

# 1

## The Third Level

### Fastrack Revision

#### Summary at a Glance

- ▶ 'The Third Level', by Jack Finney, is a science-fiction. The third level refers to the third level of the Grand Central Station in New York which in reality has two levels and the third level is the creation of the commuter's imagination. The commuter is Charley who works late one summer night in the office and is very keen to get back home. In a hurry to board a train home goes down to the second level where he crosses the arched doorway for the subway and loses his way and feels Grand Central grows like a tree and pushes out new corridors and stairs. Charley walks down a corridor and finds himself on the third level of the Grand Central Station where everything seems differently strange, e.g., smaller rooms, fewer ticket windows and open-flame gas-lights. People dressed in a style of 19th century. He buys a newspaper "The World" which dated June 11, 1894. Then goes to the ticket window to buy two tickets for Galesburg, Illinois. He wants to go there with his wife Louisa. But his currency notes are not accepted by the clerk. He runs away to escape jail.
- ▶ Next day Charley draws three hundred dollars from his bank to buy currency. He buys two hundred in old style currency for his three hundred dollars. Now he wants to go back to the third level to travel to Galesburg, Illinois but now he fails to find the corridor leading to the third

level. He tells the whole story to his wife. She dissuades him and he stops his search for the third level and reverts back to his old hobby of stamp collection. The stamp collectors affix new stamp on an envelope with a blank page inside and mail it to themselves on the first day of the sale. Envelope is never opened, it is called the first day cover. Sam, the psychiatrist disappears all of a sudden, one day the narrator finds a strange first day cover in his collection which was mailed to his grandfather's address in Galesburg. The envelope contains a letter for Charley by his friend Sam. Sam confirms the presence of the third level and advises Charley to keep looking for the third level. Charley gets proof of the third level's existence. Sam had bought eight hundred dollars' worth of old style currency. This money is enough to set him up a business in grain, says the narrator. Sam can't go back to his old business since psychiatrists are redundant in Galesburg of 1894.

#### Theme

The story reflects the fact that life in the earlier times was much happier. The people in the earlier times were not anxious or fearful, as they are in the present. Escapism is a significant theme of the story as Charley wishes to escape into a world that is far from his grim realities. Another significant theme of the story is time travel.



### Practice Exercise



#### Extract Based Questions

**Directions:** Read the extracts given below and answer the questions that follow:

- The clerk figured the fare – he glanced at my fancy hat band, but he figured the fare – and I had enough for two coach tickets, one way. But when I counted out the money and looked up, the clerk was staring at me. He nodded at the bills. "That ain't money, mister," he said, "and if you're trying to skin me, you won't get very far," and he glanced at the cash drawer, beside him. Of course the money was old-style bills half again as big as the money we use nowadays and different looking. (CBSE 2023)

- Why did Charley ask for two tickets?
- Complete the sentence by choosing the correct option:  
When Charley offered money to the booking clerk, the latter stared at Charley because the booking clerk:  
 (i) thought it wasn't money.  
 (ii) did not trust Charley.  
 (iii) thought Charley was trying to tease him.  
 (iv) thought that Charley had given him less money.
- Select the option that best describes Charley in this extract. He is:  
 (i) a cheat (ii) gullible  
 (iii) an opportunist (iv) an escapist
- 'If you're trying to skin me' suggests .....



## Answers

- (a) Charley asked for two tickets because he wanted to go to Galesburg, Illinois with his wife Louisa.  
(b) (i) thought it wasn't money.  
(c) (i) a cheat  
(d) that the clerk thought about Charley to be a cheat and said that if he dared to cheat, he would be caught very soon.

2. To make sure, I walked over the newsboy and glanced at the stack of papers at his feet. It was *The World* and *The World* hasn't been published for years. The lead story said something about President Cleveland. I've found that front page since, in the Public library files, and it was printed June 11, 1894.

