

Zoom Chat Week 14: Tom Sweterlitsch, *The Gone World* (Parts 3-5 & Epilogue)

Lina: 1. Do you think the sort of consciousness in the Ambience is something we will actually achieve someday? 2. Why does it go into first person when she's in the future? 3. And just something interesting to note: pg 233- Moss doesn't have a problem with telling Njoku about Jayla in terra firma. It seems there's no worry about messing up the future because it's always in flux anyway. This is quite different than most time travel stories.

Rhi: 1. What is the significance of the inclusion of an epilogue? Do you think that the events presented are terra firma or another IFT? The mysterious footsteps in the snow described on p. 387 make me wonder whether this is an alternate reality that Moss visited, and whether her scheme to create a black hole to reset the timeline was truly successful. 2. Now knowing that the version of Shannon Moss that we see narrating the novel is an echo of the "real" Moss, how does that affect how we interpret her actions? Do you think that coming to terms with the fact that she is an echo has encouraged her to sacrifice so much throughout the novel while attempting to unravel the mystery and prevent the Terminus?

Josie: Shannon's mom's nurse said to her that "you have to be rich to live forever" (184). What do you think the author is trying to get at? Could he be alluding to the idea of high healthcare costs in America OR the increasing price that we have to pay as a species as technology advances?

Taylor: So the end of this book got very matrix-like. My question is, how does Shannon know, or how does she even have enough evidence to know that she is a mirror/echo from the woman in the orange space suit in the beginning? The whole theme of the book seems to be centered that line about the biggest fault of humans is that we believe we exist. Is she an echo because the woman in the orange suit was also an echo, and that being an "echo" is just subjective to the person looking at another image of their self? Or is there a genuine terra firma, a genuine place that Earth is etched in stone in the universe, and the real echoes are the ones brought back from possible futures... but then how would anybody know or even be able to think that "my timeline is terra firma" ?

Grant: Is the epilogue telling us that almost the whole book was an IFT? Also, were you surprised, while reading the epilogue, when we learned that Shannon had become pregnant with Courtney's older brother, Davy Grimm? Do you think, after everything we have read throughout this book, that this could mess up the relationship between Courtney and Shannon?

Samantha: The theme of resurrection of the body occurs repeatedly throughout the book. Do you think, by the end of this novel, that Shannon has gone through 'resurrection,' and do you have any thoughts on why this theme is so prominent?

Miles: What are the ending's implications for Shannon's character arc and the arc of the story as a whole? Does it retroactively invalidate them? I'm not saying I disliked the ending or that I

even necessarily think that it invalidates the story and Shannon's character, but I'm curious what everyone else's thoughts are.

Brooke: I am pretty confused by the end of the novel. Is the Epilogue meant to show the reader that the entire series of events happening before it was simply another IFT that gets destroyed? So we end up back at the start of Moss's journey, but with Courtney surviving? I think I'm onto something, but just can't fully wrap my head around all the time stuff.

Kyle: The novel ends with the collapsing of the original IFT. Everybody in the original timeline continues with their lives with no knowledge of what has happened. How does this relate to the apocalypse? The people in the original timeline have no knowledge of the apocalypse that was occurring within this IFT. Does that mean the apocalypse did not happen for those people?

Lina: @Brooke I think you got that exactly right

Reed: If she was an echo the entire time, does that suggest that even existing as an echo creates additional possible echoes. The ending suggests that echoes can influence the past. What does this mean when considering the actual time passing? Is the reality always influenced by infinite potential futures?

Maria: How does Sweterlitsch influence our understanding of right and wrong, good and bad through the Gone World?

Tim: In the end, it is revealed that much of the story was an IFT and everything concerning the Terminus was an IFT that is erased when Shannon triggers the black hole. With Shannon back to normal time and much of the plot gone, has the Terminus been completely avoided or is it still a possible threat? It did not seem overly clear to me.

Robert: If Shannon's reality throughout the story was actually an IFT, why does it seem like she was chosen to bring an end to the Terminus? In other words, was their a purpose in using her to stop the Terminus or was her fate circumstantial?

Maria: Why does Sweterlitsch orient the novel around images and themes from Christianity? What effect do these allusions have on the story and us as the readers?

John: Moss and O'Connor have a discussion about pre-crime prevention. This occurs when Moss believes that Hydekrugger is planning on having Carla Durr, Mursult's lawyer killed. Moss knows when and how Durr will die and demands a pre-crime warrant to stop the crime and intervene before it begins. Do you believe in stopping crime before it occurs? Do you believe in punishing criminals BEFORE they become criminals? Are there any pre-crime policies within the United States criminal justice system?

