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The art of racing in the rain summary

"There is no dishonor in losing the race ... there is only dishonor in not racing because you are afraid to lose.""We are the creators of our own destiny."The Art of Racing in the Rain is a novel by Garth Stein from 2008, about an aspiring racing driver, his dreams and his life struggles. The novel would be a fairly ordinary contemporary tale, except that it is written from the point of view of the main character's dog, a labrador retriever, terrier cross called Enzo. The dog was named after Enz "There is no dishonor in losing the race ... there is only dishonor in not racing because you are afraid to lose.""We are the creators of our own destiny."The Art of Racing in the Rain is a novel by Garth Stein from 2008, about an aspiring racing driver, his dreams and his life struggles. The novel would be a fairly ordinary contemporary tale, except that it is written from the point of view of the main character's dog, a labrador retriever, terrier cross called Enzo. The dog was named after Enzo Ferrari, the founder of the Ferrari corporation.The convention of writing a book from a dog's point of view is not a new one. There are quite a few whimsical and sentimental stories from Victorian novelists, and more recently James Herbert's "Fluke", a full-blown novel in its own right. But whereas "Fluke" had a mystery story embedded in it, The Art of Racing in the Rain is more of a story of domestic ups and downs, with a tragic episode halfway through. It is based partly on Garth Stein's own experience with racing cars (and dogs), and partly that of a close friend who was having family difficulties. Stein himself stopped car racing after having a crash whilst racing in the rain.Underpinning the story, however, is an allegorical element about the journey of life. The idea of how life should be lived was inspired by a 1998 Mongolian TV documentary, "The State of Dogs". The Mongolian belief is that dogs return to this world as humans after they die. The dog Enzo watches the television quite regularly in the story, car races being a particular favourite. He too sees the documentary about Mongolian dogs, and decides to base all his future behaviour on the belief that,"when a dog is finished living his lifetimes as a dog, his next life will be as a man," adding, "I've always felt almost human. I've always known that there is something about me that's different than other dogs." Enzo began to view other dogs in terms of whether they had reached the higher spiritual state, or whether they needed to live a few more dog lives first,"Not all dogs return as men, they say; only those who are ready. I am ready." Enzo often feels trapped in his dog form, and very excited at the prospect of reincarnation. After watching the programme he is absolutely convinced that he will return as a human, and his actions show he is mentally capable of doing all of the things intelligent humans do. But because he is without the ability to speak, he is made incapable; he is merely a dog,"I see green as gray. I see red as black. Does that make me a bad potential person? If you taught me to read and provided for me the same computer system as someone has provided for Stephen Hawking, I, too, would write great books. And yet you don't teach me to read, and you don't give me a computer stick I can push around with my nose to point to the next letter I wish to type. So whose fault is it that I am what I am?"Enzo frequently conveys his messages by other means. He is a human in dog's form, constantly frustrated by his lack of thumbs and abnormally long tongue. His complaints about these do provide some gentle humour,"Those monkey thumbs were meant for dogs. Give me my thumbs you darned monkeys!"He is also in deadly fear of a stuffed toy giraffe, which seems to him to have devilish powers,"the demon, the evil zebra, the dark creature that possessed the stuffed animal ... Trust me when I tell you that devils like the zebra are real. Somewhere the zebra is dancing." Only on one occasion do Enzo's dog instincts overpower his reason. It is a very emotional episode, and all he can do is run and run. Afterwards he feels he has let both himself, and his master, down. The advantage to Enzo in being in a dog's body is that people give away their secrets to him. They always feel safe in disclosing their worries to a "mere dog". He also can anticipate some events before they happen, because of his exceptional sense of smell, and understanding of body language.The story is told in flashback. At the start of the novel Enzo is in constant pain. His joints are stiff, he can barely wag his tail - clearly he is at death's door. Yet his only concern is that his master Denny will not be too hurt about it. Enzo is looking forward to his death because of his belief that after his death he will be reborn as a human. He is excited waiting for this transformation to a human life, and imagines meeting the people he knows and loves when he is in a human body. So the reader knows what is to come, when the story then rewinds to when Enzo is brought home from a puppy farm by a much younger Denny. The