

★ Which of the science fiction themes or ingredients are present in this story?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

THE VELDT

SETTING An automated home sometime in the future.

CHARACTERS George Hadley - Concerned father.

Lydia Hadley - Concerned mother.

Peter Hadley - Child of George and Lydia.

Wendy Hadley - Child of George and Lydia.

David McClean - Psychologist friend of the Hadleys.

CONFLICT

Protagonist - The Hadley parents, who are concerned about the morbid imagination of their children.

Antagonist - The Hadley children, who are strangely protective of their virtual reality nursery.

Climax - The Hadley parents decide to shut down the nursery, but let the children play in it one last time.

Outcome - The nursery sets its lions on the Hadley parents, killing them and protecting the Hadley children from being deprived of its comforts.

★ **THEMES** The main theme is the abuse of technology. In this case, there is a chain of causality: the laziness engendered by a fully automated home has destroyed the familial bond, as the parents have ceased parenting; with the familial bond broken, technology has stepped into the vacuum and become the new parent of the children, providing not only comfort and care but the means to eliminate the old parents. Related to this theme is the danger of the imagination, as the children have conjured the reality that preys on their parents. List the imagined technologies Bradbury wrote about:

Summary Lydia Hadley expresses concern to her husband George about the children's nursery, a virtual reality room in their HappyLife Home automated house. They go to the nursery, which had taken on the form of an African Veldt for some time; Pamela hears a scream while they look around, but George doesn't hear. They are almost attacked by a pack of lions, but run out the nursery in time - George laughing at his foolishness, Pamela alarmed and frightened. Lydia makes George promise to curb the children's reading of Africa and perhaps lock up the nursery for a few days; George agrees, but notes that past attempts to shut down the nursery has caused tantrums from both Peter and Wendy. Lydia wants the whole house shut off for a few days and the family to take a vacation; she believes the house had taken on her previous roles as wife, mother, and nursemaid, making her feel unnecessary.

With Wendy and Peter at a carnival, George and Lydia eat dinner alone. George goes to the nursery to look again, considering how thoughts of death have taken over his children's minds at much too young an age. Followed by Lydia, he hears a faraway scream and the lions roar; he tries to take advantage of the nursery's ability to make the room disappear by projecting his thoughts. However, the African veldt persisted despite George's wishes, which Lydia fears may be because the room has been set in Africa too long or because Peter had modified the machinery. At this point, the children arrive; when asked about the Africa in the nursery, they deny it's there. Wendy runs into the room to check, returning to inform her parents it's not Africa at all; George checks and is greeted by a forest with Rima. Unsure of how to respond, George sends the children to bed. In the nursery's forest, he finds an old wallet of his, smelling of the veldt and lion, chewed up and covered in blood. That night in bed, he talks with Lydia about all that's happened, and they worry about not being strict enough in disciplining their kids. They hear two screams from the nursery and the roar of lions, and the screams sound familiar to them.

The next day at breakfast, Peter asks if the nursery will be locked up for good, and George tries to reason with his son about trying different scenarios besides Africa. When George mentions the possibility of turning off the house, Peter threatens him and goes off to the nursery. George is soon joined by David McClean, a psychologist friend of the family; they go down to the nursery, hear a screaming, and walk into the room to find the children in the veldt, watching the lions feed. George sends the kids out of the room and the two grown-ups watch the lions feed. David is told the veldt has been going on for a month and his instinct tells him the whole room should be torn down. The room was made as a release from destructive thoughts, he points out, not a way to channel and build them.

If anything, the children have been spoiled, but David points out that George's weak attempts at discipline have made the children prefer the house's indulgences to the control of the real-life parents. George opines that the room wouldn't want to be switched off, yet he goes to the fuse box and kills the nursery. The two children go into hysterics and Lydia pleads for George to turn on the nursery for a little while; he agrees, and the children are happy again. He and Lydia get dressed for their vacation to Iowa and realize they left the kids alone. They hear the children calling for them and rush into the nursery, where their children lock them in. George and Lydia are attacked by the lions and scream, at last realizing why the screams they heard were so familiar. David McClean returns to the house and finds the children having tea in the nursery veldt; he asks where the parents are and watches as the lions finish feeding. Wendy offers him a cup of tea.

The Veldt

1. What is ironic about the name of the home?
2. List several of the tasks the home does for its residents.
3. How do the parents in this story deal with their mechanized environment?
4. How does the psychologist explain the children's relationship with their nursery?
5. Which aspects of the story do you think seem farfetched and which seem realistic?
6. Why did the children react so hysterically when Mr. Hadley shut down the house?
7. How does Bradbury help the reader anticipate the end of the story?
8. What is the nursery? What do the walls of the nursery reflect?
9. In what way can the nursery serve the needs of both parents and children?
10. How does Bradbury describe the physical appearance of Peter and Wendy when they return home in the evening? How does their physical description contrast with what we know about their mental activities?

Did you catch the reference to Peter Pan? Wendy and Peter are allusions based on characters in Peter Pan because of their imagination; they imagine living without their parents. But in Peter Pan they achieve it by going off to Neverland, not by having their parents eaten by lions.