



Name: _____

period: _____

A Sound of Thunder

Ray Bradbury

INFER

Pause after you read the sign (lines 4–5). Underline the information that seems unusual. Based on this information, when do you think the story takes place?

INFER

Pause at line 16. Why do you think there is such a stiff penalty for disobeying instructions?

The sign on the wall seemed to quaver under a film of sliding warm water. Eckels felt his eyelids blink over his stare, and the sign burned in this momentary darkness:

TIME SAFARI, INC. SAFARIS TO ANY YEAR IN THE PAST.

YOU NAME THE ANIMAL. WE TAKE YOU THERE. YOU SHOOT IT.

A warm phlegm gathered in Eckels's throat; he swallowed and pushed it down. The muscles around his mouth formed a smile as he put his hand slowly out upon the air, and in that hand waved a check for ten thousand dollars to the man behind the desk.

10

“Does this safari guarantee I come back alive?”

“We guarantee nothing,” said the official, “except the dinosaurs.” He turned. “This is Mr. Travis, your Safari Guide in the Past. He’ll tell you what and where to shoot. If he says no shooting, no shooting. If you disobey instructions, there’s a stiff penalty of another ten thousand dollars, plus possible government action, on your return.”

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Eckels glanced across the vast office at a mass and tangle, a snaking and humming of wires and steel boxes, at an aurora¹ that flickered now orange, now silver, now blue. There was
20 a sound like a gigantic bonfire burning all of Time, all the years and all the parchment calendars, all the hours piled high and set aflame.

A touch of the hand and this burning would, on the instant, beautifully reverse itself. Eckels remembered the wording in the advertisements to the letter. Out of chars and ashes, out of dust and coals, like golden salamanders, the old years, the green years, might leap; roses sweeten the air, white hair turn
30 Irish-black, wrinkles vanish; all, everything fly back to seed, flee death, rush down to their beginnings, suns rise in western skies and set in glorious easts, moons eat themselves opposite to the custom, all and everything cupping one in another like Chinese boxes², rabbits into hats, all and everything returning to the fresh death, the seed death, the green death, to the time before the beginning. A touch of a hand might do it, the merest touch of a hand.

“Unbelievable.” Eckels breathed, the light of the Machine on his thin face. “A real Time Machine.” He shook his head. “Makes you think. If the election had gone badly yesterday, I might be here now running away from the results. Thank God
40 Keith won. He’ll make a fine President of the United States.”

“Yes,” said the man behind the desk. “We’re lucky. If Deutscher had gotten in, we’d have the worst kind of dictatorship. There’s an anti-everything man for you, a militarist, anti-Christ, anti-human, anti-intellectual. People called us up, you know, joking but not joking. Said if Deutscher became President they wanted to go live in 1492. Of course it’s not our business to conduct Escapes, but to form Safaris. Anyway, Keith’s President now. All you got to worry about is—”

1. **aurora** (ô-rôr'ə) *n.*: Bradbury is comparing the glow coming from the time machine to an aurora, a colorful display of light that appears at night in the skies near the North and South Poles.
2. **Chinese boxes**: set of boxes, each of which fits into the next-largest one.

STYLE

Re-read lines 17–35, and underline examples of **figurative language** (simile, metaphor, personification).

IDENTIFY

Pause at line 43. Who were the two candidates for president of the United States? Circle their names. Which one won the election?

WORD STUDY

Anti- is a prefix meaning “against.” According to the description of Deutscher in lines 43–44, what is he “against”?

IDENTIFY

Pause at line 52. What animal is Eckels hunting? Circle the answer.

INTERPRET

Re-read lines 54–58. What do these details suggest about Time Safari, Inc.?

INTERPRET

Circle the words in lines 76–77 that mean “Eckels said.” What does this phrase reveal about Eckels?

“Shooting my dinosaur,” Eckels finished it for him.