I turned toward the ticket windows knowing that here -- on the third level at Grand Central -- I could buy tickets that would take Louisa and me anywhere in the United States we wanted to go. In the year 1894. And I wanted two tickets to Galesburg, Illinois. (CBSE 2023)

- (a) The newspaper that covered the lead story about President Cleveland was:  
(i) The Pioneer  
(ii) The New York Times  
(iii) The World  
(iv) The Times
- (b) The narrator wanted to buy tickets to .....
- (c) Which of the following in the extract most nearly means the opposite of 'stare'?  
(i) Glance (ii) Peek  
(iii) Ignore (iv) Examine
- (d) Charley wanted two tickets because he wanted to go with:  
(i) Sam (ii) Cleveland  
(iii) Louisa (iv) the Psychiatrist

## Answers

- (a) (iii) The World  
(b) Galesburg, Illinois.  
(c) (i) Glance  
(d) (iii) Louisa

3. 941 Willard Street  
Galesburg, Illinois  
July 18, 1894

Charley

I got to wishing that you were right. Then I got to believing you were right. And, Charley, it's true; I found the third level ! I've been here two weeks, and right now, down the street at the Daly's, someone is playing a piano, and they're all

out on the front porch singing 'Seeing Nelly Home'. And I'm invited over for lemonade. Come on back, Charley and Louisa. Keep looking till you find the third level ! It's worth it, believe me !

The note is signed Sam.

(CBSE 2023)

- (a) What was the feeling of Sam as conveyed in the letter? Choose the appropriate option in the context of the extract.  
(i) Surprise (ii) Doubt  
(iii) Excitement (iv) Anger
- (b) What was Sam Weiner's reaction when Charley told him about the third level?  
(i) Dismissal (ii) Acceptance  
(iii) Wonderstruck (iv) Puzzled
- (c) The phrase 'Charley, it's true' in the context of the extract implies which of the given options?  
I. Sam is relaxed  
II. Charley had migrated with Louisa  
III. The existence of the third level  
IV. Sam had met Charley's grandfather  
Choose the most appropriate option:  
(i) I and II (ii) II and IV  
(iii) I and III (iv) IV only
- (d) Sam wrote the letter to Charley in order to .....

## Answers

- (a) (iii) Excitement  
(b) (i) Dismissal  
(c) (iii) I and III  
(d) tell him that the existence of the third level was true. Sam wanted Charley and Louisa to join him and wanted them to keep looking for the third level till they found it.

4. There's probably a long tunnel that nobody knows about feeling its way under the city right now, on its way to Times Square, and maybe another to Central Park. And maybe--because for so many people through the years Grand Central has been an exit, a way of escape--maybe that's how the tunnel I got into.... But I never told my psychiatrist friend about that idea.

- (a) Where is probably a long tunnel?  
(b) Who got into the tunnel?  
(i) A friend of the narrator  
(ii) The narrator himself  
(iii) Both the narrator and his friend  
(iv) None of the above
- (c) 'Escape' means .....
- (d) Who is 'I' in the last sentence?



## Answers

- (a) A long tunnel is probably at the Grand Central Station.  
 (b) (ii) The narrator himself  
 (c) the act of getting away from a place or an unpleasant situation.  
 (d) Charley is 'I' in the last sentence.

5. He said I was unhappy. That made my wife kind of mad, but he explained that he meant the modern world is full of insecurity, fear, war, worry and all the rest of it, and that I just want to escape. Well, who doesn't? Everybody I know wants to escape, but they don't wander down into any third level at Grand Central Station. But that's the reason, he said, and my friends all agreed. Everything points to it, they claimed.

My stamp collecting, for example; that's a 'temporary refuge from reality.' Well, maybe, but my grandfather didn't need any refuge from reality.

- (a) Why did Sam's verdict make Charley's wife 'mad'?  
 (b) Select the option that displays a cause-effect set.

	Cause	Effect
(i)	Charley's stamp collecting	Wandering into the third level
(ii)	Everybody wants to escape	Modern world full of insecurity
(iii)	Charley's wandering into the third level	Charley's stamp collecting
(iv)	Modern world full of insecurity	Everybody wants to escape

- (c) Why didn't Charley's grandfather need refuge from reality?  
 (d) 'Wander' means .....

## Answers

- (a) It seemed to suggest to her that she was the cause of Charley's unhappiness.

	Cause	Effect
(b) (iv)	Modern world full of Insecurity	Everybody wants to escape

- (c) Charley's grandfather didn't need refuge from reality because he lived in peaceful times.  
 (d) walk or move in a leisurely way.



