

# A.B.M. College, Golmuri

## English Core

### I.A. & I.Com.

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# THE THIRD LEVEL

-JACK FINNEY

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Walter Braden "Jack" Finney, an American writer, was born as John Finney on 2nd October, 1911 in United States. He was given the name Jack Finney but soon after his father died when he was three years old, he was renamed Walter Braden Finney in honour of his father.

He is mainly known for his contributions to the science-fiction & thriller genre. "The Body Snatchers" and " and Again" are his most famous creative work ever. His work The Body Snatchers became the source of highly popular and influential film, 'The Invasion of the Body Snatchers'. 5 Against The House was his first novel which published in 1954. He was given the World Fantasy Award in 1987 for Life Achievement at the World Fantasy Convention, held in Nashville, Tennessee. He died of pneumonia and emphysema in Greenbrae, California, at the age of 84 in 1995.

## Introduction

The Third Level by Jack Finney is about the harsh realities of war. War has irreversible consequences thus leaving people in a state of insecurity. It is also about modern day problems and how common man tends to escape reality by various means. In this story, a man named Charley hallucinates and reaches the third level of the Grand Central Station which only has two levels.

## SUMMARY

This is the story of a 31 year old man named Charley. One day after work coming from the Subway, he reached the third level of the Grand Central station (which does not actually exist). He reminisces the entire experience with his psychiatrist friend Sam. Charley thought he experienced time travel and had reached somewhere in the eighteen-nineties, a time before the world saw two of its most deadliest wars. As soon as he realised what time he is in, he immediately decided to buy two tickets to Galesburg, Illinois; one for himself and the other for his wife. Unfortunately, the currency used in that century was different. Thus, the next day he withdrew all his savings and got them converted even if it meant bearing losses. He went looking for the third level but failed to find it. It worried his wife and the psychiatrist Sam who told him that he is hallucinating in order to take refuge from reality and miseries of the modern world which is full of worry.

Charley thus resorts to his stamp collection in order to distract himself when suddenly one day he finds a letter from his friend Sam who had gone missing recently. Sam wrote that he always wanted to believe in the idea of third level and now that he is there himself, he encourages Charley and Louisa to never stop looking for it.

## Major Characters

### Charley

Charlie was a nervous person. Stamp collection was his hobby. Though he was young, he feared to live in this war-ridden world. He wanted to go to a peaceful and idyllic place. Later he went to the past. But his wife denied to believe him and asked him to consult with a psychiatrist.

### Sam

Sam was a psychiatrist. He was also a friend of Charley. When Charley fantasized about the Third Level at Grand Central Station, he visited Sam for consultation. Sam declared it merely a 'temporary refuge' from his tension. He called it a waking-dream-wish-fulfillment. But slowly he himself got trapped in this imaginary world. He talked to many psychic patients daily, who told him about their woes and worries. It had made Sam's life a burdened one. He also started trying to find sojourn. He wanted to escape from the life which had become woeful after listening to the afflictions of the patients suffering from mental diseases.

### Louisa

Louisa Mebbin was a very shrewd and cunning character who knew how to grab a chance to gain wealth as and when opportunity knocked at her door. She can be called an opportunist. Louisa Mebbin here uses a tone of blackmail of revealing Mrs. Packletide's secret of killing a tiger, just to extract some wealth from Mrs. Packletide. Mebbin persuade her to buy her a weekend cottage so that she keeps mum about the entire episode of whether Mrs. Packletide killed the tiger or did it die of a heart attack.

## Theme

The story of the third level clearly explores the science fiction genre of 'time travel'; Jack Finney, the recipient of the world fantasy award interweaves fantasy with the reality in the most futuristic projection of time travel. Charley wishes to be transported to the third level, the world of 1894 which is supposedly the much happier and quieter place to be. It is one of the most concise and entertaining story about time travel. The question of whether the third level exists in reality or only in Charley's mind can be inferred from Sam's letter.