50 “A *Tyrannosaurus rex*. The Tyrant Lizard, the most incredible monster in history. Sign this release. Anything happens to you, we’re not responsible. Those dinosaurs are hungry.”

Eckels flushed angrily. “Trying to scare me!”

“Frankly, yes. We don’t want anyone going who’ll panic at the first shot. Six Safari leaders were killed last year, and a dozen hunters. We’re here to give you the severest thrill a *real* hunter ever asked for. Traveling you back sixty million years to bag the biggest game in all of Time. Your personal check’s still there. Tear it up.”

Mr. Eckels looked at the check. His fingers twitched.

60 “Good luck,” said the man behind the desk. “Mr. Travis, he’s all yours.”

They moved silently across the room, taking their guns with them, toward the Machine, toward the silver metal and the roaring light.

First a day and then a night and then a day and then a night, then it was day-night-day-night-day. A week, a month, a year, a decade! A.D. 2055. A.D. 2019. 1999! 1957! Gone! The Machine roared.

They put on their oxygen helmets and tested the intercoms.

70 Eckels swayed on the padded seat, his face pale, his jaw stiff. He felt the trembling in his arms, and he looked down and found his hands tight on the new rifle. There were four other men in the Machine. Travis, the Safari Leader; his assistant, Lesperance; and two other hunters, Billings and Kramer. They sat looking at each other, and the years blazed around them.

“Can these guns get a dinosaur cold?” Eckels felt his mouth saying.

“If you hit them right,” said Travis on the helmet radio.

80 “Some dinosaurs have two brains, one in the head, another far down the spinal column. We stay away from those. That’s stretching luck. Put your first two shots into the eyes, if you can, blind them, and go back into the brain.”

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The Machine howled. Time was a film run backward. Suns fled and ten million moons fled after them. "Think," said Eckels. "Every hunter that ever lived would envy us today. This makes Africa seem like Illinois."

The Machine slowed; its scream fell to a murmur. The Machine stopped.

The sun stopped in the sky.

90 The fog that had enveloped the Machine blew away and they were in an old time, a very old time indeed, three hunters and two Safari Heads with their blue metal guns across their knees.

"Christ isn't born yet," said Travis. "Moses has not gone to the mountain to talk with God. The Pyramids are still in the earth, waiting to be cut out and put up. Remember that. Alexander, Caesar, Napoleon, Hitler—none of them exists."

The men nodded.

100 "That"—Mr. Travis pointed—"is the jungle of sixty million two thousand and fifty-five years before President Keith."

He indicated a metal path that struck off into green wilderness, over streaming swamp, among giant ferns and palms.

"And that," he said, "is the Path, laid by Time Safari for your use. It floats six inches above the earth. Doesn't touch so much as one grass blade, flower, or tree. It's an anti-gravity metal. Its purpose is to keep you from touching this world of the Past in any way. Stay on the Path. Don't go off it. I repeat. *Don't go off.* For *any* reason! If you fall off, there's a penalty. And don't shoot any animal we don't okay."

110 "Why?" asked Eckels.

They sat in the ancient wilderness. Far birds' cries blew on a wind, and the smell of tar and an old salt sea, moist grasses, and flowers the color of blood.

"We don't want to change the Future. We don't belong here in the Past. The government doesn't *like* us here. We have to pay big graft³ to keep our franchise. A Time Machine is finicky

IDENTIFY

Underline the sentence in lines 103–107 that tells you the purpose of "the Path." Why do you think the term is capitalized?

ANALYZE

Re-read lines 111–113, which are full of imagery. To what senses do these images appeal?

3. graft n.: bribes.

Notes _____

VOCABULARY

annihilate (ə-nī'ə-lāt') *v.*:
destroy; wipe out.

expendable (ek-spen'də-bəl)
adj.: worth sacrificing to gain
an objective.