## Short Answer Type Questions

**Q 1. How does Jack Finney try to establish the reality of the Grand Central Station, New York?**

**Ans.** The Presidents of the New York Central and the New York, New Haven and Hartford railroads affirm that there are only two levels of Grand Central Station, New York. Fast trains like the twentieth Century leave from the first level, where as the suburban trains leave from the second level.

**Q 2. What was Sam's reaction when Charley mentioned the discovery of the third level to him?**

**Ans.** When Charley mentioned the discovery of the third level to Sam, he said it was a waking-dream wish fulfilment. Sam said Charley was unhappy of his present life, he wanted to escape this reality.

**Q 3. How stamp collecting is a 'temporary refuge'?**

**Ans.** Stamp collection is a hobby. It produces fantasy for the past. Thus, it provides a temporary refuge to the concerned person.

**Q 4. What contract does Charley offer to the psychiatrist's diagnosis?**

**Ans.** Charley says that his grandfather didn't need any refuge from reality. Things were pretty nice and peaceful in his days, yet he started stamp collection. President Roosevelt collected stamps too.

**Q 5. Where did Charley stray when he got lost at the Grand Central?**

**Ans.** When Charley got lost, once he got into a tunnel about a mile long and came out in the lobby of the Roosevelt Hotel. Another time he came up in an office building on forty-sixth street, three blocks away.

**Q 6. What did Charley discover when he went to a newsboy?**

**Ans.** When Charley went to a newsboy, he found he was selling, 'The World' dated June 11, 1894. The lead story of the paper said something about President Cleveland.

**Q 7. You have read 'Adventure' by Jayant Narlikar in Hornbill Class XI. Compare the interweaving of fantasy and reality in the two stories.**

**Ans.** In 'Adventure' Gangadhar Pant made a transition from one world to another and back again. He was able to experience two worlds at one time. Thus, fantasy and reality are interwoven. In 'The Third Level' Galesburg is a peaceful world where Charley spent his childhood. To escape the busy life of New York Charley finds the third level to reach Galesburg. Sam is also transported to Galesburg. Here fantasy and reality are also interwoven.

**Q 8. What did Sam say in his letter to Charley?**

**Ans.** Sam said the following things in his letter to Charley:  
 (i) I believe you were right.  
 (ii) I found the third level.  
 (iii) I have been here for two weeks.

(iv) The atmosphere of Galesburg is musical and peaceful.

(v) Keep looking till you find the third level and come here with Louisa.

**Q 9. Sam's letter to Charley is a fine blend of reality and fantasy. Comment.**

**Ans.** Sam's letter, dated 18 July, 1894 written from Galesburg, Illinois is a proof of his having reached the third level. On diagnosing Charley's claim to have visited the third level. He explains it as a mere means or escape from the real world. But at the same time Sam, himself feels insecure in his heart of hearts and yearns for such an escape. Slowly he starts believing in the existence of the third level and carried out an intensive search for it.

**Q 10. What does the third level symbolise?**

**Ans.** The third level symbolises man's desire to escape into the world of imagination. It reflects for his guest the 'fabulous ordinariness of a bygone age' that was free from the modern sophistication and material comforts but exuded peace and tranquility.

**Q 11. Describe the third level as described by Charley.**

**Ans.** One summer night when Charley works till late in the office, he is keen to get back home. On the way he finds himself on the third level at Grand Central Station. There he finds smaller rooms, fewer ticket windows and open-flame gaslights. Everybody at this level of the station was dressed in the 19th century dresses.

**Q 12. In his letter to Charley, Sam writes, '...then I got to believing you were right.' What could have made Sam begin to believe? (CBSE SQP 2020)**

**Ans.** Earlier when Charley used to tell him about the third level at the Grand Central. Sam hardly believed him. Later when Charley explained to him the life and living of people in Galesburg, Sam liked the description and started believing with fascination as he too had found the third level.

**Q 13. Why did the booking clerk refuse to accept the money offered by Charley? (CBSE 2023)**

**Ans.** The booking clerk refused to accept the money offered by Charley because Charley did not pay in the currency notes that were in circulation in 1894. The clerk stared at him and said, "That ain't money, mister."

**Q 14. What role does Sam's letter play in the story? (CBSE 2023)**

**Ans.** Sam's letter was addressed to Charley. In the letter Sam informed Charley that he had found the third level. He also told Charley and his wife to keep looking for the third level. The letter was clearly a product of Charley's imagination. The letter reflects that Sam also felt insecure and yearned for an escape. He started believing that he too had found the third level.



