

Theme: Dystopian Concepts – Environmental Concerns

Text: Extract from Make Room! Make Room! by Harry Harrison (1966)

Billy started forward, Peter followed.

"Where are we going?" Billy asked when they came off the bridge and turned down Division Street. It seemed a little warmer here, surrounded by the shuffling crowds. He always felt better with people around.

5 "To the lots. There are a large number of them near the housing developments," Peter said.

"You're nuts, the lots are full, they always have been."

"Not this time of year," Peter answered, pointing to the filthy ice that filled the gutter. "Living in the lots is never easy, and this time of year it is particularly hard for the older people and invalids."

10 It was only on the television screen that Billy had seen the streets of the city filled with cars. For him it was a historical - and therefore uninteresting - fact, because the lots had been there for as long as he could remember, a permanent and decaying part of the landscape. As traffic had declined and operating automobiles became rarer, there was no longer a need for the hundreds of parking lots scattered about the city. They began to gradually fill up with abandoned cars, some hauled there by the police and others pushed in by hand. Each lot was now a small village with people living in every car because,

15 uncomfortable as the cars were, they were still better than the street. Though each car had long since had its full quota of inhabitants, vacancies occurred in the winter when the weaker ones died.

They started to work their way through the big lot behind the Seward Park Houses, but were driven off by a gang of teenagers armed with broken bricks and homemade knives. Walking down Madison Street, they saw the fence around the small park next to the La Guardia Houses had been pushed down years earlier,

20 and that the park was now filled with the rusting, wheelless remains of cars. There were no aggressive teenagers here and the few people walking about had a shuffling, hopeless look. Smoke rose from only one of the chimneys that projected from most of the automobiles. Peter and Billy pushed their way between the cars, peering in through windshields and cracked windows, scraping clear patches in the frost when they couldn't see in. Pale, ghostlike faces turned to look up at them or forms stirred inside as they

25 worked their way through the lot.

"This looks like a good one," Billy said, pointing to a hulking ancient Buick turbine sedan with its brake drums half sunk into the dirt. The windows were heavily frosted on both sides, and there was only silence from inside when they tried all the locked doors. "I wonder how they get in?" Billy said, then climbed up on the hood. There was a sliding sunroof over the front seat and it moved a little when he pushed at it.

30 "Bring the pipe up here, this might be it," he called down to Peter.

The cover shifted when they levered at it with the pipe, then slid back. The gray light poured down on the face and staring eyes of an old man. He had an evil-looking club clutched in one hand, a bar of some kind bound about with lengths of knotted cord that held shards of broken, pointed glass into place. He was dead.

Annotations:

Introductory remark: Bill, a runaway youngster, and Peter, his elderly companion, are looking for shelter.

30 pipe – a steel bar

Assignments:

1. Point out proceedings and setting Bill's and Peter's mission. [Contents]
2. Working on details of the text, draw conclusions about the changes that have affected New York. (Bear in mind that the extrapolation covers a period of roughly 35 years.) [Analysis]
3. At the end of the book, detective Andy Rush, the protagonist, patrolling the streets of Manhattan on New Year's Eve in 1999 reads the lines below on a huge screen at Time Square. Comment on this ending relating it to the present excerpt (among other aspects). [Comment]

CENSUS SAYS UNITED STATES HAD BIGGEST YEAR EVER
END OF CENTURY