**IDENTIFY
CAUSE & EFFECT**

In this long paragraph (lines 130–155), Travis explains the possible effects of stepping off the path and killing a mouse. Each effect, in turn, becomes the cause of another event. What is the final effect Travis mentions?

business. Not knowing it, we might kill an important animal, a small bird, a roach, a flower even, thus destroying an important link in a growing species.”

120 “That’s not clear,” said Eckels.

“All right,” Travis continued, “say we accidentally kill one mouse here. That means all the future families of this one particular mouse are destroyed, right?”

“Right.”

“And all the families of the families of the families of that one mouse! With a stamp of your foot, you **annihilate** first one, then a dozen, then a thousand, a million, a *billion* possible mice!”

“So they’re dead,” said Eckels. “So what?”

130

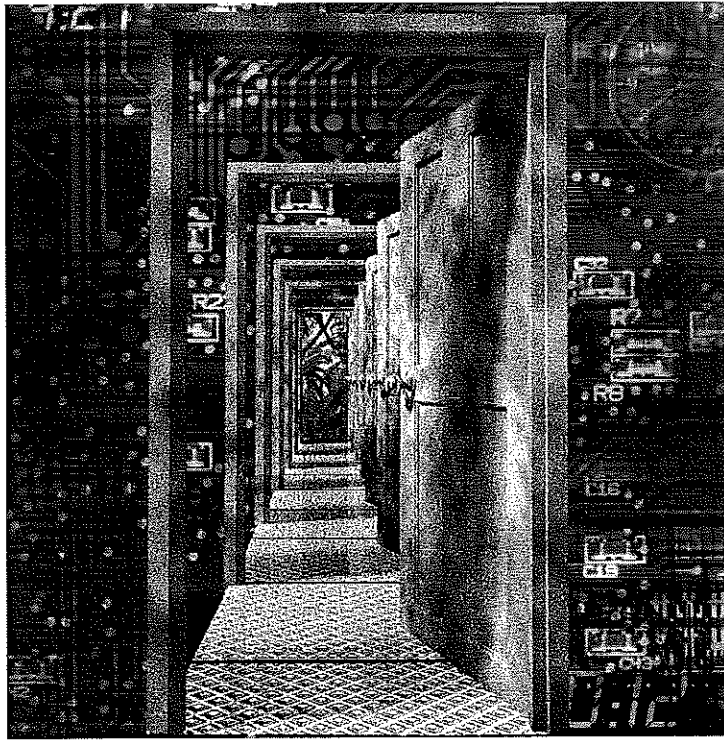
“So what?” Travis snorted quietly. “Well, what about the foxes that’ll need those mice to survive? For want of ten mice, a fox dies. For want of ten foxes, a lion starves. For want of a lion, all manner of insects, vultures, infinite billions of life forms are thrown into chaos and destruction. Eventually it all boils down to this: Fifty-nine million years later, a cave man, one of a dozen in the *entire world*, goes hunting wild boar or saber-toothed tiger for food. But you, friend, have *stepped* on all the tigers in that region. By stepping on *one* single mouse. So the cave man starves.

140

And the cave man, please note, is not just *any expendable* man, no! He is an *entire future nation*. From his loins would have sprung ten sons. From *their* loins one hundred sons, and thus onward to a civilization. Destroy this one man, and you destroy a race, a people, an entire history of life. It is comparable to slaying some of Adam’s grandchildren. The stomp of your foot, on one mouse, could start an earthquake, the effects of which could shake our earth and destinies down through Time, to their very foundations. With the death of that one cave man, a billion others yet unborn are throttled in the womb. Perhaps Rome never rises on its seven hills. Perhaps Europe is forever a dark forest, and only Asia waxes healthy and teeming.⁴ Step on a mouse and

150

4. **teeming** (tēm'in) *adj.*: swarming; overflowing.



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you crush the Pyramids. Step on a mouse and you leave your print, like a Grand Canyon, across Eternity. Queen Elizabeth might never be born, Washington might not cross the Delaware, there might never be a United States at all. So be careful. Stay on the Path. *Never* step off!”

