

Choke Study Guide

Choke by Chuck Palahniuk

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Plot Summary

Choke is a novel written by the contemporary American author Chuck Palahniuk. It tells the story of the sex obsessed Victor Mancini who pays for his mother's stay in a hospital by going to restaurants and pretending to choke on his food. In between visiting his mother, Victor reflects on his childhood and events that led him to become a self-hating sex addict.

The story begins with Victor going for to sex addiction clinic, held at a local church. Before the class begins, he has sex with fellow addict Nico in the church bathroom. The next day Victor visits his mum at St. Anthony's hospital. She is suffering from Alzheimer's disease and thinks her son is her old lawyer Fred. Victor talks to Dr. Marshall who tells him she needs a stomach tube to keep her alive. Victor goes back to work. He works at a tourist attraction with his friend Denny.

Victor and Denny visit a restaurant. Victor eats down his steak as quickly as possible and begins to choke. The idea is that the person who dislodges the food will feel so good about saving Victor's life they will forever see themselves as his guardian. Victor travels around restaurants doing the same thing, and each time the person who saves his life continues to keep in contact and even sends him money. Victor uses the money to pay for his mother's treatment. The next day Victor visits his mother. She says she has something important say, but forgets what it is.

Victor asks Denny if he can visit his mother and pretend to be him, this way she may tell him her secret. Denny agrees and after work, they set off for the hospital. Denny tells Miss Mancino he is Victor, however she refuses to say anything about her secret until the real Victor leaves. Victor walks to the other side of the ward and talks to Dr. Marshall. Dr. Marshall leads Victor to the chapel where she claims she may have a way of curing his mother, though he may not like it her method. Victor asks what it is and she takes off her clothes.

Denny tells Victor that everything he needs to know about his mother's secret is in her diary. Unfortunately, she wrote the diary in Italian. When he visits his mother again, she is rapidly going downhill. Dr. Marshall says if Victor gets her pregnant he can save his mother. She says she can inject her fetus into his mother's brain, curing any damage. Victor says he would prefer to get her diary translated from Italian into English. Dr. Marshall tells him she studied Italian for four years.

Dr. Marshall tells Victor she thinks his mother was delusional. Her diary claims Victor is the son of the Holy Trinity. Victor asks what she means and Dr. Marshall says according to the diary Victor is Jesus. She continues to say her mother stole an ancient foreskin from under a priest's bed and used it to impregnate herself. Both Victor and Dr. Marshall think his mother is insane.

Victor visits Denny. Denny is now unemployed, but he is building a wall with the huge number of rocks he has collected. Victor tells him he needs a work permit and Denny



says people do not need a permit for a baby so why should I need one for a wall. A while later Victor gets a telephone call from Dr. Marshall. She tells him that she has checked the information in his mother's diary and it is all true. Victor is Jesus.

This new development in Victor's life puts him off sex as he seems to think he should now be a good person. However, he is not entirely comfortable with being a savior. He talks to Denny about the situation, saying maybe that Jesus grew into his role. While they are talking, Victor gets a call from the hospital. They tell him his mother is dying.

Victor goes to the shop to buy his mother some puddings and sets off for the hospital. At the hospital, his mother finally recognizes him as Victor. He tells her he knows her secret and everything is okay. His mother apologizes, but Victor says he is able to cope with the pressure of being Jesus. His mother looks at him strangely and tells him the secret was that she stole Victor from his pram while his real mother's back was turned. She then pretended he was her child so she could stay in America. Victor is telling her she is delusional, when she chokes on her pudding. Dr. Marshall runs in to resuscitate her, but it is too late and she dies. At this point Dr. Marshall admits she lied to Victor and she is really a patient at the hospital.

Victor goes to see Denny who is still building his wall. When he gets there, hundreds of people are chanting his name. Earlier he had appeared on television in support Denny's wall and he now realizes his mad rant had a positive impact and half of the people have come with stones to help complete the wall. Unfortunately, the other half seem to think Victor is a fake and they have come to attack him. Victor closes his eyes and Denny's wall collapses. A few hours later, everyone has disappeared apart from Denny, his girlfriend Beth and Victor. A car appears and Dr. Marshall climbs out. The four of them put together Denny's wall.



1-5

1-5 Summary

The book begins telling the reader not to bother reading the book. He recalls a tale about a young boy with an eccentric mother who in between spells in jail takes him from motel room to motel room. This is not the ideal upbringing, but the narrator wonders why the boy puts up with her antics and suggests it is because he is a pathetic loser. Towards the end of the first chapter, the reader guesses the kid is the narrator. He tells the reader the story is not about anyone that is brave or kind, but the story of an addict.

The narrator arrives at a church where he meets Nico. She hands him her panties and the two of them walk into the building. They are here for a sex addicts meeting and the narrator tells the reader some of the people that go to the meeting and their stories. He says these people are not mythological, but real life legends. The narrator sees the cleaner and she tells him the meeting tonight is in the Sunday school room. Instead of going into the meeting, Nico leads the narrator into the women's bathroom and they have sex on the tiled floor. The narrator explains what sex addiction is and says he does not come to the meetings to get over his problem, but because here he finds contacts, tips and techniques he could never think up on his own.

The narrator visits his mum in hospital. Here the reader finds out his name is Victor Mancini. Victor states how his mother is getting so forgetful she rarely recognizes him. However, in the past when she did recognize him, she would only talk to him for 10 minutes before she got tired. Sometimes she recognizes him as her old lawyer Fred. On these occasions, she seems to be able to talk forever. Victor talks to the doctor about his mother's condition. The doctor says she will need a food tube inserted into her stomach otherwise she will die.

Victor is working at a tourist attraction, which recreates 18th century America. Victor is dressed as an Irish servant. He is standing by his friend Denny who has to spend time in the stocks. Victor explains that anyone caught doing or wearing anything that does not correspond to the period has a choice of banishment or two days in the stocks. Denny was caught chewing gum, but previous crimes include one of the female workers whistling an Erasure tune. Victor suggests they should be more worried about what their workers do behind their employer's backs. He claims the miller is a crystal meth addict, the seamstress is a heroin addict and the innkeeper supplies the high school kids with acid.

Victor talks about how he got into pornography. As a child, he moved from foster home to foster home and the only thing that remained a constant in his life was the Internet. His favorite site had a film of a man having hot chestnuts put up his backside by a monkey. As a damaged boy, Victor says he appreciated the courage and confidence this took.