Whitney: In the book it seems like everything they were doing was in vain. No matter what they did the terminus kept getting closer. My question is what is the purpose of this type of

storyline? Is it telling us that no matter what we will all have to face doomsday and trying to fight it useless or is there a more positive message that I am missing? In the end it seems like they get some kind of alternate reality where Courtney comes back although her scar where she was cut is still there is this supposed to symbolize life after death or some type of religious undertone. In the book there seemed to be a strong rejection of religion and god but then there is symbolism of life after death so I wondered what that was suppose to mean.

Sierra: I have two questions for you guys: 1. Do you guys think there is a time-travel discrepancy in the novel? For this question think about how Shannon gets back in time. Since you didn't us the desgined way to get back to her time, shouldn't there be two Shannons? 2. Do you guys think the world is really safe at the end of The Gone World or you think the world is still doomed?

Natalie: After considering the Gone World and the rest of the books we've read in class, what lengths will people go to preserve the things they love? After considering the whole Moss and Nestor thing, how do our decisions, given enough time, affect our future?

Zoe: How does the theme of time travel connect with other books themes of reminiscing/ preserving the past or rebuilding based on the past?

Brooke: @Lina, I'm glad I actually figured it out! It took a bit of time to think through

Alexis: Hyldekrugger mentions that "everyone's critical flaw is that we believe in our own existence, until we're shown otherwise. Everything we see and feel tells us we're alive, that what surrounds us is real, but it's all a damn mistake, all an illusion we can't see through." I'm having trouble understanding if he's only speaking to the human race or just really large philosophical ideas about non-human existence as well. He asks Shannon to "bring back our freedom of will, our other futures, our chance at future. Kill until every future doesn't end in death". The ideas behind echoes and doppelgängers feels like there is no sense of will or existence with so many other possibilities, so what is the author ultimately trying to say with these ideas?

John: Billy Joel in Piano Man(1973): "And he's talking with Davy, who's still in the Navy." This book came out in 2018. Conclusion: Billy Joel is secretly a time traveler:)

Tim: @John lol

Zoe: It almost reminds me of the Mandela effect

Kyle: Reminds me of Inception.

Samantha: it's the spider man meme

Alexis: I also find it so self-centered to think that terra firma is kind of like the center of the universe because there have to be other planets with the same kind of agency and thinking, i don't even know at this point lol

Natalie: @Samantha LOL!!! YES!

Lina: @ Alexis, terra firma isn't Earth, it's a time. So, those other planets also exist in terra firma, if that makes sense?

John: @Kyle The New Yorker Magazine literally says about the book: "Inception meets True Detective"

Taylor: If we started jumping in time to a "possible" future and then came right back, that *future* is an IFT, and the time you jump BACK to is terra firma... or is it?

Lina: yep @ Taylor, unless you are traveling to an IFT from and IFT....like Shannon it turns out has been doing

Taylor: wibbly wobbly... timey wimey... stuff

Lina: right!

Samantha: ^^^

Samantha: Paradoxes? Never heard of her

Sierra: @Zoe, that's what I thinking. I related this to the Mandela effect as well. I kinda thought that throughout the novel Shannon was kinda suffering with this on some level. Yes, there was an original Shannon, but her time traveling changed her into a different Shannon, however, I don't fully think that she knows this. So she says "you got the wrong Shannon ", when indeed they don't. She keeps having this Mandela effect and remembering her old self, who now no longer exists.

Tim: Is Terra Firma constant or does it change upon time traveling?

Lina: I think the point of the theory is that it is constant

Alexis: @Tim that's what I'm wondering about anything being considered stable or ground zero in this novel

Lina: But maybe Shannon proves that wrong???

Taylor: How would terra firma even exist, if Shannon lived years and came back to normal earth only 2 weeks later? there's another rabbit hole

Zoe: Nothing is constant but inconsistency

Taylor: I'm glad sweterlitsch doesn't incorporate hopping BACK in time too

Rhi: It's wild that echoes can exist in the first place. When brought to terra firma, they continue to exist, but the rest of their world blinks out when the time traveler leaves?

Sierra: @Tim and Alexis I think this falls into the notion that we think time is constant. But however, it is not, so I think Terra Firma changes as we change time. We create a new Terra Firma, we don't think we are, but we are and just don't know it. But that's just how I view it

Rhi: Still very confused haha

Samantha: my mind was so jumbled at that point I kinda went "you know what sure"

Robert: I'm confused, but I think that the story being an IFT with multiple child IFTs explains the epilogue the best.

Lina: @Robert, I like the term "child IFTs" haha

Robert: I saw it on a website that helped explain the book tbh lol

Taylor: Terra firma is a chaos we are trying to fit into an order, that's just not possible lol

Lina: Wait IFTs only exist while the timetraveler is alive...SO who is the timetraveler that caused majority-of-story-Shannon's IFT to exist?