“I see,” said Eckels. “Then it wouldn’t pay for us even to touch the *grass*?”

160 “Correct. Crushing certain plants could add up infinitesimally.⁵ A little error here would multiply in sixty million years, all out of proportion. Of course maybe our theory is wrong. Maybe Time *can’t* be changed by us. Or maybe it can be changed only in little subtle ways. A dead mouse here makes an insect imbalance there, a population disproportion later, a bad harvest further on, a **depression**, mass starvation, and, finally, a change in *social* temperament in far-flung countries. Something much more subtle, like that. Perhaps only a soft breath, a whisper, a hair, pollen on the air, such a slight, slight change that unless you looked close you wouldn’t see it. Who knows? Who really can say he knows? We don’t know. We’re guessing. But until we

170 do know for certain whether our messing around in Time *can* make a big roar or a little rustle in history, we’re being careful.

5. **infinitesimally** (in’fin-i-tes’i-məl-ē) *adv.*: in amounts too small to be measured.

Notes _____

VOCABULARY

depression (dē-presh’ən) *n.*: major economic downturn.

CLARIFY

What does Travis mean when he says he’s not sure whether “messing around in Time *can* make a big roar or a little rustle in history” (lines 169–171)?

**IDENTIFY
CAUSE & EFFECT**

Pause at line 175. Why do the travelers wear sterilized clothing and oxygen helmets?

**IDENTIFY
CAUSE & EFFECT**

Pause at line 190. Why are only animals that are about to die anyway chosen for hunting?

PREDICT

Re-read lines 195–202. What do *you* think? Will the expedition be a success, or will it end in tragedy?

VOCABULARY

paradox (par'ə-dāks') *n.*: something that has or seems to have contradictory qualities.

This Machine, this Path, your clothing and bodies, were sterilized, as you know, before the journey. We wear these oxygen helmets so we can't introduce our bacteria into an ancient atmosphere."

"How do we know which animals to shoot?"

"They're marked with red paint," said Travis. "Today, before our journey, we sent Lesperance here back with the Machine. He came to this particular era and followed certain animals."

180 "Studying them?"

"Right," said Lesperance. "I track them through their entire existence, noting which of them lives longest. Very few. How many times they mate. Not often. Life's short. When I find one that's going to die when a tree falls on him, or one that drowns in a tar pit, I note the exact hour, minute, and second. I shoot a paint bomb. It leaves a red patch on his side. We can't miss it. Then I correlate our arrival in the Past so that we meet the Monster not more than two minutes before he would have died anyway. This way, we kill only animals with no future, that are never going to mate again. You see how *careful* we are?"

190

"But if you came back this morning in Time," said Eckels eagerly, "you must've bumped into *us*, our Safari! How did it turn out? Was it successful? Did all of us get through—alive?"

Travis and Lesperance gave each other a look.

"That'd be a **paradox**," said the latter. "Time doesn't permit that sort of mess—a man meeting himself. When such occasions threaten, Time steps aside. Like an airplane hitting an air pocket. You felt the Machine jump just before we stopped? That was us passing ourselves on the way back to the Future. We saw nothing. There's no way of telling *if* this expedition was a success, *if we* got our monster, or whether all of us—meaning *you*, Mr. Eckels—got out alive."

200

Eckels smiled palely.

"Cut that," said Travis sharply. "Everyone on his feet!"

They were ready to leave the Machine.

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The jungle was high and the jungle was broad and the jungle was the entire world forever and forever. Sounds like music and sounds like flying tents filled the sky, and those were pterodactyls soaring with cavernous gray wings, gigantic bats of
 210 **delirium** and night fever. Eckels, balanced on the narrow Path, aimed his rifle playfully.

“Stop that!” said Travis. “Don’t even aim for fun, blast you! If your guns should go off—”

Eckels flushed. “Where’s our *Tyrannosaurus*?”

