature of the evil scientist—since Moreau represents science unbridled by ethics—Wells provides a necessary nuance to the conflict between scientific progress and society's conscience, avoiding simple categorizations of "good" and "evil."*



## CHAPTER 14: DR. MOREAU EXPLAINS

Back at the enclosure, Prendick and Moreau sit together, Prendick still clutching both revolvers. Moreau explains that the **Beast Folk** are not vivisected humans made to look beastly, but rather animals who have been reshaped to resemble humans. Moreau's life has been committed to studying the "plasticity of living forms" and he has been carrying out his research on the island for the past decade.

Prendick is rather disturbed by this, but Moreau insists that it is necessary. Society has no stomach for vivisection and so will never be able to advance in its understanding of anatomy, and thus Moreau carries on that work in its stead. Not only has Moreau managed to create a human shape, but also through excising the brain and educating through hypnotism, produced a quasi-human intelligence. Moreau regards the pain that Prendick detests as merely an evolutionary by-product, an inconsequential mechanism of self-preservation. Thus, Moreau is unbothered by the ethics of his work, only the advancement of it.

*This realization brings both the unreliable narration and the unresolved terror of the novel to an end. Prendick is now able to see the full picture and angles his narration toward explaining the mechanics of the island, rather than emoting his own fear to the reader. Regardless, the existential horror of Moreau's work remains.*



*Moreau and his work stand for unbridled scientific progress with no regard for society or its ethics. Because of this, his actions will become negative arguments for why Wells believed that scientific research must be bounded and moderated by society, so that it does not become an end to itself and unnecessarily cruel. Moreau, having been isolated for so long, has lost any form of empathy for other creatures, making him something of a sociopath without the moderating influence of society to redirect him.*



Moreau recalls the early years of his research: almost eleven years ago, he and Montgomery and several Hawaiian laborers arrived and built his house and workshop. He immediately set to work, first on sheep. He accidentally killed his first subject. The second sheep survived the vivisection but seemed like a failure, so Moreau killed it as well. However, before long, he managed to make a man out of a gorilla, even teaching it to speak. After the laborers had teased it one day, it climbed a tree and made animal noises at them, which led Moreau to develop the **Law** and instill a sense of shame within his creations, which encourages them to strive to be human.

Over time, all of the laborers either deserted the island or died. Moreau seems reticent to tell of how the last was killed, but Prendick is insistent. Moreau reveals that once he had tried making something altogether new, a beast without limbs and a contorted face. The beast was immensely powerful, traveling by rolling across the ground. It killed the last laborer, after which Montgomery shot it, and Moreau then resolved to only make humans, except for some tiny creatures.

Moreau finishes by explaining that in the twenty years he has practiced vivisection—counting his time in England—he has yet to have a complete success. His **Beast Folk** always maintain their animalistic urges, and thus Moreau has no interest in further interacting with them. However, despite these urges, the Beast Folk desire to be human and seem to quest after that end. Retiring, Moreau willingly leaves the revolvers with Prendick as a source of comfort and sign of good faith.

## CHAPTER 15: CONCERNING THE BEAST FOLK

The following morning, M'ling—the name of Montgomery's assistant—delivers Prendick's breakfast, and Montgomery joins him. Montgomery explains that he and Moreau are reasonably safe from the **Beast Folk** due to their limited intelligence and the **Law** that Moreau has implanted in their minds. Perhaps the most important dictate of the Law is that the Beast Folk not taste blood, for fear of what desires that taste might arouse in them. Montgomery explains that for many, their animal urges become most potent at night. However, it seems that the Beast Folk respect the majority of the Law during Prendick's first weeks there.

