

# The Third Level

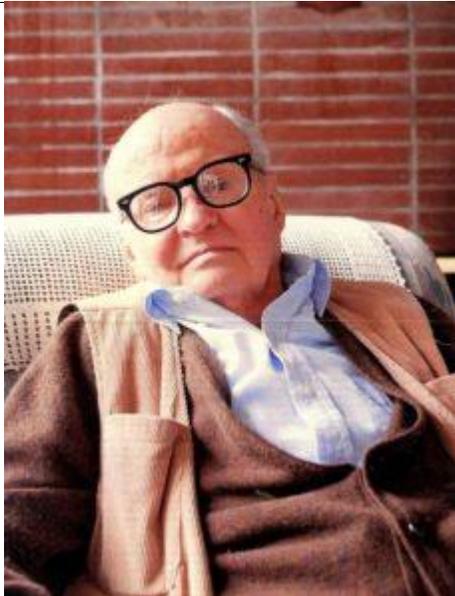
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Jack Finney (2 October 1911-16 November 1995) was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and given the name John Finney. His father died when he was three years old and he was renamed Walter Braden Finney in honour of his father. Yet the nickname Jack remained with him throughout his life. He attended Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois. His best-known works are science fiction and thrillers. Two of his novels, 'The Body Snatchers' and 'Good Neighbor Sam' became the basis of popular films.

<b>Poet Name</b>	Jack Finney
<b>Born</b>	2 October 1911, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, United States
<b>Died</b>	14 November 1995, Greenbrae, California, United States
<b>Awards</b>	World Fantasy Award—Life Achievement
<b>Movies</b>	Invasion of the Body Snatchers, The Invasion



Jack Finney

Jack Finney first showed an interest in time travel in the short-story collection 'The Third Level'. Finney's greatest success came with his science fiction novel 'Time and Again'. Finney died of pneumonia and emphysema at the age of 84, not long after finishing 'From Time to Time', the sequel to 'Time and Again'.

## The Third Level Theme

'The Third Level' is a story that weaves together a psychological journey of the narrator into past, present and moves towards future. There is always a natural human tendency to constantly move between the past, the present and the future. Past, present and future are strategically and organically interconnected.

Man is mortal and has many good and bad aspects of life like love, profit, loss, good, bad, etc. All these aspects tend to affect the human mind. Then existential worries act like a catalyst for making the human mind constantly move between the past, the present and the future. 'The Third Level' is a study of human mind caught in this cycle of time.

When people in the present time want to escape the problems and stress of life, they feel that life, fifty or sixty years ago, was relaxed and they wanted to go back to that time for peace and happiness.

## The Third Level Summary in English

'Charley is convinced that there are three, not just two, levels of Grand Central Station. Charley's psychiatrist Sam Weiner and his friends think his delusion is a 'waking-dream-wish fulfilment' and like his stamp collection, a temporary refuge from a world full of insecurity, fear, war and worry'.

Charley describes how one evening while hurrying home from office he decides to take the subway from Grand Central Station, and gets lost. He eventually finds himself on a strange third level with spittoons, gaslights, an ancient locomotive and people whose appearance and clothes look strange. He realizes that he has somehow gone back in time to 1894, which is confirmed by the newspaper's lead story on President Cleveland.

Charley tries to buy tickets to Galesburg, Illinois, a wonderful town... with big old frame houses, huge lawns and tremendous trees..., and where summer evenings were twice as long and people lived in peace and harmony. But the clerk won't accept his 1950 currency and so he leaves the station.

During his lunch break the next day, Charley withdraws nearly all his savings and buys old-style currency to buy tickets to Galesburg of 1894. But he can never again find the entrance to the third level at Grand Central Station. Charley finds evidence that the third level actually exists when he discovers a letter dated July 18, 1894 addressed to his grandfather at Galesburg, Illinois, from his psychiatrist Sam Weiner who it seems was not skeptical of the third level as he had appeared.

## Character Sketch of Charley in The Third Level

Charley: The protagonist of the story, Charley is a true representative of modern man. He is a victim of stress, insecurity and fear and wants to run away from reality. He is an escapist and wants to escape from the world of harsh realities. He is fond of stamp collection, a hobby, which he takes up to make his leisure hours more productive and fulfilling experience. But his psychiatrist friend calls it a temporary refuge from reality.

He yearns to lead a good simple life of his grandfather's time, when things were pretty nice and peaceful. He quests for the fabulous ordinariness of a bygone age that was free from modern razzle-dazzle, sophistication and material comforts but exudes peace and tranquillity. He wants to go to Galesburg, Illinois, in the year 1894 when the First World War was twenty years off and the Second World War still forty years ahead.

He is an imaginative person. Hence on the wings of his imagination, he takes a flight to the non-existent world – the third level at Central Station. But after finding it once, he and his wife fail to find it again. In short, Charley is the true representative of the modern man who is torn between the pulls and pressures of a hectic modern life and wants to escape since he is not happy.

## Character Sketch of Louisa in The Third Level

Louisa: Louisa is Charley's wife. She is loving and caring towards her husband. However, she is a simple lady and it is not difficult to take her in. She refuses to accept the psychiatrist's observation that her husband is unhappy. She takes this comment as a personal attack and feels 'kind of mad'. On being told the modern world is full of insecurity, fear, etc. she feels satisfied with the psychiatrist explanation.

When Charley talks to her about his predicament regarding the third level, she gets alarmed and advises him not to look for the third level anymore. Her husband's exchanging the new currency with the old one is a cause of concern for her and she tells Charley emphatically to stop looking for it. When Charley tells her about Sam's disappearance, she joins him in looking for the third level every weekend.

## Character Sketch of Sam in The Third Level

Sam, Charley's Psychiatrist friend: Sam is a psychiatrist by profession. He is a typical city boy. When Charley shares his visiting the third level he tells him it is a waking dream wish fulfilment. He tells him that he is looking for ways to escape since he is not happy. But he immediately revises his statement that Charley is a victim of insecurities of modern life. He dubs the argument of narrator's hobby of stamp collection as a temporary refuge from reality. He does not believe in mixing up his profession with his friendship.

He gets fascinated by Charley's description of Galesburg, Illinois, as a wonderful town with big old frame houses, huge lawns, tremendous trees lining the streets. He is also affected by the pulls and pressures of modern life that he thinks of escaping to the peaceful world of

Galesburg of 1894. In the end, he discovers the third level of Grand Central and goes there. He writes a letter from there advising Charley and Louisa to keep finding the third level because it is worth. According to Charley, Sam must have set up his little hay feed and grain businesses as he can't go back to his old business as psychiatrists are redundant in Galesburg of 1894.