1-5 Analysis

From the beginning, Victor confesses he is a loser and his self-hatred continues through the book. He blames his feelings of inadequacy on his mother and opens his narrative with his mother leaving him standing half-naked in the snow. This opening chapter shows how much his early years shaped the rest of his life. For example, he says his mother took him to a restaurant where he choked on a corn dog. He loves the attention he receives from both his mother and the other customers and spends the rest of his life trying to recreate the feeling. In proceeding chapters, Victor goes to restaurants and pretends to choke until somebody saves his life. He also tries to make up for the lack of attention through sex. In this section, he has sex with a woman called Nico just before he attends a sex addict class. Again, Victor blames his sex addiction on his early years. As a child, he says the only constant in his life was Internet pornography.

Nico and Victor's relationship does not go beyond sex. This allows Victor to continue hating who he is, a feeling he seems to need in his life as much as he needs people to notice him. By hating himself, Victor has an excuse for being an addict and attending the clinic, one of the few things providing his life with substance. The other thing that gives his life substance is paying for his mother's stay in hospital. In later chapters, Dr. Marshall says she may have a way of curing his mother from Alzheimer. However, Victor has no interest in curing her because he then knows she will no longer need him.



6-10

6-10 Summary

Victor goes to see his mum again. She still thinks he is Fred, but just before he goes she calls out his real name and says she needs to talk to him about something important. Victor sits down and she is just going into her story when something distracts her and she presses the nurse's bell. When Victor leaves, Dr. Marshall comes up and asks what he would say if she could restore his mother's mind. Victor tells her "god forbid" and leaves. Victor visits again and his mother thinks he is Fred. She starts talking about how Victor has wasted his life and a promising career as a doctor. Victor argues back as Fred. He says, maybe her son dropped out of medical school to look after her.

Victor is at a crowded restaurant with Denny. He is eating his steak as fast possible so that he will choke. The idea is that someone will rush forward and save him from certain death. From past experience Victor knows they will be grateful to Victor for making them a hero and for a long time after they will write him birthday cards, phone him up to make sure he is okay and send him money. In fact, the whole charade is so he can make a decent life for himself beyond all the cash he has to spend to keep his mother alive.

Victor goes to see his mother. He says the place is not exactly a hospital, but a care center for the elderly. Most of them are losing their minds and to keep them in the ward they are each fitted with a magnetic bracelet. If they try to leave, the magnet inside, triggers the lock in all the doors so they cannot escape. Victor explains how all the old women think he is responsible for a something happening in their life. One woman called Eva thinks Victor is her older brother and tells him to stop hurting her. One day she accuses him, as her brother Colin, of raping her. Victor admits yes he did, but it was such a long time ago and they were both so young she should forgive him. Eva breaks down and says she does forgive him. Does Colin still love her? Victor says he does and then looks at his watch, thinking if his mother does not finish her shower soon, he will be late for work.

Victor reflects on his childhood. He is in a shopping mall with his foster mother when a voice came across the tannoy asking Dr.Ward to meet his wife in the cosmetic department of Woolworth's. Victor knows it is his mother's signal to meet and he tells his foster mom he is just going to the toilet. He meets his mother and she asks him if he likes his foster mom. He says he does not and his mother says that is good because later she is going to tell him all the filthy things his foster mother has done to him. Victor and his mother leave the shopping mall to catch a train.

Victor sees his mum at the care center. As usual, she thinks he is someone else and asks how Victor is. Victor says he does not want to break her heart and therefore it is best he says nothing. His mother says she should tell Victor the truth about himself. Victor says he is all ears, but his mother says she cannot tell him when she does not



know who he is. Victor says he can fetch Victor in a matter of minutes, but she says she cannot tell him to his face. In the end, Victor pretends he is his father and his mother breaks down crying.

6-10 Analysis

Choke has an episodic structure, each chapter taking place in one setting. This section begins at the hospital, moves onto a scene in a restaurant, back to the hospital, a flashback of Victor's childhood and then another scene at the hospital. Within these scenes very little happens in terms of plot development and often Victor will go on a tangent. This serves to show Victor as person capable of far more. For example, the reader knows from this chapter that he has dropped out of medical school and uses all of his knowledge to con people. At the restaurant, he shows a deep knowledge of how the body works, scattering medical terms that few people could know. His knowledge of how people think is also impressive. At the restaurant, he describes in detail why people need to feel heroic and the reasons why they continue to look after him once they have saved him. This also further proves Victor's need for attention as it is obvious he has the self-knowledge to get over his problems. In this section, Palahniuk hints at what Victor's problem is. When he goes to visit his mother, she tells him she has a secret to tell. It is this secret Victor strives to uncover for the rest of the novel.



11-15

11-15 Summary

Back at Victor's work, the bosses lock Denny in the stocks for still having a nightclub stamp on the back of his hand. Victor talks to him about the care center, the old ladies and all the nurses he wants to have sex with. He tells Denny that his mother has a big secret she is keeping from him because she thinks he is her old lawyer. He wants Denny to come with him to the hospital and pretend to be him.

In his house Victor tries to decide which restaurant he should choke at next. He has crossed out all the restaurants he has been to in red ink. Victor reflects on all the people that have saved him from choking and all the checks they sent him. So far, in his hero book, he has 300 names. Most of the money he receives goes towards his mother's care at the hospital and he talks about how his mother came from Italy to study medicine and then decided to stay when she had Victor. He once asked her about his grandparents and she said they do not need to know about him so do not go making any trouble. Eventually he chooses a restaurant by closing his eyes and dropping his finger randomly on a name.

Denny and Victor visit the hospital. At reception, Denny is too hot and takes off some of his clothes. He leaves them at the front desk and they go to see Victor's mother. Denny pretends to be Victor and Victor's mother falls for the trick. She clasps his hands and asks why it has taken him so long to come and see her. Victor reminds her that she has something important to tell to her son, but she will not say anything until she is alone with her boy. Victor walks to the other side of the ward and watches as his mother tells Denny her secret.

Dr. Marshall asks to see Victor. She takes him to the hospital chapel where she says she knows of a way to save his mother, but Victor may not like it. He asks what it is and she takes off her clothes. Victor says he is a recovering sex addict and he has been sober for the last two days and Dr. Marshall tells him he will have to begin his recovery tomorrow.