*This killing of the sheep is the strongest indication so far of Moreau's ruthless cruelty. When a living being who looks like a human and possesses a stunted human intelligence represents a personal failure to him, Moreau executes it. Although Moreau is aiming to make humans out of his test subjects, he will not treat them as such. Moreau thus dehumanizes the Beast Folk in his own mind, inflicting suffering and death as he wills. Outside of human society with no one to tell him otherwise, this seems permissible.*



*Moreau tried to create something original and made a monstrosity, though it could be argued that the Beast Folk, made to be humans yet resulting in a hideous, unnatural crossover, are just as monstrous. It is worth noting that, like Montgomery, Moreau does not seem inclined to take responsibility for the death of the laborer that he caused. Outside of human society, there is no one to hold him accountable, once again offering a negative argument for the necessity of society to be involved in scientific research (and for outside authority to be necessary for any kind of moral standard).*



*This confirms the internal conflict of the Beast Folk between human behavior and animal instincts that Prendick witnessed earlier. In this way, the Beast Folk are symbolic of human beings. Like humans, the Beast Folk want to be better, but are beset by a primal nature and the urge to do shameful things—to “sin,” in the religious symbolism of the Law. It is tragic, then, that for all their striving and veneration, Moreau, their god-figure, has no interest in them.*



*The Law, like much organized religion, is protected by conservative boundaries that restrict behavior which might possibly lead to transgression. Both the Law and organized religion in human society depend on the maintenance of individuals' inhibitions, which help to keep them from sin. The prohibition of the Beast Folk tasting blood for fear of what it may arouse in them is similar to religious prohibitions of certain types of pleasure—especially drunkenness or promiscuity—for fear that it will lead to a total rejection of other rules and authority.*



The island itself is home to about sixty humanoid **Beast Folk**, though Moreau had made twice that number in total over the course of his work. They bear offspring, but their children have no marks of humanity until Moreau takes them to the operating table and “stamp[s] the human form upon them.” According to the **Law**, the Beast Folk are monogamous. The two most fearsome of the Beast Folk are the Leopard Man, who had chased Prendick on the beach, and the Hyena-Swine, a dreadful and powerful combination of the two creatures. M’ling is the only Beast Folk that doesn’t live in the ravine; rather, he lives in a kennel in the enclosure to remain close to Montgomery.

Prendick gradually “habituate[s]” to the **Beast Folk**’s appearance and behavior. Montgomery, having spent so much time around them, seems to regard the Beast Folk as nearly normal, and perhaps even bears some affection for them. Indeed, on his annual trips to buy animals, the humans he encounters seem more strange and fearsome than the Beast Folk do. He has a strange relationship with M’ling—at times Montgomery is affectionate towards him, while at other times he drunkenly beats him. M’ling is fiercely loyal regardless.

## CHAPTER 16: HOW THE BEAST FOLK TASTED BLOOD

One afternoon, Prendick and Montgomery are hiking through the forest, each carrying a **whip**. They briefly hear a rabbit squeal in the bushes, but think little of it. As they travel, they catch glimpses of Moreau’s own created alternatives to rabbits—small pink creatures that are much cleaner than their naturally occurring counterparts and do not destroy grass by burrowing.

As they are walking, they come upon the Ape Man and another beast. Both salute Montgomery, referring to him as the “Other with the **whip**.” Montgomery announces that now a third person carries the whip, so the **Beast Folk** must respect him. The Ape Man is confused by this, indicating that he believed Prendick was also a creation of Moreau. Despite the Beast Folk’s questions, Montgomery and Prendick continue.

