

Alas, Babylon

Study Guide

Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! For in one hour is thy judgment come.

Chapters 1 – 2, pp. 1–37

- ▶ 1. Identify the setting. Why is this important to this novel?
 - Fort Repose, Florida; 1959. The setting is important for many reasons, but initially because the story takes place during the Cold War.
- ▶ 2. Who is the protagonist? Briefly describe him.
 - Randy Bragg; lawyer, works sporadically, lives on family's land, indifferent (pp. 4–8)

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- ▶ 3. Identify the following characters, and give two adjectives for each:
 - Florence Wechek – manages telegraph office, suspicious, lonely;
 - Alice Cooksey – librarian, conscientious, friendly, intelligent;
 - Preacher Henry – retired pastor, concerned, helpful;


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- Lib MvGovern – Randy’s girlfriend, lovely, wealthy;
- Two-Tone – Missouri’s husband, lazy, alcoholic;
- Malachai – Preacher’s son, hard-working, intelligent;
- Missouri – Randy’s housekeeper, perceptive, loyal;
- Dan Gunn – Randy’s best friend, doctor, bitter, disheartened

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- ▶ 4. Why is Fort Repose called Randy's town?
 - His ancestor Lt. Randolph Rowzee Peyton founded the town in 1838.
- ▶ 5. What information does Mark's telegram to Randy contain? How does he conclude the telegram? How does this relate to Randy and Mark's conversation the previous Christmas?
 - Mark wants Randy to meet him at McCoy; Mark is sending his family to Fort Repose; Mark concludes the telegram with the words Alas, Babylon; the brothers had discussed the possibility of nuclear war between Russia and the U.S. last Christmas.

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- ▶ 6. Explain whether you agree or disagree with Alice Cooksey’s statement, “Censorship and thought control can exist only in secrecy and darkness.”
 - A.W.V.
 - ▶ 7. Identify two changes at McCoy Air Base that indicate preparations for a nuclear attack.
 - Some of the preparations Randy notices are: tightened security, half of the planes dispersed elsewhere, and civilians evacuated.
 - ▶ 8. What does Mark tell Randy about the impending war?
 - He tells Randy that Russia has a powerful fleet in the Mediterranean and plans to fire nuclear weapons toward the U.S. and other targets.
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- ▶ 9. How has the United States learned of Russia's plans to attack the United States?
 - Mark tells Randy that they have learned of Russia's plans from a Russian general who recently defected from his country.
- ▶ 10. What two reasons does Mark give for believing war is unavoidable?
 - The Navy is trying to track four unidentified submarines, and he has been recalled to SAC headquarters.

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- ▶ 11. What does Mark give Randy before they part? Why?
 - Mark gives Randy a check for \$5,000.00 for supplies.

Chapters 3 – 4, pp. 39–90

- ▶ 1. Who is Edgar Quisenberry? Why does he have a grudge against Randy Bragg? What might this indicate about Edgar?
 - Edgar owns and manages the bank. He holds a grudge against Randy because Randy and Mark's father, Judge Bragg, embarrassed Edgar the one and only time Edgar was invited to play poker at the St. Johns Country Club five years ago, and Mark often calls him Fisheye to his face. This shows that Edgar for all his self-importance is really a petty and insecure person.

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- ▶ 2. What survival preparations does Randy make? What else might he need to do?
 - Randy stocks up on food supplies and liquor. A.W.V.
- ▶ 3. Who is Malachai Henry? How does Randy feel about him and his family? How does Malachai react to the news of a possible nuclear attack?
 - Malachai is Randy's black neighbor and yardman. He feels closer to the Henry family than anyone in town except Lib. Malachai isn't surprised by the news as he keeps up with current events.

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- ▶ 4. What does the Henry family have that hardly anyone else in Fort Repose has? Why is this information important?
 - Malachai reminds Randy that they have water from artesian wells. This is important because eventually city water will no longer work.
- ▶ 5. Briefly summarize Randy and Lib's relationship. How do her parents feel about Randy?
 - Randy and Lib have been dating for two months and are falling in love with each other. Lib's parents dislike Randy.

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- ▶ 6. How do the following react to the news of an impending nuclear attack: Lib, Dan Gunn, Bill McGovern? Whose reaction is most logical, and why?
 - Lib is shocked, but she believes Randy; Dan is angry but not surprised; he agrees to stock up on medical supplies; Bill doesn't believe Randy. A.W.V.

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- ▶ 7. Why does Dan Gunn have financial difficulties? How has this affected him?
 - He must make large alimony payments to his ex-wife. He is a bitter and depressed man.
- ▶ 8. What illness does Lavinia McGovern have? Why does this concern Dan after he learns of a possible nuclear attack?
 - Lavinia has diabetes. Dan worries that if the community loses electricity, they will not be able to refrigerate Lavinia's insulin.

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- ▶ 9. How do Mark, Helen, and the children react to their parting? What do you think this reveals about them?
 - Mark is resolved to their parting and wants his wife and children safe; Helen feels like she is deserting her husband; Ben Franklin understands the necessity, but Peyton is too young to do so. A.W.V.
- ▶ 10. What seaport does Ensign Cobb inadvertently strike? Why is this significant to U.S./Soviet relations?
 - He attacks the Syrian port of Latakia. Syria is an ally of the Soviet Union.

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- ▶ 11. What does Mark convince General Hawker to do? Why is this important?
 - Mark convinces the General to ask for the release of their nuclear weapons. This gives them 95 seconds of extra time in the event of an attack.
- ▶ 12. What types of enemy weapons are headed for the United States?
 - Ballistic missiles.