novel tells of his early happy years with his master, the boy-meets-girl tale of Denny and Eve Swift, and the consequent routine of happy families in Seattle with their baby Zoe. What we do not yet know is what is going to ruin this domestic harmony enough to make us want to carry on reading about it. And the novel does deal with huge life and death issues. It depicts a lot of contemporary stresses, legal battles, illness, and tragedy in the second half of the book. They are all observed by Enzo, with a view to what he, in his doggy role, can do to help the situation.The novel's weakest points are when Garth Stein places too much emphasis on telling his main story. There is a lot about death and dying. We know that Enzo is extremely intelligent and perceptive, yet the fact that he is a dog is sometimes lost, except at key points, such as when Enzo is not allowed inside the hospital. It feels very much as if this is added on for verisimilitude, and the focus, that the events are viewed by a dog, has been lost.The allegorical parts are an interesting take, but the homespun philosophy does become a little wearing. It is not perhaps as illuminating as the author intended. Denny hopes to be a champion Formula One driver some day and Enzo shares this dream, this love of speed and both physical and emotional control. "Your car goes where your eyes go."One of the most valuable skills that Denny has is his exceptional skill at driving in the rain, not fearing the wet track or skidding. He has the ability to anticipate what will happen next, and taking charge; responding to it before it happens,"If I intentionally make the car do something, then I can predict what it's going to do. In other words it's only unpredictable if I'm not ... possessing ... it."There are quite long parts of the novel where Enzo is philosophising, and using racing as a metaphor for life. It does not really need to be hammered home so insistently. The novel's title itself if a metaphor for life; life can be compared to racing car driving. Events in the novel illustrate that it is about much more than speed alone, that life involves change, acceptance and overcoming hardship too. "I am a racer at heart, and a racer will never let something that has already happened affect what is happening now."But the main message is that living in the moment is crucial; life is about about learning "how to race in the rain", and living to your full potential. As Enzo says,"With your mind power, your determination, your instinct, and the experience as well, you can fly very high ... My soul has learned what it came to learn, and all the other things are just things." ...more The Art of Racing in the Rain by Garth Stein is an unusual novel for more than one reason. What makes the novel unique is that the narrator is a dog named Enzo. It just so happens that Enzo is extremely intelligent and perceptive. In fact, Enzo's thought processes are very much like those of his owner, Denny Swift. Denny Swift is an aspiring race car driver whose dreams of Formula One glory consume all of Denny's energy and focus. Denny and Enzo are best friends from the moment Denny brings Enzo home from the puppy farm in Spangle, Washington until the last few seconds of Enzo's life. The novel is a love story, a story of speed and emotion, change and acceptance - all told through the eyes of a very astute canine. The novel begins at the end of Enzo's life. He is looking back at some of the most critical moments of his existence as a dog and philosophizing about what he has learned on his journey so far. Enzo is old and ill but his spirits are buoyed by the lovely memories he has collected along the way. And even though he is accepting that his time is near, Enzo is nonetheless disappointed that he cannot take his memories into the next life with him. Enzo is convinced that he will be reincarnated as a man, with thumbs. Being a man is Enzo's ultimate dream and there is nothing more important to Enzo than leaving this life and beginning the next life as smoothly and as soon as possible. Enzo narration of the story of their lives features several philosophical monologues in which Enzo uses racing as a metaphor for life. Enzo has learned everything he knows from Denny Swift. Denny hopes to be a champion Formula One someday and Enzo shares this dream. One of the most valuable skills that a race driver can have is the ability to win a race in the rain. Enzo loves television, especially the educational aspects of The Weather Channel. Enzo thinks deeply about the world and his understanding of the truly important aspects of life makes his point of view both refreshing and illuminating. Enzo and Denny are a family until Denny marries Eve and baby Zoë is born. Enzo comes to enjoy his role as protector and confidant to the little family until Eve suddenly becomes ill. Enzo watches as Denny's entire world is turned upside down and he stands to lose everything. Through everything that happens to Denny and his family, Enzo is the observant witness who shares his perspective with the reader while telling the story of his journey with his best friend.

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