*Despite the story’s narrowing of the delineation between human and animal, Wells seems hesitant to eliminate all barriers between the two. Thus, Moreau is never able to fully take the place of God and create an entirely new, self-sustaining hybrid race that can produce its own fully-formed offspring. While Wells certainly argues for a great amount of similarity and shared traits between the two, it seems that if he had wanted to argue that human and animals are absolutely the same, Moreau would not need to vivisect the children again to make them similarly humanoid. It is also worth noting that, at this point, M’ling seems to identify himself more with the humans than with the Beast Folk. This will be affected by future developments.*



*Prendick’s perception continues to be reshaped by his circumstances, continuing the development of his character away from his former moral firmness. Though Wells will not make humans and animals interchangeable—Montgomery is always, essentially, a human—he does demonstrate through Montgomery’s character how humans may take on such beastly qualities that they are no longer comfortable in human society.*



*Wells is cautious in his depiction of the conflict between scientific progress and ethics. Even with vivisection, which he was obviously wary of, Wells also provides examples of the beneficial usage of it, in this case to create a less destructive alternative to rabbits. Thus, he avoids a one-sided attack on scientific research by showing that it can also provide value to society.*



*The fact the Ape Man did not initially recognize that Prendick was a human because he was not carrying a whip—the symbol of human authority—indicates how narrow the margin between the humans and the Beast Folk truly is. In the eyes of the Beast Folk, what makes a human (in the way that Moreau is human, and thus separate from them) is not their particular biology or advanced intelligence, but merely the authority conferred by carrying a whip.*



Prendick and Montgomery come upon a dead half-eaten rabbit. Montgomery is alarmed by this, afraid of what could result of the **Beast Folk** becoming carnivorous again. Prendick surmises that it may have been the Leopard Man. Montgomery explains that it is odd, since the Beast Folk's mind should have been fixed against the concept of eating flesh. One of them must've first tasted blood. Montgomery then remembers that he foolishly showed M'ling how to skin and cook a rabbit a few days prior.

Taking M'ling with them, Prendick, Moreau, and Montgomery make their way to the ravine to gather the **Beast Folk**. The men are each armed with **whip** and revolver. M'ling is armed with a hatchet. When they have arrived, Moreau blows into a cow horn and the Beast Folk emerge from the forest and gather round. The Leopard Man arrives, his head still bruised from where Prendick struck him.

By Moreau's command, the Sayer of the Law leads its recitation until they reach the prohibition of eating flesh. Moreau announces that this **Law** has been broken, cracking his **whip** and looking at the Leopard Man. Both Moreau and the **Beast Folk** announce that the criminal must go back to the House of Pain, seeming nearly exultant in the condemnation.

When Moreau turns his back, the Leopard Man lunges at him, knocking Moreau off-balance. The beasts, already excited, seem on the verge of revolution, and Prendick thinks that the Hyena-Swine is about to join the attack. However, the fire of Moreau's pistol sets the whole crowd off in pursuit after the Leopard Man, who has fled. The animals are flushed with the "exultation of hunting." The Leopard Man has begun running on all fours through the forest. Prendick notes that the Hyena-Swine runs at his side, and he cannot tell if the beast means to attack him or aid the party.

The group chases until the Leopard Man is cornered by the island's topography. Fanning out and proceeding more slowly, Prendick discovers the Leopard Man cowering amidst the tall grass. Despite its animal posture and inhuman features, Prendick is struck by the beast's humanity, now doomed back to the operating table and the House of Pain if it is captured. Prendick draws his revolver and shoots the beast between the eyes. The Hyena-Swine, seeing this, pounces upon the Leopard Man and buries its fangs in the neck of its prey.

*This instance of the Beast Folk tasting blood marks the beginning of the end of society on the island, as the order of the Beast Folk and the authority of the Law will gradually begin to unravel. That it was the fault of Montgomery, due to his animal-like lack of self-control or good judgment as well as his close kinship with the Beast Folk, seems to be a condemnation of his behavior.*



*M'ling is the only member of the Beast Folk ever to carry a weapon, which is a tool and generally considered a mark of humanity. M'ling's use of such an item suggests that he still identifies more closely with the humans than the Beast Folk, though this will change as events unfold.*



*Similar to the witch burnings of human religion, Moreau and the Beast Folk take on a religious, nearly ecstatic fervor at the thought of a sinner suffering for their crimes. This gleeful moralistic cruelty is arguably a distinctly human behavior, evidence of the Beast Folk's adopted human qualities.*