Lesperance checked his wristwatch. “Up ahead. We’ll bisect his trail in sixty seconds. Look for the red paint! Don’t shoot till we give the word. Stay on the Path. *Stay on the Path!*”

They moved forward in the wind of morning.

“Strange,” murmured Eckels. “Up ahead, sixty million years,
 220 Election Day over. Keith made President. Everyone celebrating. And here we are, a million years lost, and they don’t exist. The things we worried about for months, a lifetime, not even born or thought of yet.”

“Safety catches off, everyone!” ordered Travis. “You, first shot, Eckels. Second, Billings. Third, Kramer.”

“I’ve hunted tiger, wild boar, buffalo, elephant, but now, this is *it*,” said Eckels. “I’m shaking like a kid.”

“Ah,” said Travis.

Everyone stopped.

230 Travis raised his hand. “Ahead,” he whispered. “In the mist. There he is. There’s His Royal Majesty now.”

The jungle was wide and full of twitterings, rustlings, murmurs, and sighs.

Suddenly it all ceased, as if someone had shut a door.

Silence.

A sound of thunder.

Out of the mist, one hundred yards away, came

Tyrannosaurus rex.

“It,” whispered Eckels. “It . . .”

240 “Sh!”

VOCABULARY

delirium (di·lir’ē-əm) *n.*: extreme mental disturbance, often accompanied by hallucinations (seeing things that are not there).

STYLE

Re-read lines 206–211, and circle repeated words. Then, underline the imaginative description of pterodactyls. How would you describe the style of the writing here?

PREDICT

Pause at line 217. The guides keep telling Eckels, “Stay on the Path!” What do their warnings lead you to predict?

INFER

Pause at line 231. Whom might Travis be referring to as “His Royal Majesty”?

VOCABULARY

resilient (ri-zil'yənt) *adj.*: able to return to its original shape quickly after being stretched or compressed; elastic.

STYLE

The author uses rich **figurative language** in lines 241–259. Underline at least four metaphors or similes that help you visualize the fearsome dinosaur.

FLUENCY

Read the boxed passage aloud twice. Focus on reading the figures of speech clearly and dramatically.

VOCABULARY

remit (ri-mit') *v.*: return payment.

Notes _____

It came on great oiled, **resilient**, striding legs. It towered thirty feet above half of the trees, a great evil god, folding its delicate watchmaker's claws close to its oily reptilian chest. Each lower leg was a piston, a thousand pounds of white bone, sunk in thick ropes of muscle, sheathed over in a gleam of pebbled skin like the mail⁶ of a terrible warrior. Each thigh was a ton of meat, ivory, and steel mesh. And from the great breathing cage of the upper body those two delicate arms dangled out front, arms with hands which might pick up and examine men like toys, while the snake neck coiled. And the head itself, a ton of sculptured stone, lifted easily upon the sky. Its mouth gaped, exposing a fence of teeth like daggers. Its eyes rolled, ostrich eggs, empty of all expression save hunger. It closed its mouth in a death grin. It ran, its pelvic bones crushing aside trees and bushes, its taloned feet clawing damp earth, leaving prints six inches deep wherever it settled its weight. It ran with a gliding ballet step, far too poised and balanced for its ten tons. It moved into a sunlit arena warily, its beautifully reptilian hands feeling the air.

260 "Why, why," Eckels twitched his mouth. "It could reach up and grab the moon."

"Sh!" Travis jerked angrily. "He hasn't seen us yet."

"It can't be killed." Eckels pronounced this verdict quietly, as if there could be no argument. He had weighed the evidence and this was his considered opinion. The rifle in his hands seemed a cap gun. "We were fools to come. This is impossible."

"Shut up!" hissed Travis.

"Nightmare."

270 "Turn around," commanded Travis. "Walk quietly to the Machine. We'll **remit** one half your fee."

"I didn't realize it would be this *big*," said Eckels. "I miscalculated, that's all. And now I want out."

"It *sees* us!"

"There's the red paint on its chest!"