Victor reflects back to his childhood. One day at school, he gets a telephone call telling him he has to go to the dentist with his foster mum. However, Victor knows this is the signal to meet his mother. Victor and his mother drive dangerously through the traffic. She tells her son to forget everything he has learned at school and remember only what she tells him. She continues to say the important things to remember include when you are at such places as a hospital and a nurse calls for Dr. Blue. This, she says, means someone has committed suicide. Similarly, if you are in a store and a member of staff calls "Sheila to the front," it means someone is shoplifting at the front of the store. At a traffic light, Victor's mother falls asleep. She wakes up amidst the blaring of car horns, and an announcement on the radio that she has kidnapped her son. Immediately they



climb out of the car and make their escape. Victor's mother says they will have 30 days of adventure or until her credit card runs out.

11-15 Analysis

Victor has a very complex relationship with his mother. He does not seem to particularly like her, but at the same time feels a need to look after her and is hurt when she does not recognize him. In this section, Victor persuades Denny to pretend that he is Victor, so she will tell him her secret. However, she will only tell Denny when Victor goes away. Later on, Victor acts jealous that Denny is the one she told and refuses to listen to what she had said. At the same time, despite his jealousy, he only wants his mother around so she can give him closure on his problems. Palahniuk shows this closure is important to Victor by the way he gives all the Alzheimer patients closure in their own lives. They all blame him for a problem from their past and Victor always takes complete responsibility, which for most of the patients are highly appreciative.

However, this novel has a real sense of over-exaggeration—the more the novel goes on the less the reader feels he can trust Victor's narration. In this regard, the reader wonders how much of what Victor says is merely symbolic. For example, would nurses allow Victor to talk to the patients as he does? Moreover, would they allow a relationship to develop between Victor and Dr. Marshall? In this section, Dr. Marshall, who we later find out is an patient, takes Victor into the chapel to have sex. Nurses may not have seen this happen, but according to Victor, he has quite a reputation among them so they are likely to have been more careful. From this perspective, and in light of his addiction, the book could be part of his therapy. In fact at the end novel he says part of his therapy is to keep a notebook, telling the police it contains "what we say when we can't tell the truth."



16-20

16-20 Summary

Victor and Denny are at strip club examining young ladies. Victor is the doctor, whilst Denny is sketching them on a pad. Victor notices one of the girls has a mole and he tells her it is probably cancerous. In between talking to the women, Denny is trying to tell Victor what his mother told him, but Victor does not seem interested. Eventually Denny tells him that everything he needs to know about his father is in his mother's diary.

Back at St. Anthony's hospital, Victor chats to the girl at the front desk. She looks tired and Victor offers to take her for a cup of coffee. She says not with you, but asks Victor to keep an eye on the desk while she goes to the café by herself. Victor agrees and sits at the desk playing with the security camera. He finds his mother and Dr. Marshall talking and listens into their conversation. His mother says she has wasted all her life, spending most of it protesting about nothing. Dr. Marshall says, how about your son? Was he not worth all the trouble? Victor's mother says parenthood is the opiate for the masses.

Victor visits his mother again. She is losing a lot of weight and is rapidly going downhill. Dr. Marshall says she is dying and at 62 she is too young to die. With this in mind, she asks why Victor will not do anything to save her. She says he can save his mother by having sex with her and asks why he ran away from her at the chapel. The other nurses have told her he has no hang ups about sex so he must have some other reason. Victor admits he does not necessarily want his mother to get better. At the same time, he does not want her to die either because he has a need for her to feel dependent on him. Dr. Marshall tells him he does not want the old version of his mother because she is too strong for him. Victor says in all honesty, all he wants is an Italian speaker who can translate his mother's diary.

Victor is at work with Denny, cleaning out the chicken and cowsheds. Denny has a newspaper with him and he points to an ad that he says his parents wrote. It says they are looking for a home for a house trained, ex-self abuser, meaning Denny. He asks Victor if he can stay at his house, but Victor does not bother answering. Instead, he asks Denny if he would ever consider having sex with a girl just because she wanted to get pregnant. He continues to tell Denny that Dr. Marshall wants to have sex with him so she can get pregnant. However, she does not want to keep the baby, but use the fetus to restore his mother's mind. Apparently, doctors can inject a fetus into a patient brain and cure any damage. Doctors never do it because of the potential controversy, but Dr. Marshall likes his mother and wants to help.



16-20 Analysis

Though Victor gives the reader the impression he embellishes the truth, many of the embellishments relate to the development of his character and very little drives the plot forward. This is particularly the case when he reflects back to his childhood. At the end of this section, he talks about his mother's job as a hypnotist. She would help her patients imagine having sex with famous celebrities; her sessions become so popular that men from all over the country would come to see her. Again, this acts as a metaphor for Victor's later problems.

However, such moments also force the reader to question where Palahniuk is going. As the novel becomes increasingly bizarre, the reader presumes that the secret his mother holds is explosive. In the end, it is nothing of the sort, but by making readers think it is, Palahniuk keeps them reading. In this section, Palahniuk plants the idea that there is some conspiracy going on between Dr. Marshall and Victor's mother as Victor listens in to their conversation at the front desk. They say nothing of any importance, but such moments create the impression something is happening Victor does not know about. This keeps the reader interested.



21-25

21-25 Summary

Denny arrives at Victor's house holding what looks like a baby. Victor gave him the idea of pretending to carry a baby so he would get more attention. However, it is not a baby, but a rock wrapped in a blanket. Denny collects rocks for each day he is sober and has cleverly combined the two ideas.

Victor goes to see Dr. Marshall to ask her what was in the diary. Dr. Marshall says from what she can understand, his mother was delusional before he was born. She says the diary says Victor's father is the Holy Trinity. Victor has no idea what she means and Dr. Marshall says his mother thinks Victor is the second coming of Christ.

Victor again reflects back to his childhood. His mother takes him on a walk around a town, taking alcohol left for slugs and smelling the inside of petrol tanks. In between, she takes drugs through a small tube. She says her goal in life is to uncomplicate herself.

Dr. Marshall tells Victor what his mother wrote in her diary. She says his mother came from Italy already pregnant. In her home country, she never wanted to get married, but someone promised her a miracle which she presumed would be a child. One day a friend stole an ancient foreskin from under a priest's bed, and she used it to impregnate herself. Both Dr. Marshall and Victor say his mother was crazy. After Dr. Marshall has finished, one of the old ladies tells Victor he is the man her son saved from choking. She says she knows he is a fake, but Victor must be someone special to go to those extremes to make people feel good. Victor calls her a lunatic. He says he is not nice person and everyone should stop making him think he is Jesus. Grabbing Dr. Marshall, he drags her to the chapel to have sex on the altar.