*The pursuit of the Leopard Man is a critical moment in the development of the theme of human versus animal nature, in that it displays very clear elements of both. The Beast Folk and the humans are all caught up in an extreme religious fervor, determined to crucify the sinner—a grotesquely human act. At the same time, the thirst for blood and the adrenal thrill of the chase stirs the primal animal in all of them. This demonstrates that there are latent animal instincts even in those as supposedly sophisticated as Prendick or Moreau. Likewise, even those as primitive as the Beast Folk are capable of utterly human religious zeal.*



*This further develops the human versus animal theme, though Prendick's reaction is much different from the Hyena-Swine's. Prendick recognizes in the Leopard Man the same bestial fear of being hunted—as Prendick was earlier—as well as the human fear of capture and future torment. The Hyena-Swine, thrilled by the hunt, sees only the chance to attack his prey. Thus, while human and animal qualities are intertwined in the Leopard Man, the human's response is very different than the beast's, indicating that there is a widening difference between the two.*





Moreau is angry that Prendick killed the creature, but Prendick brushes it off and breaks away from the mob. As he wanders through the forest, he considers Moreau's cruelty, which he now sees most manifest in the conflicted psyches of the **Beast Folk**, trapped between human dignity and animal urges. Moreover, Moreau's cruel work seems without purpose, "wanton." The fear that Prendick had once felt for the Beast Folk turns to fear of Moreau's character and the ease of his cruelty. The world loses all sense of shape or sanity.

*Though this is obviously a condemnation of Moreau, it also seems to be a condemnation of God's cruelty. Like the Beast Folk, human beings are torn between the desire to act civilized and live with dignity, and their powerful primal urges. By considering Moreau cruel for causing such arduous psychological conflict in his creations, Wells also makes a similar inference about God.*



## CHAPTER 17: A CATASTROPHE

Six weeks on, Prendick's sympathy for the **Beast Folk** wanes and is replaced by loathing. He longs to be returned to human civilization.

*Prendick's former rigid morality and character has now been entirely worn away and reoriented by the dreariness of his circumstances.*



One morning, Prendick is standing near the enclosure smoking a cigarette when the Puma breaks free of its restraints, barreling into Prendick before tearing off down the beach, followed by Moreau armed with a pistol. The collision throws Prendick to the ground and breaks his forearm. Montgomery arrives and bandages Prendick's arm, while explaining that the Puma was so strong it tore its shackles straight out of the wall and escaped. He leaves Prendick with a revolver, saying he may soon need it, and follows after Moreau.

*The Puma's escape represents the first time one of the Beast Folk has truly managed to defy "God." The Puma has escaped the House of Pain—the Law's version of hell—the primary means of punishment and a key facet of Moreau's god-like authority. This critical failure is a threat to the Law's dominion over the minds of the Beast Folk, which Montgomery immediately intuits when he hands Prendick the revolver.*



Prendick waits in his room. The island seems eerily quiet. After some time, he hears a gunshot nearby and a shaken Montgomery comes stumbling in. Montgomery exclaims that the **Beast Folk** have gone mad, losing all sense of civility or adherence to the **Law**. Montgomery and M'ling had tracked Moreau for a while, but eventually lost the trail. They wandered onward, arriving at the Beast Folk's gathering of huts in the ravine. The huts and ravine were completely empty, abandoned.

*The empty huts signal the abandonment of society by the Beast Folk. Now that the religious authority of the Law has been shaken, the order that holds the Beast Folk's society together is swiftly coming apart. By leaving their dwellings, the Beast Folk are abandoning organized community and shelter, critical markers of human society. They are becoming feral animals once again, as the novel suggests humanity would likewise become without the ordering influence of religious authority.*



Montgomery and M'ling then retraced their route until they encountered two **Beast Folk** who had blood all over their mouths. Even though Montgomery cracked his **whip**, the Beast Folk attacked them—the first time any Beast Folk had dared to defy the whip. Montgomery shot one; M'ling killed the other. They then made their way back to the enclosure, encountering one more of the Beast Folk, whom Montgomery shot as it fled.