## Question-Answer

1. What does the third level refer to?

A. Third level refers to an additional floor at the Grand Central Station which originally only had two levels. Charley was hallucinating one night while going home when he reached the third level.

2. Would Charley ever go back to the ticket-counter on the third level to buy tickets to Galesburg for himself and his wife?

A. Charley went looking back for the third level that could take him and his wife to Galesburg because he wanted to go back to his past. He wanted to go back to the world that has not seen two of its deadliest wars that changed everything.

3. Do you think that the third level was a medium of escape for Charley? Why?

A. Yes, the third level of the Grand Central Station was a medium of escape for Charley. Modern world offers a lot of challenges and in order to take refuge from reality, one might resort to day-dreaming or hallucination. We all understand the miseries of the modern world which is full of worry and pressure, thus, in order to take the burden away from his shoulders and heap a sigh of relief, Charley resorted to escaping reality, although unintentionally.

4. What do you infer from Sam's letter to Charley?

A. The way Charley discovered Sam's letter was rather peculiar. It was one of those first-day covers people used to mail to themselves back in time with a blank page inside. So to begin with, the cover had a letter in it and not a blank page in it. Secondly, the letter dates back to 18 July, 1894 when Sam (the writer of the letter) didn't exist because both Sam and Charley exist in the present times. Thus, it is sound to conclude that it was just a product of Charley's imagination.

5. ~The modern world is full of insecurity, fear, war, worry and stress. What are the ways in which we attempt to overcome them?

A. One cannot count on fingers the negative aspects the modern lifestyle has to offer. There is stress, pressure, fear, insecurity and worry. In order to relieve you of all these miseries, one can indulge in creative activities from time to time. Making time for yourself and what you love without worrying about a productive outcome is a crucial thing many people tend to ignore in the hustle and bustle of daily lives. Secondly, one can read a good book or even meditate. Long walks in the lap of nature are not to be underestimated because nature has its own healing power. Apart from these, a short weekend

getaway, movie night with friends or even alone at home can be done in order to dissociate oneself from the routine.

6. Do you see an intersection of time and space in the story?

A. Yes, there are a lot of instances that tell us about the intersection of time and space in the story. First intersection being the one between the first two levels of the Grand Central Station and its third level which is based somewhere in the 1890s whereas the former exists in the present times. Also when Charley went to buy tickets for Galesburg which existed in 1894 while he and his wife exist in the present times. Not to ignore the old fashioned architecture of the third level in contradiction to the modern interiors of the first two levels. Lastly, the letter dated 18th July, 1982 that Charley found also throws light upon the intersection of time and space as both the sender (Sam) and the receiver (Charley) exist in the present times.

7. Apparent illogicality sometimes turns out to be a futuristic projection? Discuss.

A. While a lot of the world's greatest inventions were made by people who were criticized for their ideas. Audiences used to mock at them for being illogical. Sighting the example of Thomas Edison who invented the light bulb, no one believed in him at first but all he had was an idea and its realistic projection in mind. The idea here tells us how important it is to sometimes follow one's insight and have hope for it holds the capacity to change the world through its futuristic projections.

8. Philately helps keep the past alive. Discuss other ways in which this is done. What do you think of the human tendency to constantly move between the past, the present and the future?

A. Philately does indeed help in keeping the treasures of past alive. It gives one a chance to revisit and embrace the past of one's existence. Some of the other ways in which it can be done is by keeping a record of all the letters, ancient manuscripts, things that are discontinued but were a significant part of the past, images, videos and written records of experiences.

Human beings are a collection of all the experiences they have been through. Their tendency to connect with the past from time to time helps them stay connected to the roots while helping them to face the present and future challenges with more strength. Connecting with the future on the other hand, is just as important to know the outcome of one's current actions and decisions. If one doesn't seem satisfied with the realistic interpretation of future, it can certainly help in altering current actions to direct towards a better future.