Victor reflects on a time his foster mother took him to the police station. The police say his mother has been causing trouble by writing letters saying she has given people sexual diseases. The fire alarm goes off, but still the police press Victor on his mother's whereabouts. In reply, Victor asks if he can go to the bathroom.

21-25 Analysis

The previous sections show that Victor blames his upbringing for his problems. In this section he not only continues this theme, but also indicates he can only relate to similar unstable personalities. His friend Denny arrives at his house holding a rock, pretending it is a baby, and then only to get a seat on the bus. Furthermore, Denny collects rocks and the reader will see in the next chapter, the hobby has taken over from his sex addiction and become a problem in itself. Dr. Marshall comes across as the only sane character Victor develops a good relationship with. However, she proves him wrong

when she eventually tells him she is not a doctor, but a patient and everything she has said is a lie.

However, one of the major themes of this book, and something Victor refers to, is the Oedipal complex. By the end, the reader finds this is one of the running jokes of the book, but here Palahniuk sets up the joke by first saying Victor was an immaculate conception, and second showing Victor taking Dr. Marshall to have sex with her on the altar. Victor makes out that he wants to prove he is not Jesus, but a nasty piece of work, capable of great sin, yet really it symbolizes his obsession with his mother and the need to discover who she really is. The joke is that Miss Mancini is not his mother at all. Palahniuk is suggesting a person can become emotionally dependent on anyone if that person is the one who shapes his or her life. By the end of the book, Palahniuk shows Dr. Marshall to be similar to Miss. Mancini's personality and the woman with whom he suggests Victor will form a stable relationship.



26-30

26-30 Summary

Victor and Denny walk around the local neighborhood, drinking beer whilst pushing along a baby stroller. Inside the stroller and wrapped in blankets is Denny's granite rock. Every now and then the two men jump into someone's garden and take the beer left for the slugs and snails. Victor states it is such a rich neighborhood even the beer left for garden pests is imported from Germany or Mexico. Denny asks if Victor actually had sex on the altar with Dr. Marshall. Victor says he did not and thinks he likes her too much. He asks Denny if he thinks he has a resemblance to Jesus Christ and Denny says no.

Victor is hiding in a closet with a pair of pantyhose on his head, holding a knife. He is waiting for a girl to come out of the shower so he can rape her. Earlier in a bookshop, he met a woman called Gwen and she asked him if he could rape her by knife point. She now walks out of the shower and Victor jumps out of the closet. Gwen immediately tells him off for ruining her pantyhose, as it was not part of the agreement. Victor thinks back to the ground rules she wrote out for him earlier in the café. First she said if he cut her, even accidentally, she would call the police, second he cannot use the bathroom, third he cannot stay the night, fourth he cannot ask if he is hurting her and finally if he wants to masturbate he has to do it on the towel she will lay out. Gwen screams for him to stop raping her and he steps away. However, she says it is part of the act and shouts at him not for not raping her properly. In the end Victor gets so tired of the situation he ejaculates all over her bedroom, leaving via the window.

Denny has moved into Victor's house. He has developed an obsession with rocks. He claims he only collects one rock a day as a celebration of his sobriety. However, Victor knows this is the lie of a junkie and his fridge, microwave and basement are full of them. One day a policeman escorts Denny to Victor's house. The policeman recognizes Victor as the person he once saved from choking and asks if there is anything he can do to help. Victor gives him the address of someone he does not like.

Victor looks back at the time his mother took him to the zoo and she decided they should liberate the animals. Victor thought this meant opening the cages and setting them free. He asks his mum if she has the keys and she says she has something better. She takes a handful of LSD from her pocket and throws it into the monkey cage.

26-30 Analysis

Throughout the book Victor is trying to get away from who he is and this is the reason why he so readily accepts he could be Jesus. Like Palahniuk's use of the Oedipal complex, this works both to make a joke and a serious point. The reader laughs that Victor is so open to manipulation, particularly as he seems so highly educated. Yet



within the humor Palahniuk is showing the desperation of a self-hating addict who paints such a strange upbringing the reader can believe he is pretty much open to anything. For example, in this section, Victor describes Denny's rock obsession as if it is no big deal.

However, Victor's goal as a character is not necessarily to develop into an amazing person, but to accept and appreciate who he is. Here he shows himself most happy when he does things that remind him of his early years. As he walks around the town with Denny, drinking the beer left for slugs, he is relaxed enough to ask if looks like Jesus. In the next chapter, a woman asks him to rape her. He appreciates the concept of raping someone who requests to be raped, but the ground rules she lays down are contrary to his more spontaneous character and he cannot go through with it. He shows she cannot hold him back by breaking one of her rules and ejaculating all over her room.



31-35

31-35 Summary

At St. Anthony's hospital Victor tells the girl at the front desk her tires look flat. While she goes to check them, Victor looks at the monitor. Again, he finds Dr. Marshall and his mother and listens into their conversation. His mother wishes she did something more with her life and shows admiration that Dr. Marshall had the motivation to train to be a doctor. Dr. Marshall says it was something to do.

Victor is having sex with Leeza in the janitor's cupboard, just before the sex addict class begins. She says he is hurting her and asks what he is trying to prove. Victor says he does not want people to think he is too nice. Back at Victor's house, the reader discovers more about his personal life. He listens to his mother's sex tapes that she made when she was a sex hypnotist. The tapes help Victor imagine he is having sex with historical figures such as Anais Nin. Victor has lived with Denny for a month, but rarely sees him as he has been busy with his daily schedule of girls. His Friday girl Tanya is a prisoner at the local jail and after their session, Victor has to sign her release form.

After work, Victor goes to see Denny at his new house. Denny is building a wall with his stones. Cherry Daiquiri, the dancer from the strip club, sits under a nearby tree. Denny says her real name is Beth. Victor asks why Denny is building a wall, starting an argument about needing permits. Denny says people do not need a permit to write a book or a permit to have a baby so why should he need a permit to build a house. He calls it freedom of expression. He suggests a badly brought up child could be just as dangerous as a badly built house and Victor angrily asks if he is talking about him. Denny suggests Victor should go and see his mother.

Victor receives an answering machine message from Dr. Marshall. She says all the facts in his mother's diary check out. Dr. Marshall's husband comes into the room and she says she needs to go.

31-35 Analysis

Choke is not necessarily about Victor finding himself, but getting over himself. Until then, Victor's life will not move forward. He will continue going to the sex clinic, seeing the same women, working at a tourist attraction and choking at restaurants. This would not be a problem if Victor was not such a spontaneous person who needs freedom in his life. Palahniuk symbolizes this freedom with the wall Denny starts to build in this section. Victor asks Denny if he has a permit and Denny questions why he should need one, saying he has a right to express himself.