*The defiance of the whip is the defiance of human authority, which now seems to be lost amongst the Beast Folk. This abandonment of the island's hierarchy of authority is another critical indicator that society is breaking down. It is worth noting that the Beast Folk are not the only ones affected: Montgomery too has set to killing, even shooting down a fleeing animal. In the chaos and the fear, Montgomery himself immediately resorts to beastly behavior, suggesting that there was very little keeping him from it all along.*



## CHAPTER 18: THE FINDING OF MOREAU

Montgomery is so rattled that he starts getting himself drunk. To stop him, Prendick declares that they must go look for Moreau themselves, since something terrible has obviously happened or he would have been back already. Prendick, M'ling, and the intoxicated Montgomery set off through the forest, searching until they find a small gathering of **Beast Folk** who say that Moreau is dead.

The Ape Man and the Sayer of the Law ask the humans if the **Law** still exists, now that Moreau is dead. Prendick proclaims to the **Beast Folk** that indeed Moreau is not dead, he has only changed shape and now watches from the sky, leaving his body behind. Moreau will now judge those who have broken the Law with death. The Beast Folk lead Prendick and Montgomery to Moreau's body, and as they do so, they are attacked by another member of the Beast Folk who has become entirely feral. Prendick shoots it with the pistol, and the Sayer of the Law takes this as a sign of Moreau's judgment.

They find Moreau's body next to the Puma's. It appears that they have killed each other in a violent struggle. With the help of the **Beast Folk**, they bring Moreau's body back to the enclosure. The Beast Folk return to the beach, joined now by M'ling. Prendick and Montgomery enter Moreau's laboratory and kill every living creature they find there.

## CHAPTER 19: MONTGOMERY'S "BANK HOLIDAY"

That evening, near midnight, Montgomery and Prendick are discussing their options. Though Montgomery has sobered, the death of Moreau has left him nearly hysterical. Although Prendick says they must plan their escape from the island, Montgomery is convinced there is no life for him back in human society. In a mad rush, Montgomery resolves to take his brandy and get the **Beast Folk** drunk with him in one last binge before the end. He finds M'ling and others on the beach, shouting that giving the **Beast Folk** liquor is the last human touch that Moreau never thought of. Heavily intoxicated, Montgomery and a crew of the Beast Folk go shouting and singing into the forest.

*In the breakdown of society, the swiftness with which Montgomery regresses to animalistic behavior confirms that he was always as close to regression as the Beast Folk were, despite the fact that he was a biological human. This suggests that outside of human society's socializing influence, "civilized" human nature will weaken and fall away.*



*The loss of the island's god-figure immediately suggests that the Law itself has no authority, even to the simple intelligence of the Beast Folk. This demonstrates the way that such a central authority figure is crucial the survival of a religious system and its ability to maintain order. Prendick, though he once detested the deification of Moreau, shamelessly tries to uphold the lie; in his bid to survive, he has again reframed his morality to allow himself to do things he once found unconscionable.*



*Prendick has now come full circle, taking life thoughtlessly just as Moreau had. His dire circumstances and impulse to survive have utterly reshaped his morality. His actions are even more chilling considering that in Moreau's laboratory there were either innocent animals that could not have harmed him or partially-sentient Beast Folk, on their way to human-like consciousness. Thus, the killing seems needless and perverse.*



*Montgomery, evidently, was as dependent on Moreau's authority for maintaining order in his own life as the Beast Folk were; thus Moreau, in some capacity, represented human society for Montgomery. It is ironic, then, that Montgomery considers offering the Beast Folk liquor to be the final touch of humanity: in his own life, alcohol has only ever reduced his self-control and inhibitions, so much so that he was exiled from human society.*



Prendick locks himself in the enclosure and begins planning his escape: when the sun rises, he will load a dingy with food and water and set himself adrift in the ocean once more. Briefly, he hears a lot of shouting and wood splintering, but he thinks little of it, having already decided that Montgomery is beyond saving and unfit for human society. However, as the morning approaches, the sounds from the beach grow more intense, and Prendick hears a gunshot. Alarmed at this, he bursts through his room to make for the beach, knocking over a shelf as he leaves.

