

Summary and Analysis of "A Sound of Thunder"

Summary:

In Bradbury's "A Sound of Thunder," a hunter named [Eckels](#) pays \$10,000 to travel with Time Safari, a time machine company that takes hunters back to the time of dinosaurs and allows them to hunt Tyrannosaurus Rex. The company guarantees nothing - neither your safety nor your return, and there are strict instructions and expectations for how the hunters should behave once they travel back in time. Eckels and the two other hunters, Billings and Kramer, are to obey their guide, [Travis](#), at all times. Before they leave, Eckels reviews this information with the man behind the desk and they both engage in small talk. Everyone is happy because President Keith has just been elected, and many considered time travel as a way to escape the present day had Deutscher, the other candidate and potential dictator, won.

When they travel sixty million two thousand and fifty-five years back in time, Eckels is incredibly excited about the idea of conquering the beast Tyrannosaurus. He remarks, "Good God, every hunter that ever lived would envy us today. This makes Africa seem like Illinois." (3) Before they exit the time machine, Travis points out the path laid by Time Safari. It floats six inches above the earth and is the only path that the hunters should travel upon. They are not to touch anything during their stay in the past, and they are only to shoot when the guide and his assistant instruct them to shoot.

When Eckels inquires about this particular rule, he is astounded by the gravity of Travis' response. Travis insists that interrupting any of the natural processes in the past could have irreparable repercussions for the future. He draws out the example of killing one mouse and articulates the potential aftershocks of it: "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." (4) Stepping on a mouse has a much broader reach than Eckels initially thought.

Together, the five of them depart on the path to find their prey. The Tyrannosaurus Rex has been carefully scouted by Travis on a previous trip to the past, where he waited to see when one of the dinosaurs would die naturally and then timed the next hunting trip accordingly. In the case of this particular "monster," a tree limb was going to fall and kill it. Travis and Time Safari are very careful with leaving the past just as it was supposed to unfold. When they reach the clearing where the Tyrannosaurus is scheduled to appear, Eckels begins to have second thoughts, and he becomes increasingly more scared as the dinosaur comes into view. Eckels describes the encounter as, "a sound of thunder."

Eckels is paralyzed by fear, and Travis yells at him, telling him to go back to the time machine and wait for the others. Because Eckels was supposed to shoot first, he has now endangered the lives of the rest of the group, and Travis is furious with him. Dazed and confused, Eckels stumbles off of the Time Safari path and into the jungle, the grass giving way to his feet. Meanwhile, the rifles cracked furiously as the others tried to take down the giant beast. "Like a stone idol, like a mountain avalanche, Tyrannosaurus fell." (7) Caked in blood, the others return to the time machine, where they find Eckels shivering on the floor. He managed to find his way

back to the time machine. They all hear a cracking sound - the tree branch has now fallen on top of the dinosaur as had been observed.

Upon seeing Eckels, Travis decrees that he cannot return to the future - he sees the mud on his boots and knows that he walked off the path. They have no idea how much damage Eckels has caused for future generations and species. Travis relents a bit though, and allows Eckels to return to the future as long as he removes the bullets from the monster's skull. Eckels returns drenched in blood and passes out immediately after returning the bullets to Travis. Travis is still outraged and threatens to kill Eckels, but ultimately they clean up and begin to travel back to present day.

When they exit the time machine, Travis anxiously checks in with the man behind the desk to see if everything is ok, and the man tells him it is. The man, however, is acting a bit differently than when they left for the safari, and Eckels notices a strange smell in the air. It's faint, but something is different. He looks around him trying to figure out what has changed. The immediate thing that he noticed had changed was the sign upon the wall. The words were spelled differently, and Eckels begins to panic, seeing firsthand the repercussions of his stroll off of the path. He sits down and inspects himself, particularly the bottoms of his shoes. "Embedded in the mud, glistening green and gold and black, was a butterfly, very beautiful and very dead." Panicked, he asks the man behind the desk who won the election the other day, and the man responds, "You joking? You know damn well. Deutscher, of course! Who else?" (11) The death of the butterfly has resulted in the future being changed - a different man won the presidency of the United States, and people believe he will be a dictator. Eckels cries out in disbelief, begging to return to the past and somehow undo what he has done. He sits down with his eyes closed, and he senses Travis enter the room, breathe loudly, and take the safety off of his rifle. Suddenly, all Eckels hears is a sound of thunder and he is dead.

Analysis:

In "A Sound of Thunder," Bradbury offers a poignant and effective interpretation of the dangers of time travel and possible ripple effects, highlighting our interconnectivity with one another. He also explores the connections between the past, present, and future, and he does it through vivid descriptions and gripping narrative.

Bradbury's prolific ability to paint a vivid picture shines in his description of Tyrannosaurus Rex, the prey that the hunters have come to kill. Metaphors fill his descriptions. The dinosaur has "watchmaker's claws," pistons for legs, and thighs of steel. (6) It ran like a ballerina but loomed like an evil god. As effective as the metaphors are on their own, they are even more powerful when juxtaposed with one another as well as the more realistic descriptors of the dinosaur. Even though the reader has never seen a living Tyrannosaurus Rex, Bradbury's descriptions make it seem as if the dinosaur is standing directly in front of you.

The most powerful part of Bradbury's story is his articulation of the interconnectivity between the past, present, and future. Travis' tirade at the beginning of the story lays out the possible ripple effect that one ill-fated move can have on the future. Unfortunately, Eckels and the rest of the group realize this is indeed possible when they return after their trip. The death of a single butterfly has dramatically altered the world they once knew. The language has developed

differently and an important presidential election was decided differently. It is a strong piece of advice to consider how your actions today can affect the future.

These connections are delicate and tenuous, further emphasized by the fact that the small butterfly had such a massive effect on the world. Even if we are aware of the potential ripple effects, we may not consider the fact that a small decision can make a big impact. This is both precautionary and empowering. While the potential for failure exists, the potential to make a positive difference is also present and real.

Bradbury's story is also a gripping environmentalist story. Not only are different time periods connected, but all living things are a part of an interconnected world. His story helps us to see the importance of protecting the natural environment, which is an important issue in today's world.