Interestingly Victor reacts angrily to Denny's claim that a badly brought up child is more dangerous than a badly built wall, showing true bitterness towards his upbringing. In fact



Palahniuk shows that, by finally acknowledging his anger, Victor begins to move forward . At the beginning of this section, Victor watches his mother and Dr. Marshall on camera, but neither Victor nor the reader learns anything important. Similarly, the following chapter is all about Victor's routine and the girls he meets during the week. However, when Denny pinpoints his problem, Palahniuk suddenly pushes the plot forward. In the final chapter in this section Dr. Marshall phones him up to tell him she has contacted his mother's fertility clinic and from here the novel picks up pace. Dr. Marshall tells Victor he is probably Jesus, Victor does not want sex with Nico, he appears on television, he finally finds out the truth from his mother, his mother dies, the police arrest him on rape charges and he gets together with Paige Marshall. At the end of the novel he is helps Denny rebuild his wall, showing he has finally found freedom.



36-40

36-40 Summary

Victor visits his mother. She is in a bad way, lying in bed looking as thin and vulnerable as a child. She still thinks he is her old lawyer Fred and tells him she wants to see Victor. She raises a shaking hand towards Dr. Marshall and asks if she loves her son. After a pause, Dr. Marshall says yes. She asks Victor if he loves Dr. Marshall and he says yes as well. It is a shame, she says, Victor will never be able to love anybody. Dr. Marshall takes Victor to go to the chapel for a chat. She says all the facts in his mother's diary check out. Victor asks if she truly believes he is the second coming and Doctor Marshall says it would not surprise her. Every time he talks to a patient they become very peaceful.

Victor is having sex with Ursula. She tells Victor she saw Denny on television and people have been complaining about the wall Denny is building because they think he is going to build a church. Ursula thinks it is disgusting people cannot do what they want. Victor is having problems with his bowels and asks Ursula to listen to his stomach.

Denny has too much wax in his ear and Victor cleans it out. He rolls up a piece of paper, inserts it into Denny's ear, and then lights it with a match. After a few moments, he removes a wax-covered piece of paper. As he works, he talks to Denny about Jesus. He wonders if Jesus had to learn his trade as a savior and that if he always knew he was special.

Victor meets Nico before the sex addict class. She undoes her bra and hands it to him, but Victor says he cannot have sex with her anymore. Nico pushes him against the wall, but Victor says he has had enough and needs to get off the fourth step. He goes to the class and introduces himself as a sex addict. Nico calls him a loser and storms out of the building.

36-40 Analysis

In this section, Marshall tells Victor he is probably Jesus. Victor takes this literally and for the first time actively changes his life. At the end of the section, he refuses sex and tells Nico he needs to get off the fourth step of the sex addict program. At this point, the reader wonders how long Victor has been on the fourth step, because when he enters the class he has to introduce himself. It seems the claim he is Jesus has led to a rebirth of his character.

However, the reader wonders if his mother and Dr. Marshall are not working together to bring Victor out of his rut. Certainly there are indications Victor thinks something is wrong because he has twice spied on their conversations. From this point of view, the story about Victor being Jesus is just a strange way of making him realize he is not a bad person. In this section, his mother asks Dr. Marshall if she loves Victor and she

says yes. She then turns to her son and asks if he loves Dr. Marshall. It is as if her last desire is to find happiness for her son before she dies. Yet, like so much in the novel, it proves a red herring and only there to keep the reader interested. Palahniuk has to keep the reader interested somehow because the point of the novel seems to be that the reality of life is dull and uninspiring.



41-45

41-45 Summary

Victor is on television supporting Denny's construction. Beth has videotaped it and the three of them watch Victor's performance. On film, he looks very ill and while he watches, Beth takes his temperature. The film crew asks Denny what he is building and he says he will not know until he puts the last stone into place. The phone rings and Beth answers. It is the hospital to say Victor needs to see his mother right away.

Victor buys his mum lots of puddings from the store and goes to visit her. As Victor feeds her one of the puddings, he tells her he knows the truth about his birth and that he is Jesus Christ. His mother looks at him and asks what he talking about. Victor reassures her, saying he will learn to cope with the pressure of being a savior. His mother says he has completely misunderstood and she actually stole him from outside a shop. She says she is sorry, but she needed an excuse to stay in America. Victor tells her she is delusional. Suddenly his mother goes into a fit and Dr. Marshall runs over to resuscitate her. Victor screams it's okay, he is Jesus and commands her to live.

Not only does Victor's mother die, but he finds out Dr. Marshall is an inmate at the hospital. Everything she said was a fabrication, including that she likes him. Victor thinks he has murdered his mother, but Dr. Marshall tells him she will take responsibility and leads him to the elevators. She tells him not to tell anybody he was at the hospital. Later at work, a woman accuses Victor of raping her mother. Victor thinks she means Gwen and tells her she asked him to rape her. The woman is enraged and says her mother is in her nineties. Victor must be a very depraved man. The police arrive and take a confused Victor away.

Victor reflects on what Paige Marshall told him earlier. She said she was both a doctor and an inmate. Her crime was that she told the truth about being a genetics doctor from the year 2556. She had traveled back in time to find a man to impregnate her. She will use the fetus to cure her world of a plague. Victor takes a pen from the front of her jacket and traces her outline. When Paige asks what he is doing, Victor says, "just in case you are real."

41-45 Analysis

In this section, Victor buys his mother many puddings and feeds them to her. Feeding her so much food is reminiscent of how he chokes himself in restaurants and the reader questions whether he actually purposely kills his mother. Palahniuk further suggests he kills her in the next section when, as a child, he says he will try to get his mother out of his life when they get to a restaurant. At the same time, it seems Victor is trying to prove not only his theory he is Jesus, but also his theory that people feel great when they save

someone's life. Victor does not save her and walks away from the hospital an unhappy man.

However, it is not his mother's death that upsets him, but that Dr. Marshall has lied. This shows Victor finally has the closure in his life he needs, but unfortunately it has not lead to any feeling of happiness. Instead he has found the woman he has fallen in love does not like him.