When Prendick gets to the beach, he finds a bonfire raging next to the boathouse. Montgomery is on the ground, calling Prendick's name. There is a cluster of **Beast Folk** near him, but when they spot Prendick running towards them they scatter. Montgomery is mortally wounded, having been attacked by the Sayer of the Law, whom he shot dead. M'ling's dead corpse is also nearby, along with a few other Beast Folk's bodies.

A gout of flame rises from the direction of the enclosure, and Prendick realizes that he overturned an oil lamp when he ran for the beach, and Moreau's entire house is burning down. Looking to the boats, Prendick also realizes that Montgomery has burned the boats as a vindictive act of spite against Prendick. Montgomery utters a brief apology to Prendick and dies on the beach. As he does so, three **Beast Folk** emerge from the forest with hostile looks in their eyes.

## CHAPTER 20: ALONE WITH THE BEAST FOLK

Prendick faces the **Beast Folk** with one broken arm and a single revolver in his pocket with only a few rounds left. He spots Montgomery's **whip** on the ground and seizes it, cracking it in the air and demanding that the Beast Folk salute him. Hesitantly, still fearful of Prendick, the three do. Prendick proclaims that none escape the **Law** or Moreau's judgment, not even Montgomery or the Sayer of the Law. Prendick orders the three Beast Folk to carry the bodies deep into the ocean and send them adrift. They comply.

The Hyena-Swine emerges also, immediately challenging Prendick's authority. Prendick resolves that he will kill the Hyena-Swine the first chance he gets, since he represents the greatest threat of any of the **Beast Folk**. He draws his revolver and fires, but misses, and the beast disappears into the forest again.

*Montgomery's time away from society seems to have diminished his human dignity and desire to resist his worst impulses. This suggests that human society plays a critical socializing role, encouraging the decorum and behavior that separates humans from animals. That Montgomery was able to regress to a more animalistic state, despite the fact that he is biologically human, further suggests that the difference between humans and animals is more socially compelled than biologically inherent.*



*It is symbolically significant that the most degenerate, lawless human is killed by the priestly Sayer of the Law, the Beast Folk's paragon of proper human behavior. By the time of Montgomery's death, it could well be argued that the Sayer of the Law was, in fact, more human in his behavior than Montgomery.*



*Symbolically, the burning of the enclosure, Moreau's house, and the boats mirror the breakdown of society among the Beast Folk. Overnight, all figurative and literal vestiges of human society have been burned to the ground. With no structures and no society left, the island belongs entirely to the Beast Folk and their animalistic instincts.*



*This is the last instance in which the Beast Folk will fear the whip or human authority ever again (save for the Dog Man, as will be seen). The memory of such authority is enough to cause hesitation in the smaller, less-powerful creatures for a brief time, suggesting that, due to their physical stature, they are in less of a position to challenge the prior authority, and indeed had more to gain in their protection by it.*



*In contrast to the lesser beasts who obeyed Prendick, the Hyena-Swine is powerful and fearsome and so stands to gain the most from defying authority and embracing the new anarchy. In the new lawless hierarchy of power, the Hyena-Swine will be on top. This suggests that the greatest threats both to religion and to social order are those individuals who are most powerful and brutal.*



Prendick makes his way to the ravine to hide and assess the situation. He has no secure location left on the island now that the enclosure has burned down. The **Beast Folk** are becoming animals once again, as Moreau knew that they could, and now Prendick is hiding rather than asserting his authority and taking up the place of power Moreau once held in the minds of the Beast Folk.