## Long Answer Type Questions

**Q 1. Do you think that the third level was a medium of escape for Charley? Why?**

*Or*

**'The third level was a sheer medium of escape for Charley'? Do you agree? Support your answer with reference to the lesson 'The Third Level'.**

**Ans.** Charley was an ordinary man. He was thirty-one years old. His native place was Galesburg in Illinois. He spent his childhood there. Now he is working in an office in New York. He is not happy with city life. Charley wants to escape from his modern life in New York to Galesburg. The Grand Central Station of New York has two levels. One night last summer Charley worked late at the office. He was in a hurry to get uptown to his apartment. He decided to take the subway from Grand Central because it was faster than the bus. He got lost in the subway. After wandering up and down he reached the third level at Grand Central Station. He saw there everything in contrast of the present time. He saw a newspaper dated June 11, 1894. He wanted two tickets to Galesburg, Illinois. But he did not have the currency of the year 1894, and failed to purchase the ticket. When Charley came home, he talked to a psychiatrist friend among others. He said it was a waking dream wish fulfilment. He told Charley that he just wanted to escape his modern world. Thus, the third level was a medium of escape for Charley.

**Q 2. 'The modern world is full of insecurity, fear, war, worry and stress.' What are the ways in which we attempt to overcome them?**

**Ans.** 'The modern world is full of insecurity, fear, war, worry and stress'. There are ways in which we attempt to overcome them.

We must realise the realities and facts. We must accept bitter truth however painful it is. We must make efforts to mould the circumstances in which we live. If forces against us are very dominant and powerful, we must be elastic and pragmatic. We must learn to handle the forces that hinder our growth. Adaptation to circumstances is the key to success.

We may develop some hobby like stamp collecting, gardening, painting, photography, coin collecting, reading, etc.. Our hobby gives us a temporary refuge from reality. We may go on picnics and excursions on weekends and feel released. We may join some club where we can spend our time leisurely.

**Q 3. Give a brief account of the things and persons on the third level of the Grand Central Station, New York that Charley had seen there.**

*Or*

**Describe briefly the scene at the third level of Grand Central as seen (or seemed to be seen) by Charley.**

*(CBSE 2020)*

**Ans.** The things and persons on the third level were altogether different from those which Charley had seen on the second level of the Grand Central Station, New York. The room was smaller. There were fewer ticket windows and train gates. The information booth in the centre was wood and old looking. There were brass spittoons on the floor. He saw a locomotive which was very small with a funnel-shaped stock. There were open-flame gaslights.

The man in the booth wore a green eyeshade and long black sleeve protectors. Charley saw a man. he wore a derby hat, a black four-button suit with tiny lapels. He had a big, black, handlebar mustache. A woman walked in through the train gate. She wore a dress with leg-of-mutton sleeves and skirts to the top of her high-buttoned shoes. Charley walked over to a newsboy. He was selling 'The World' newspaper. The date printed on the paper was June 11, 1894.

**Q 4. Apparent illogicality sometimes turns out to be a futuristic projection. Discuss.**

**Ans.** At one time, almost all the inventions or discoveries of scientists or discoverers previously seemed illogical. The reason was that people or authorities of their time believed that what they said was illogical.

But when the inventions and discoveries turned out to be true, people and authorities started believing in them as their futuristic projection.

In March, 1878 Edison began to work on an electric lamp. He promised people to give electric light in two years. At this all the scientists laughed at him. They said that it was impossible. At last he succeeded in making an electric bulb. On New Year's Day, 1880 Edison and his workers put up electric lights at his laboratory. People from all over America came to see that grand sight.

Science fiction writers often make predictions which seem illogical but sometimes they turn out to be true. We read about Charley's wandering on the third level of the Grand Central Station, New York in 1894. It seems illogical today. But tomorrow some scientist might invent a time machine which would make it possible to move there freely in the past.

**Q 5. 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?**

**Ans.** Philately is the collection and study of postage stamps. Stamp is an important piece of history. Countries issue new stamps to commemorate important events, persons or developments. Thus, a study of stamps helps keep the past alive.

Museums are the great source which helps keep the past alive. There are collections of old coins, ornaments, weapons, dresses, potteries, paintings; etc.. They remind us of different ages of the past. Historical monuments like temples, mosques, tombs, etc. also remind us of the past.