45-49

45-49 Summary

At the police station, the police are reading Victor's diary. They tell him Paige Marshall has vanished from the hospital and ask if he knows of her whereabouts. Victor says he has no idea, picks up a dime coin and swallows it. He does not choke so he picks up a paper clip and swallows that as well. A policewoman brings him a burger and fries and Victor stuffs it down and begins to choke. However at this point the police know he is a conman and leave him to it.

Victor reflects back to when he was a child. He is waiting at the bus stop with his foster mom. A school bus arrives and he gets on, waving goodbye to her. When he turns, he sees that the driver is his mom. She tells him she wants Victor to learn how to create his own reality and hands him a pen and paper, asking Victor to draw the mountains in the distance. Victor says he plans to get his mother out of his life forever as soon as they stop at a restaurant.

Back at the police station, a detective is trying to save Victor from choking. As he thumps him in the chest, two beads fall from his backside followed by a pile of feces. The detective holds Victor and says everything will be all right.

Victor goes to see Denny. Hundreds of people are standing around with rocks they have brought to help Denny complete his wall. Denny tells Victor people have been asking about him all day because he looked so ill on the television. Suddenly people begin chanting Victor's name and someone turns on their car lights, spotting him. Victor sees the crowd is half full of people who want to help him and half full of people who know the truth about him. Preparing to be attacked, Victor closes his eyes and Denny's building falls down around him. Denny hold something up to Victor's nose, tells him to sniff and Victor passes out. When he wakes a sees Paige Marshall stepping out of a car. Victor, Denny, Paige and Beth collect the scattered rocks and rebuild Denny's wall.

45-49 Analysis

In this final section, everything Victor has done comes out into the open when the police read his diary. Interestingly Palahniuk symbolizes this when the police unwittingly unblock the anal beads stuck up his backside, resulting in Victor's bowels letting loose. For the first time Victor is free of all the crap in his life and celebrates it by meeting up with the only three people he can relate to, Denny, Beth and Paige Marshall. However, Palahniuk shows his life is still unlikely to run smoothly when a crowd of people knocks Denny's wall down, his symbol of freedom. Together the three characters put the wall back together, showing that if they want their freedom they will have to fight for it.



Characters

Victor Mancini

Victor is the narrator and main character of the novel. He seems to lack a lot of self-confidence and from the very beginning says the reader will not like his character. However, his ideas about himself do not correspond with who he really is and Palahniuk suggests he is more of an attention seeker than a bad person. This search for attention comes from his childhood when he moved between foster parents while his mother was either in jail or in a mental asylum. The only time he saw his mother was on the occasions she kidnapped him. Victor demonstrates his self-hatred when he reflects back to these times, referring to his younger self as an idiot.

He grows up addicted to sex. Every day he has a different partner and even sponsors female prisoners so he can have sex with them on day release. He attempts to get over his addiction by going to a sex addiction clinic, but he admits all he has found there are new sex partners. At the clinic, he meets his best friend Denny. They work together at a tourist attraction where Victor teaches children about 18th century life.

Victor uses the sex as an excuse for ignoring any deeper feelings and particularly feelings of guilt. For example, he runs a scam at restaurants where he pretends to choke on his food. He knows the person who saves him will feel forever responsible for Victor's well being, sending him money and gifts. However, during the book Victor shows signs he wants to get over whatever is making him miserable. and jumps at the chance of hearing his mother's secret. Unfortunately, in the process he leaves himself open to manipulation from Dr. Marshall who tells him he is Jesus Christ. He so badly wants to believe her claim he is Jesus Christ that when his mother says he is not, he says she is delusional.

Dr. Paige Marshall

Dr. Paige Marshall is a patient at the St. Anthony's hospital who the nurses allow to wear a doctor's uniform. She fools Victor into thinking she is a real doctor, claiming if Victor impregnates her she can inject the fetus into Ida's head and restore her mind. Victor is not interested in restoring his mother's mind. He would prefer to translate her Italian diary so he can discover his father's identity. Dr. Marshall claims she can read Italian and says the diary states Victor was an immaculate conception.

At the end of the book, Paige admits she lied to him. However, she says she is a real doctor who is in hospital because she was stupid enough to tell the truth. Basically, she has traveled back in time from 2556 to find a man to impregnate her. Once she goes back home, she can use the fetus to destroy the plague that is currently sweeping through her world.



When Victor accidentally kills his mother, Paige helps him to escape and then later escapes herself. At the end of the book, she drives to meet Victor and helps him rebuild Denny's wall. Here Palahniuk suggests the beginnings of a relationship between her and Victor.

Ida Mancini

Ida is Victor's 62-year-old mother. Despite her relative youth, she is an Alzheimer's patient at St. Anthony's hospital. Victor visits her frequently, but she usually gets him confused with her old lawyer Fred.

Victor claims his mother was a bad influence on him as a child. She first came to America from Italy to train as a doctor, but for an unexplained reason she left medical school. Victor was her green card and she managed to set up home in the United States. Unfortunately, Ida has an unstable personality and spends her time either in prison or in a mental hospital. Victor recalls moments she would kidnap him from his foster parents and take him on wild adventures, such as the time she took him to the zoo and fed the monkeys LSD.

In the story Victor tries to get his mother to tell him who his real father is. She tells his friend Denny everything Victor needs to know is in her diary. Unfortunately, she wrote the diary in Italian. Dr. Paige Marshall translates it as reading that Victor's birth was an immaculate conception and that he is Jesus Christ. When Victor confronts his mother about it, she tells him she stole him from a baby stroller outside a shop.

Denny

Denny is Victor's best friend. They met at the sex addict clinic where Denny was seeking treatment for his addiction to masturbation. During the novel, they work together at a tourist attraction that attempts to recreate the 18th century. The rules at work are very strict and bosses do not allow workers to have anything upon their person that relates to the modern era, otherwise they face banishment or a day in the stocks. Denny finds this rule difficult to adhere to and spends most of his time locked up. When he brings in a newspaper, they banish him for good.

Unemployed and thrown out by his parents, Denny stays at Victor's house. At this time, Denny develops an obsession for collecting rocks. It starts with Denny finding a rock to symbolize everyday he stays clear of addiction, but it soon escalates until he has so many he takes up almost all of Victor's house. When he starts a relationship with the lap dancer Beth, Denny uses the rocks to build a wall. His wall attracts a lot of attention, including a television network. Some people are against building a wall because they think he is building a church and he does not have a permit. However, Denny points out that you can a baby without a permit so he can build a wall. The wall symbolizes Denny's role as an outsider and his wish to do whatever he pleases.