After several hours, Prendick emerges, finding some **Beast Folk** resting. He requests food and they tell him that there is some stored in the huts, though none of them rise or pay him much mind. Prendick finds the food, then barricades himself in one of the huts with some branches and falls asleep.

*That Prendick has already missed his chance to take up the authority of Moreau is suggestive of how quickly the order of society unravels and its memory fades. This would further suggest that civilization and religion are both precariously held together, far nearer to dissolution and chaos than most would expect.*



*That the Beast Folk don't even rise from their rest to address Prendick demonstrates how quickly they have abandoned all belief in human authority. For his own part, Prendick stoops to their level and takes shelter in one of their huts. Human and beast, once separated by a wide margin of power, are now equals.*



## CHAPTER 21: THE REVERSION OF THE BEAST FOLK

Prendick, by his own description, becomes one of the **Beast Folk**. Although he has one loyal subject who believes in his authority, the Dog Man, the rest have become indifferent, saying, "We have no Master, no **Whips**, no House of Pain anymore. There is an end. We love the **Law**, and will keep it; but there is no pain, no Master, no Whips for ever again." Although Prendick arrives with the Dog Man and tries to assert that Moreau still watches and the House of Pain will come again, the Beast Folk are largely unconvinced.

This point marks the start of the majority of Prendick's life on the island, most of which he does not wish to recall. The Dog Man is a close companion and valuable asset, since the island's new hierarchy of power becomes dependent on one's ability to fight and kill, and thus Prendick has protection. The Hyena-Swine still lives, but seems to avoid Prendick and the Dog Man.

In the first month of this period, the **Beast Folk** retain much of the **Law**. The Ape Man comes to believe that he is Prendick's equal, and prides himself on repeating any word or idea Prendick says that the Ape Man is unfamiliar with. He calls these "big thinks" and goes about repeating them to all the other supposedly lesser Beast Folk, though they are often nonsense.

*This is the final marker of Prendick's circumstantially-derived morality. Where once he had despised Montgomery's kinship with the Beast Folk, considering it undignified, now he is one of them. Many of the Beast Folk have opted to try to hold onto the Law, and their effort seems to parallel an atheistic humanism, a belief in the importance of certain moral precepts without the authority that underlies them.*



*Prendick's relationship with the Dog Man evokes the earlier image of Moreau and his stag hound. The dependence of both men on a canine companion for protection demonstrates the way in which, outside of organized society, human beings are woefully inadequate for life in the natural world, especially in contrast to a creature as fearsome as the Hyena-Swine.*



*The Ape Man is a mockery of human arrogance, particularly of philosophers and theologians. The Ape Man believes that his "big thinks" are a mark of his superiority over his Beast Folk comrades, when in reality he is "little better than an idiot." This again nods to the very thin delineation between humans and animals.*



However, this decorum and observance of the **Law** fades. The **Beast Folk** gradually regress back to embracing animal behaviors. They lose their ability to speak, begin walking on all fours, sucking water, and gnawing on animal flesh, neglecting to wear clothes. The females seem to be the first to throw off the mores of “decency.” The Dog Man regresses so much that Prendick comes to regard it not as Dog Man, but as his St. Bernard Brute, and even Prendick begins to change—his clothes become rags, his hair gets long and snarled, and to this day he is told that his eyes move so quickly as to suggest an “animal alertness.”

Prendick initially spends his days watching for passing ships, and though he sees five, he never manages to attract their attention. For some months he sets himself to building a raft, quickly realizing that he has no practical skill in construction. After several tries, he manages to put one together but accidentally destroys it trying to get it to the ocean.

