

The Man

The man goes unnamed throughout the novel. He is the boy's father, his papa, and believes that he has been entrusted by God to keep the boy safe and to protect him from harm and the evils in the world — even if that means killing him before the bad guys can get to him. He wonders if he has it in him to do harm to his own son, the only source of light in the man's world. He must push himself and his son to extreme measures in order to survive. The connection that the man feels with his son is sacred, almost holy, and throughout the novel the man makes great sacrifices to allow his son to live on and have a future in a world that has gone dim. He shows his son how to carry the fire, first with his help, and then, later, without him.

The Boy

The boy goes unnamed throughout the novel. As the man and boy travel on the road, the boy is the only source of light in his father's life. Similarly, the man is all that the boy has, and the boy doesn't want to live unless his father remains with him. The boy is strong and resilient, but also sensitive and compassionate. When the man and boy encounter others on the road, the boy shows more sympathy towards them, while his father is more concerned about keeping the two of them alive. It is the boy who is able to get the man to show kindness to others on the road, however begrudgingly such kindness is given. One of the boy's top priorities is to be a good guy. He wants to make sure that he and his father are helping people and are carrying the fire. While the boy is the source of all of the man's strength, the man doesn't realize how much the boy worries about him, and how much the boy's will to live on depends on his father.

Minor Characters

The Woman

The woman is the man's wife and the boy's mother, and she also goes unnamed throughout the novel. She leaves the man and boy when the boy is still very young, and she is presumed to be dead. Through the man's flashbacks, it became clear that the woman had grown weary of the brutal and bleak world in which they lived and wanted to die alone. She wanted to take the boy with her, but the man refused to let her. Many of the man's dreams and memories are of the woman, and he knows that death is near when he starts having comforting, good dreams about her.

Man struck by lightning

The man and boy come upon a burnt man on the road, a man who's been struck by lightning. They follow him for a short time, but the man eventually sits down in the road and they overtake him. The boy wants to help, but the man says they can't help him because they don't have anything to give him. The boy cries for the man struck by lightning, a man who highlights the sadness and helplessness that exists along the road.

The bad man from the truck

He's the first human being, other than the boy, that the father speaks to in over a year. He represents what has become of the human race. When the bad man grabs the boy, the boy's father shoots him in the head.

Roadagents, the bad guys

The roadagents and members of communes are the bad guys, and they're the ones who the man and boy fear and must watch out for. They rape, kill, and eat other humans, which the man and boy bear witness to multiple times throughout the novel. The man and boy come upon a group of roadagents that keep a group of humans locked in a basement, each to be killed and used as food, as if they are livestock. Another group of roadagents births, kills, and cooks a baby over a spit. They are the essence of evil in the novel.

Ely

The old man that the man and boy come upon in the road. The boy takes pity on him and convinces his father to let Ely eat dinner with them. Ely doesn't thank the boy because he says that he wouldn't have done the same, if the situation was reversed. Ely isn't the man's real name: He doesn't want to reveal who he really is.

Thief

This thief, an outcast from one of the communes, steals all that the man and boy own while they are away walking on the beach. The man and boy catch up to him and the man makes him strip naked and leave his clothes. The man wants to leave the thief with nothing, just as the thief did to them. But the boy cries for the man, saying they've killed him.

The man with the bow and arrow

As the man and boy are walking through town, the man with the bow and arrow shoots the boy's father with an arrow. The boy's father shoots back with a flare gun and either kills or severely wounds the man. It is not made clear which, but the father tells his son that he didn't kill the man.

The woman with the bow and arrow man

After the boy's father shoots the man with the bow and arrow, he enters the house to see who else is inside. He finds this woman, who holds the man with the bow and arrow, curing the boy's father for what he's done. When the boy's father realizes that other people left her there with the man, she tells him that she chose to stay behind.

The man with a shotgun

He finds the boy after his father dies. He tells the boy that his family has been following them and that there was some debate as to whether they should come for the boy. In the end, they decide to invite the boy to join them on their journey. The man says that he's one of the good guys and that he's carrying the fire. This man adopts a fatherly role for the boy and seems to be a man that the boy can trust as he keeps his promise to cover the boy's father with a blanket.

The little boy

Throughout the novel, there are instances when the boy says he sees another little boy and is deeply concerned for him. At the novel's end, we meet this other traveling family that has both a little boy and a little girl. This could be the same little boy that the boy has seen previously, or he could be a different one. It's never made clear, but the link between the little boy from earlier in the novel and the little boy at the end is clear.

The woman, wife of the man with a shotgun

The woman takes on a motherly role for the boy, welcoming him to their family with a hug and saying that she's glad to see him. The boy talks to the woman about God because the woman still believes in His existence. The boy says that he finds it hard to talk to God, but that he prefers to talk to his father. The woman assures him this is okay, saying that the breath of God passes through all men.

The little girl

Though she's never seen in the novel, she is mentioned by the man with the shotgun. She will be a part of this new post-apocalyptic nuclear family.