6. mail *n.*: here, flexible metal armor.

280 The Tyrant Lizard raised itself. Its armored flesh glittered like a thousand green coins. The coins, crusted with slime, steamed. In the slime, tiny insects wriggled, so that the entire body seemed to twitch and undulate,⁷ even while the monster itself did not move. It exhaled. The stink of raw flesh blew down the wilderness.

“Get me out of here,” said Eckels. “It was never like this before. I was always sure I’d come through alive. I had good guides, good safaris, and safety. This time, I figured wrong. I’ve met my match and admit it. This is too much for me to get hold of.”

“Don’t run,” said Lesperance. “Turn around. Hide in the Machine.”

“Yes.” Eckels seemed to be numb. He looked at his feet as if trying to make them move. He gave a grunt of helplessness.

290 “Eckels!”

He took a few steps, blinking, shuffling.

“Not *that* way!”

The Monster, at the first motion, lunged forward with a terrible scream. It covered one hundred yards in six seconds. The rifles jerked up and blazed fire. A windstorm from the beast’s mouth engulfed them in the stench of slime and old blood. The Monster roared, teeth glittering with sun.

300 Eckels, not looking back, walked blindly to the edge of the Path, his gun limp in his arms, stepped off the Path, and walked, not knowing it, in the jungle. His feet sank into green moss. His legs moved him, and he felt alone and remote from the events behind.

The rifles cracked again. Their sound was lost in shriek and lizard thunder. The great level of the reptile’s tail swung up, lashed sideways. Trees exploded in clouds of leaf and branch. The Monster twitched its jeweler’s hands down to fondle at the men, to twist them in half, to crush them like berries, to cram them into its teeth and its screaming throat. Its boulder-stone

IDENTIFY

How does Eckels react when he sees the dinosaur (lines 260–287)? What do the guides tell him to do?

**IDENTIFY
CAUSE & EFFECT**

Pause at line 302. What causes Eckels to step off the path? What effect might this action have?

7. undulate (un'jə-lāt') v.: move in waves.



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IDENTIFY

What two things is the dinosaur compared to in line 311? What type of figurative language is each comparison?

VISUALIZE

Circle the words in lines 311–318 that help you visualize the violent death of the giant dinosaur.

WORD STUDY

The prefix *mal-* means “not” or “bad.” What do you think *malfunctioning* (line 334) means?

310 eyes leveled with the men. They saw themselves mirrored. They fired at the metallic eyelids and the blazing black iris.

Like a stone idol, like a mountain avalanche, *Tyrannosaurus* fell. Thundering, it clutched trees, pulled them with it. It wrenched and tore the metal Path. The men flung themselves back and away. The body hit, ten tons of cold flesh and stone. The guns fired. The Monster lashed its armored tail, twitched its snake jaws, and lay still. A fount of blood spurted from its throat. Somewhere inside, a sac of fluids burst. Sickening gushes drenched the hunters. They stood, red and glistening.

The thunder faded.

320 The jungle was silent. After the avalanche, a green peace. After the nightmare, morning.

Billings and Kramer sat on the pathway and threw up. Travis and Lesperance stood with smoking rifles, cursing steadily.

In the Time Machine, on his face, Eckels lay shivering. He had found his way back to the Path, climbed into the Machine.

Travis came walking, glanced at Eckels, took cotton gauze from a metal box, and returned to the others, who were sitting on the Path.

330 “Clean up.”

They wiped the blood from their helmets. They began to curse too. The Monster lay, a hill of solid flesh. Within, you could hear the sighs and murmurs as the furthest chambers of it died, the organs malfunctioning, liquids running a final instant from pocket to sac to spleen, everything shutting off, closing up forever. It was like standing by a wrecked locomotive or a steam shovel at quitting time, all valves being released or levered tight. Bones cracked; the tonnage of its own flesh, off balance, dead weight, snapped the delicate forearms, caught underneath. The meat settled, quivering.