One day, Prendick is lying next to the ruins of the enclosure when the pink sloth creature, now almost completely animalistic like the others, approaches him. Prendick follows him into the forest where he finds the Hyena-Swine eating the corpse of the Dog Man. The beast leaps at Prendick and knocks him over, but Prendick manages to shoot the Hyena-Swine between the eyes and kill it.

Prendick knows that he will likely be attacked again, as many of the **Beast Folk** have regressed as far as the Hyena-Swine had. Though there are only twenty or so Beast Folk left, most have made dens for themselves in the forest and now prowl at night. Prendick considers killing all of them by trapping or with a knife, and had he enough bullets, would shoot every single one of them with no hesitation. However, he does not have the bullets and his success in hunting by other means seems implausible, so he returns to raft-building.

*The Beast Folk’s Law without authority—a seeming parallel to atheistic humanism—crumbles in the absence of a central authority figure and ideal to model after. This suggests that Wells may have believed that any moral system without an underlying authority was also doomed to fail. Prendick himself becomes beastly, furthering the argument that one’s humanity is imbued by the social forces of human society. Prendick’s biology does not change, but he is left without any influence to encourage human behavior.*



*Prendick is a scientist, not a craftsman. Once again, in situations of survival he is largely powerless. This again suggests that human beings, without the network of society to exchange skills and goods with each other, are ill-equipped for life in the natural world. Just as the Beast Folk did not make good humans, humans do not make adequate feral creatures.*



*Though the Hyena-Swine has been killed, much of its harm to Prendick has already been done. The Hyena-Swine’s immediate challenging of human authority no doubt exacerbated the loss of that authority amongst the other Beast Folk. Due in part to the Hyena-Swine’s example, Prendick no longer lives on an island of people but an island of beasts.*



*Prendick’s morality has shifted with his circumstances and been defined by survival over all other considerations. Just as most of the Beast Folk would now kill him without a second thought, he would do the same to them if it meant a little more safety. Prendick’s dire circumstances and his need to survive have completely eradicated the moral framework that he once held. He now operates on the same moral plane as the Beast Folk.*



Another day, Prendick spies a small sail on the horizon and eventually a little boat comes into view with two people in it. He builds a signal fire, yells, and waves, but when the boat lands he realizes that both the men in it are dead. Prendick dumps the corpses out, which to his horror are eaten by several **Beast Folk**, gathers some food, and sets sail into the ocean.

*The Beast Folk have fallen to their lowest state of existence as well: where once they revered human beings, even seeing Moreau as an untouchable God, they now simply respond to impulse and eat human flesh. Any vestige of humanity in them is now completely gone, providing the final negative proof for the critical role of society in fostering and maintaining any sense of humanity in the individual. This also calls back to how the novel began, with Prendick's fellow survivors on the boat turning to cannibalism as well.*



## CHAPTER 22: THE MAN ALONE

After three days drifting, Prendick is picked up by a passing ship. The crew does not believe his story and thinks him mad. Prendick, rather than being filled with joy and surety by his reunion with humanity, feels the same dread of the island in human company. Even after years in human society, he says, he cannot convince himself that the people around him are not simply well-refined **Beast Folk**, though he knows this to be an illusion. They are human beings, rational and reasonable, not beasts.

*Though he did not see it before his time on the island, Prendick now recognizes the latent beastliness of every human being. This again suggests that though not utterly interchangeable, human nature and animal nature are closely linked. In the actions of humans can be seen the remnants of their bestial ancestors. Although much of the feral, animal nature has been evolved and domesticated out, traces of it still remain, held back only by society's influence.*



Prendick moves to the countryside, where he can be away from other human beings, since London and its masses proved far too beastly for him, particularly in their day-to-day struggles. He commits to studying chemistry and astronomy. Astronomy specifically seems to him a humanizing pursuit, a proof that humans are much more than bestial in their ability to contemplate the cosmos.

*Wells posits here that, rather than any biological difference, the truly exceptional quality of human beings is the ability to wonder at the universe and consider questions greater than everyday affairs.*





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