Alexis: Multiple readings: multiple IFTS lol

Brooke: My brain hurts lol

Robert: @lina that's what I was trying to figure out honestly. I'm assuming someone from the Libra crew?

Taylor: Right! They're trying to measure chaos, but measuring means ORDER

Taylor: Have you read Stephen Hawking? I am interested

Rhi: @Lina from my understanding OG Shannon travelled with a group of other students/her instructor to the IFT, so perhaps because the others were still alive, Shannon's IFT was allowed to exist? Idk it's all very confusing, especially if the whole story is an IFT

Samantha: yes.

Taylor: What if you take someone from one IFT and bring them to another IFT, then is their death any sort of implication.. like Nicole's whole existence in the first place

Robert: Maybe he's just trying to drive home the point that time travel is confusing lol

John: Memory: you need time to be able to create memory. However, it is also enough time that erases memory.

Samantha: That's called memory reconstruction I think

Alexis: Shannon tries to reconstruct Nestor at some point I think, I'll try to find the quote

Alexis: Shannon reconstructed Nestor, "reconstruct his past-a past he might not ever come to have" so it's interesting that reconstruction in this case is centered in the past and not with the future driven theme of the novel.

Samantha: Ohhh it is

Rhi: @John Exactly! Over time, you lose a little bit of a memory or remember it differently, until a lot of it has essentially been erased. Interesting how technology has affected memory - now people can capture memories in film or photo format instead of relying solely on their brain in a way

John: Exactly. Photos are more important now than ever!

Zoe: I don't think he's suggesting it can be avoided completely, only dodged for a short time

Zoe: I agree Whitney

Lina: But then I end up remembering the photo on its own and not the actually moment of the photo xD

Whitney: Yes Zoe if something is going to happen its going to happen pretty much

Sierra: In terms of linking it to apocalypse, I will bring up some points I made in my discussion form. In this post I brought up how in real life and in the novel, people see a disaster and they try to stop it. But in some cases, like in the novel these attempts speed up disaster. Overall, I think the novel is trying to say that no matter how hard you try disasters like the apocalypse will happen and that sometimes trying to stop it only makes it worse

Samantha: I think maybe the hope in this novel is that although the apocalypse is inevitable, humanity will never stop trying to save themselves in spite of it, like just because I know I'm going to die doesn't mean I'm going to stop living

Rhi : @Samantha I like that idea! Instead of trying to extend the length of human life, try to improve the quality of the human life that is left

Maria: Shannon had hope that there was a possible future in which the Terminus does not come, in which Esperance is never discovered. This is what makes the end of any value--that although the whole story technically doesn't ever exist, Shannon fought and struggled in an IFT to destroy the link between the Terminus and earth. Maybe, just maybe she was able to accomplish that.

Tim: Everybody knows they will die someday, but that doesn't give us just cause to be nihilists and not strive for achievement or happiness. I would think most people would want to make the most of the life they are given.

Alexis: Right, do we go back before the invention of the car? Before the industrial revolution? Before the slave trade? Before invention of fire? Time is so complex I don't think there is one place we could go back to ultimately change it

Kyle: Can you type that term in?

Jennings: Anthropocene

Kyle: Thanks!

Samantha: Humans are just blobs of liquid

Maria: Yes! Shannon as an echo DOES matter, even if she may not have technically existed.

Alexis: That was th most trippy thing of the novel for me

John: Even if we were more conscious of the environment, it is still very well possible that we could face a climate crisis. Consider the native Aboriginal Australians. They came to Australia 100,000 years ago when Australia was a lush continent full of jungles and forests. However, about 20,000 years ago, Australia grew drier and hotter and much of the land became a large desert. This coincided with the end of the Ice Age. However, the Aboriginal Australians couldn't have had a huge effect on the climate with low populations and a lack of industrial pollution. This makes it more difficult to determine where we could go in time to reverse the effects of climate change.

Jennings: Yes, John, that is very much the debate within discussions about the Anthropocene

Tim: With Apocalypse novels, so much of the world changes, and thus that leads to a change within humans. Since humanity has usually hit "rock bottom" during apocalypse events, we tend to notice a rebirth of characters within such narratives.

Rhi : This new Shannon seems like an entirely different person

Samantha: She still loves Courtney lol

Tim: Gaining knowledge but paying prices such as suffering is also a theme of Pandora's Box in Greek mythology.

John: The importance of suffering also explains why she is able to remember in detail the story and pain of her amputation.

Zoe: If we submitted our proposals in dropbox would you give us suggestions?

Samantha: watch me make a vine compilation

Zoe: do it samantha

Lina: yes please xD

Natalie: yes do it!

Zoe: Apocalypse in 6 seconds

Natalie: RIP Vine

Alexis: Also the apocalypse of vine as a platform haha

Sierra: That's cool

Samantha: Vine died and tiktok arose

Taylor: I wish we could present these in person