340

Another cracking sound. Overhead, a gigantic tree branch broke from its heavy mooring, fell. It crashed upon the dead beast with finality.

"I'm innocent. I've done nothing!"

1999. 2000. 2055.

The Machine stopped.

"Get out," said Travis.

The room was there as they had left it. But not the same as they had left it. The same man sat behind the same desk. But the same man did not quite sit behind the same desk.

420 Travis looked around swiftly. "Everything okay here?" he snapped.

"Fine. Welcome home!"

Travis did not relax. He seemed to be looking at the very atoms of the air itself, at the way the sun poured through the one high window.

"Okay, Eckels, get out. Don't ever come back."

Eckels could not move.

"You heard me," said Travis. "What're you *staring* at?"

430 Eckels stood smelling of the air, and there was a thing to the air, a chemical taint so subtle, so slight, that only a faint cry of his **subliminal** senses warned him it was there. The colors, white, gray, blue, orange, in the wall, in the furniture, in the sky beyond the window, were . . . were . . . And there was a *feel*. His flesh twitched. His hands twitched. He stood drinking the oddness with the pores of his body. Somewhere, someone must have been screaming one of those whistles that only a dog can hear. His body screamed silence in return. Beyond this room, beyond this wall, beyond this man who was not quite the same man seated at this desk that was not quite the same desk . . . lay an entire world of streets and people. What sort of world it was
440 now, there was no telling. He could feel them moving there, beyond the walls, almost, like so many chess pieces blown in a dry wind. . . .

But the immediate thing was the sign painted on the office wall, the same sign he had read earlier today on first entering.

Somehow, the sign had changed:

PREDICT

Pause at line 415. Do you think that Eckels will find that he has "done nothing" when he gets back to the future?

IDENTIFY

Underline clues in lines 416–418 that indicate that Eckels's actions have had an effect on life in his present.

VOCABULARY

subliminal (sub·lim'ə·nəl)
adj.: below the level of awareness.

INTERPRET

Circle the **sensory images** in lines 428–442 that describe Eckels's feeling that something is not right. Why does he compare people to chess pieces?

COMPARE & CONTRAST

Compare this sign with the one at the beginning of the story. How are they the same or different?

IDENTIFY CAUSE & EFFECT

Pause at line 462. What was the main effect of Eckels's killing of the butterfly?

INTERPRET

What is the "sound of thunder" in line 471?

Tyme Sefari, Inc.

Sefaris tu any yeer en the past.

Yu naim the animall.

Wee taekyuthair.

Yu shoot itt.



Peter Bollinger.

Eckels felt himself fall into a chair. He fumbled crazily at the thick slime on his boots. He held up a clod of dirt, trembling, "No, it *can't* be. Not a *little* thing like that. No!"

450 Embedded in the mud, glistening green and gold and black, was a butterfly, very beautiful and very dead.

"Not a little thing like *that!* Not a butterfly!" cried Eckels.

It fell to the floor, an exquisite thing, a small thing that could upset balances and knock down a line of small dominoes and then big dominoes and then gigantic dominoes, all down the years across Time. Eckels's mind whirled. It *couldn't* change things. Killing one butterfly couldn't be *that* important! Could it?

His face was cold. His mouth trembled, asking: "Who—who won the presidential election yesterday?"

460 The man behind the desk laughed. "You joking? You know very well. Deutscher, of course! Who else? Not that fool weakling Keith. We got an iron man now, a man with guts!" The official stopped. "What's wrong?"

Eckels moaned. He dropped to his knees. He scabbled at the golden butterfly with shaking fingers. "Can't we," he pleaded to the world, to himself, to the officials, to the Machine, "can't we take it *back*, can't we *make* it alive again? Can't we start over? Can't we—"

470 He did not move. Eyes shut, he waited, shivering. He heard Travis breathe loud in the room; he heard Travis shift his rifle, click the safety catch, and raise the weapon.

There was a sound of thunder.

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