P.S. Shelley says, "We look before and after, and pine for what is not." When we are not satisfied with the present, we look at past or look hopefully towards the future. One the wings of fancy we travel into the past or fly upward into the future but we have to come down to the present since we have to live in the present.

This account for the human tendency to constantly move between the past, the present and the future.

**Q 6. How can we attain calmness in the present hectic life? Discuss with reference to Charley.**

**Ans.** In today's world of machine, man's life has become so hectic that he can hardly enjoy a moment of peace. Insecurities of war, worry, fear and stress rob man of his peace of mind. So, our subconscious mind constantly forces the invasion of tension and anxiety. Devoid of all thrill and excitement, modern man rather than living life in the real sense of the world, merely goes through the process of existing. In order to get out of this labyrinth, he turns to religions, world of fiction, fantasy, hobbies, sports, music and creativity. These things divert his attention from the harsh realities. Thus, man experiences some sort of relief from his worries. The degree of involvement in such activities ascertains the level of calmness, he attains. The serenity that he experiences for himself saves him from the psychiatric problems caused by stress, strain and apprehensions. As Charley's style of work, the fast pace of life, overwork and subconscious apprehension made him too uneasy and restless. He yearned for peace and tranquility. He turned to philately but the degree of relief that this hobby provided him was not sufficient to calm him down emotionally. So, he redoubled the efforts of his subconscious mind for escape which resulted in his flight to the third level.

**Q 7. In the story, 'The Third Level' by Jack Finney, Charley is obsessed with finding the third level.**

**In an attempt to thrash out whether this obsession is a good quality or a harmful one, Charley's wife expresses her thoughts in a diary entry.**

**As Louisa, Charley's wife, write this diary entry. Support your response with reference to the story. You may begin this way:**

**I have been married to Charley for a few years now and I have always known him to be an intelligent man with an imaginative mind. However, his recent obsession with finding the Third Level has ...**

(CBSE SQP 2023-24)

**Ans.** Friday, 23 June 20XX

8 pm

Dear Diary,

I have been married to Charley for a few years now and I have always known him to be an intelligent man with an imaginative mind. However, his recent obsession with finding the Third Level has left me quite worried. While he talks about it with excitement, I cannot help but wonder if it is a good quality or a harmful one.

On one hand, Charley's obsession displays his determination and persistence in achieving his goals. It shows that he is willing to go to great lengths to unravel the mysteries of life. His imagination and curiosity are admirable qualities that have always attracted me to him.

However, his obsession has caused him to become detached from reality. He is no longer able to differentiate between what is real and what is not. He spends all his time and money searching for a place that may not even exist. This could be harmful not only to himself but also to our family.

I understand that he feels overwhelmed by the stress and pressures of his present life and Sam indicated that he uses his obsession as a coping mechanism. I

think this is harmful as it prevents him from addressing the underlying issues that are causing him stress.

Furthermore, Charley's obsession has caused him to neglect his responsibilities. He has been absent from work and has not been able to contribute financially to our household. His obsession is affecting our relationship, and I am afraid that if he continues on this path, it might lead to irreparable damage.

Finally, all I can say is, I believe that Charley's obsession with finding the Third Level may have started as a harmless curiosity, but it has now become a harmful one. I love him dearly and I hope that he realises that his obsession is affecting not only himself but also those around him.

Louisa



## Chapter Test

### Extract Based Question

Q 1. He nodded at the bills. 'That ain't money, mister', he said, "and if you're trying to skin me, you won't get very far," and he glanced at the cash drawer beside him. Of course the money was old-style bills, half again as big as the money we use nowadays, and different-looking. I turned away and got out fast. There's nothing nice about jail, even in 1894.

(a) Who nodded at the bills?

(b) The bills are:

- |               |                   |
|---------------|-------------------|
| (i) cards     | (ii) money coins  |
| (iii) posters | (iv) money notes. |

(c) Why did the narrator turn away and get out fast?

(d) 'you won't get very far' suggests .....

### Short Answer Type Questions

Q 2. Give a brief description of the third level.

Q 3. What did Sam's letter state?

### Long Answer Type Question

Q 4. What specific differences did Charley notice at the third level of Grand Central?