Denny plays a big part in helping Victor find the truth about his mother. He agrees to pretend to be Victor and ask Victor's mother who his real father is. Victor's mother tells Denny everything he needs to know is in her diary. When Denny starts seeing Beth, he becomes more concerned with Victor's well being and encourages him to continue seeing his mother.

Cherry Daiquiri

She is a lap dancer at the strip club Denny and Victor often visit. Later on, she develops a relationship with Denny and the reader finds out her real name is Beth.

Front Receptionist

Like many of the nurses at the St. Anthony hospital, she has a strong dislike for Victor. Victor sometimes offers to keep an eye on reception while she goes for a coffee. When she is gone, he spies on his mother on the security camera.

Ursula

Ursula is the milkmaid at Victor's work. She enjoys smoking hashish.

Gwen

Gwen asks Victor to rape her by knife point. Unfortunately, she destroys the occasion by setting down too many rules.

Tracey

Tracey is the woman Victor loses his virginity to. He meets her on a flight to Los Angeles and they have sex in the toilets.

Nico

Nico is the woman Victor has sex with before his Sex Addiction classes.



Objects/Places

St. Anthony's Hospital

The elderly care center where Victor's mother is a patient.

Victor's mother house

Victor lives in his mother's house on his own. Later his friend Denny stays with him

The Church

Victor's sex addiction meeting are held at a church.

The Chapel

Victor has many liaisons here with Dr. Marshall.

The Strip club

Victor and Denny visit a strip club and Denny falls for one of the dancers.

Victor's work

Victor works at a tourist attraction trying to recreate the 18th century.

The Zoo

When he was a child, Victor's mother abducted him and took him to a zoo where she fed the monkeys LSD.

Gwen's house

Gwen asks Victor to rape her at her house and Victor waits for her in her closet.

Miss Mancini's Diary

Victor tries to find out his mother's secrets by reading her diary, but it is all written in Italian.



Denny's Granite Rock

Denny wraps a rock in a blanket and pretends it is a baby.

Denny's building

Denny collects lots of rocks and tries to build a wall. When asked what he is building, he says he will not know until he has finished.



Themes

The Influence of the Mother

Victor mentions the Oedipal complex a few times in the story and at the beginning he states a boy brought up by his mother is virtually born married, and any woman he has a relationship with while she is alive is his mistress. This works as an excuse for Victor's sex addiction. In fact, he blames his mother for every problem he has in his life. He does not trust people because his mother did not trust people. He can only get on with eccentric people and have sex with eccentric women because his mother was eccentric. He cons people that he is choking because his mother showed him how to do it and he drops out of medical school because his mother is ill. Finally, he thinks he cannot move on his life until his mother gives him closure on his father. Interestingly Palahniuk does not discount Victor's theory that this bond controls him, but adds a twist that makes as much a serious point as it does a joke.

In the final chapters, Miss Mancini tells Victor she is not his real mother. She stole him from outside a shop and then used him to get a green card. However, to Victor this hardly matters. Whatever his real parents are like, Victor still accepts he is the product of Miss Mancini and the way she brought him up. In fact, Palahniuk is suggesting genetics have little to do with how we think and behavior is conditioned. He highlights this at the end of the book when Victor replaces his mother with Paige Marshall. Like his mother, Paige is an eccentric outsider, living life how she wants to live it.

Accepting Oneself

Choke is not about Victor finding himself, but accepting himself. At the beginning of the novel, he states over and over again what a pathetic loser he was as child and this theme continues into adulthood. The reader is continually made aware that the bad things he does is purely because he does not like who is, but at the same time he realizes he has gone too far to change how he thinks.

Most of what he does seems to be part a routine he cannot get away from because it is what gives his life some sort of substance and stability. On Mondays he has sex with Nico, Tuesdays with Leeza and so on. In between, he goes to restaurants to pretend to choke. The regularity of his life serves to help Victor forget his feeling of self-hatred. However, it also prevents him from moving forward in his life as Victor gives every indication that he is a spontaneous person who needs his freedom. His routine gives him some semblance of normality he thinks he needs, but it is also destroying what his friends and his mother like about him.

When Victor gets out of his routine, he begins to think more about others and less of what a loser he is. This is partly to do with the closure he gets from his mother's death and partly to do with the fact he decides to progress from the fourth step of his sex



addict program. Interestingly, the fourth step is writing a diary of his life and as such, the reader could see the novel itself as part of his therapy. When the police gain access to his diary and expose everything he has done, Victor becomes less self-obsessed. At the end of the book, Victor is helping Denny, Paige and Beth rebuild Denny's wall, symbolizing that he is on his way to forgetting his problems and finding some sort of freedom.

Addiction

Victor is a sex addict and every week he visits a sex addiction clinic. However, the reader never sees Victor taking a class because he is usually having sex with Nico in the church where the classes take place. In fact, he seems to refuse to admit he is an addict and instead only goes to the classes to pick up tips and make new contacts.

Victor could partly be right and he is not necessarily addicted to the sex, but the attention he receives. Victor has the self-knowledge to realize this, stating his problems stem from his childhood where he was moved from foster home to foster home with his only constant companion being Internet pornography.

Palahniuk is linking addiction to childhood. The implication is that Victor does not need to get over the sex, but what happened to him growing up. Palahniuk suggests that Victor continues to look for attention through sex because this is what he has always done and he feels comfortable living within that world. Palahniuk symbolizes this by listing Victor's routine. On Monday he has sex with Nico, on Tuesday he has sex with Leeza and so on. It is only when Victor finally breaks his routine that he is able to reflect on where his life is heading, begin to make positive changes and move on.



Style

Point of View

Palahniuk tells the story in the first person. The narrator and main character is the self-hating sex addict Victor Mancini. His account of his life is so over the top, the reader never doubts its unreliability. In fact, the exaggeration plays a part in the book's humor. Victor is trying to present himself as someone he is not, when in reality the only way he can move on is by accepting who he is. The reader also knows Victor's account is unreliable because he often contradicts himself. For example, throughout the book he claims his mother is a crazy, deluded eccentric, responsible for all of his problems. However, when Victor overhears a conversation she has with Dr. Marshall, she appears sane and articulate. At the end of the book, she denies Victor is Jesus with incredulous disbelief that Victor could ever have such a thought. If the reader believed Victor's analysis of her, it would make more sense if she embraced such an eccentric idea. This suggests Victor wants his mother to be crazy because he can then have a valid excuse for his self-hatred.

