



## **Sense Making Faith p 95**



### **Pincher Martin**

**This novel by William Golding is about a man called Christopher 'Pincher' Martin, whose life is characterized by selfishness and greed and which is dominated by a central metaphor of eating and being eaten.**

**The novel opens with Martin fighting for his life in freezing ocean waters having been thrown off his stricken ship. His past (and his future) unfolds as we accompany a story of a huge fight for survival, not on a desert island, but on an inhospitable bare rock.**

**As he forces himself to eat sea anemones (which poison him) Martin's life begins to revisit him. He is a taker, letting nothing stand in his way. He violently takes his friend's girlfriend, just because he wants to. He gets rid of anyone who stands in the way of his ambition, including his friend. He is pursued by the idea of maggots in a box eating each other until just the one huge maggot is left. He is that maggot, determined to survive, never to be devoured, never to be eaten himself.**

**But as he struggles to survive on the island, ready to eat anything to stay alive, tortured by finding a chocolate wrapper in his pocket with just the last taste of sweetness left to torment him, Pincher Martin starts to realize another terrible truth. He tears his mind away from it and occupies himself with more ideas of survival, but the truth keeps coming back to him and threatening to swallow him up. He hopes for human rescuers, but something else is out there. Is it a monster or something else?**

**The truth is that he is dead and that the island on which he clings to life is an illusion formed from his last sensation, that of feeling the teeth in his greedy mouth. The rocky lumps and landscape of his world are just the teeth in his gums, bolstered into rocky reality by the memory of his human life. He suffers, determined not to give up, not to be 'eaten', but God is coming for him and although he will resist God, death and judgement to the last, in the end he must be overcome.**

**Eventually, the reader realizes, the whole story is just an illusion, Pincher Martin's last gasp (quite literally). He was dead from the first page of the book, having never managed to remove his sea boots.**

**Some things to think about:**

- What does this story tell us about human greed?**
- What does this story tell us about the instinct to survive?**
- Do you feel sorry for Christopher Martin?**
- What sort of person is his friend Nathaniel?**
- What is the view of God in this story?**
- Is Christopher Martin a hero?**
- What sort of spiritual journeys are present in the novel?**