Throughout the book, Victor is working towards some sort of closure on his life and in fact, the point of writing this book is to find the closure he desires. From this perspective, the book is Victor's therapy and it does not matter that he over-exaggerates because most of what he says is symbolic of how he feels or wants to feel. For example, he is ready to believe he is Jesus Christ because to Victor it firstly explains why he feels so different and secondly provides him with a purpose. Before then, he could only find purpose through sex and the trauma of his upbringing.

Setting

Choke is set in the late 1990s, dealing with contemporary issues such as alienation, addiction, single motherhood and overcoming one's problems through therapy. Occasionally Victor reflects back to his childhood and, in accordance with his age, this would be the mid-eighties to the early nineties. However, the setting of his childhood has no other importance than to highlight its effect on the next generation. The main setting of the novel is St. Anthony's hospital where his mother receives care for Alzheimer's disease. At the hospital, Victor is probably his most comfortable. Here there are people looking for closure on their lives and Victor happily accepts responsibility for their problems. For example, one old lady thinks Victor is her older brother Michael and accuses him of raping her as a child. He apologizes and tells her she should forgive him, which turns out to be exactly what she wants to hear. In comparison, Victor has a poor relationship with the nurses. They seem to see him as a bad person who wants nothing but to hurt people. Victor plays up their idea of him. For example, he lets down the front receptionist's tires. However, it is just symbolic of Victor's need for attention and his anger at not being able to fit into normal society. He shows this in restaurants where he pretends to choke on food, as much for the attention as for the money he receives.



In general, though Victor tends to get on with fellow outsiders, the settings only matter in that his antics in that place are usually against its usual practices. For example, he has sex with women on day release from prison and accepts a woman's offer to rape her while in a bookshop. However, each time Victor visits these settings, he has a genuine desire to improve his life. For example, he goes to the church to participate in a sex addict class. In this regard, the settings work to highlight Victor's status as an outsider in comparison to normal society.

Language and Meaning

Palahniuk uses informal language and a conversational tone. This works to help the reader identify with Victor's character because despite the fact he thinks his problems are all his own, they are universal and shared by all the other main characters. Victor constantly refers to body parts or drugs that help people to overcome problems. This serves to show what an insular and self-centered person he is. For example, when he is talking about choking in restaurants, he is so interested in the process of how he chokes and the psychology of it that he bypasses the fact he is conning people. This is a problem because the conversational style presents him as a likable person intent on destroying himself.

Palahniuk further reflects Victor's selfishness in the dialogue, which almost entirely revolves around him. When he visits his mother in hospital, he rarely asks after her, rather he shows more interest in encouraging his mother to share her big secret. Even when his friend Denny is the stocks, he concentrates more on how Denny can help him uncover the secret than on his friends suffering. Palahniuk highlights this further when Denny is building his wall. Denny talks about how he should not have to need a permit because a person does not need a permit for a baby and a badly brought up child is more dangerous than a badly built wall. Victor presumes his friend is talking about his upbringing and reacts angrily

As the novel moves on Victor seems to realize that the only way to change his life is to accept who he is. However, rather than reflect this change in the dialogue, Palahniuk shows it only in Victor's actions. This shows how difficult Victor finds it to express his emotions.

Structure

The novel's premise is the acceptance of oneself overcomes self-hatred. In the first chapter of the novel, Victor states the reader will not like him and if they expect a story with likable characters, they should stop reading now. Palahniuk further highlights his self-hatred in the chapters where Victor reflects back to his childhood. Here he refers to himself as a pathetic loser. However, as the book moves on, he realizes the only way forward is to accept who he is. In the final chapter about his childhood he recognizes the need to sever the damaging relationship he has with his mother.



The whole structure of the book works towards this realization. At the beginning, everything revolves around Victor and his problems. Even when his friend Denny is stuck in the stock at work, Victor stands over him talking about his own life and how his mother has a secret she refuses to tell him. In fact, all the characters seem to be there for Victor. Denny's obsessional behavior helps Victor feel better, Victor's mother gives him an excuse to act badly and Dr. Marshall gives him the hope he could be someone else. The minor characters in the book provide him with the attention he feels he lacked as a child. For example, he chokes in restaurants partly so someone will hold him and tell him everything is okay. As the book continues, the characters all move on in their lives and without them to lean on Victor has no choice but to accept himself. Denny finds a girlfriend, Dr. Marshall admits she is a patient at the hospital and his mother dies. By the end, Victor gets off the fourth step of his therapy and starts appreciating the people around him.



Quotes

"If you're going to read this, don't bother," p.14.

"That old urban legend about the surprise party for the pretty housewife, how all her friends and family hid in one room, and when they burst out and yelled "Happy birthday" they found her stretched out on the sofa with the family dog licking peanut butter from between her legs... Well she's real," p. 27.

"The truth is, every son raised by a single mom is pretty much born married. I don't know, but until your mom dies it seems like all the other women in your life can never be more than just your mistress," p. 34.

"Do you cut the lining out of your bathing suit so your genitals show through? Do you leave your fly or blouse open and pretend to hold conversations in glass telephone booths, standing so your clothes gap open with no underwear inside? Do you jog without a bra or athletic supporter in order to attract sexual partners? My answer to all the above is, I do now," p. 37.

"If the Ye Old Town Council only knew Mistress Plain, the seamstress, is a needle freak. The miller is cooking crystal meth. The innkeeper deals acid to the busloads of bored teenagers who get dragged here on school field trips," p. 56.

"My first time I jacked off, I thought I'd invented it. I looked down at my sloppy handful of junk and thought, This is going to make me rich," p. 60.

"It was the confidence. The courage. The complete lack of shame. The comfort and genuine honesty. The up-front-ness of being able to just stand there and tell the world: Yeah, this is how I chose to spend a free afternoon. Posing here with a monkey putting chestnuts up my ass," p. 64.

"Somebody saves your life, and they'll love you forever. It's that old Chinese custom where if somebody saves your life, they're responsible for you forever. It's as if now you're their child. For the rest of their lives, these people will write me," p. 82.

"You could put most of these folks in front of a mirror and tell them it's a television special about old dying miserable people, and they'd watch for hours," p. 131.

"Yes," she says, "I fought against everything, but more and more I worry that I was never for anything, " p. 168.

"There's that nice young man I told you about. He's the one who strangled my pet cat." The other lady, her sweater is buttoned wrong, and she says, "You don't say." She says, "He beat my sister almost to death one time," p. 174.



"At night, the Mommy used to sneak the little boy through the backyards of other people. She'd drink the beer people left out for slugs and snails, and she'd nibble their jimson weed and nightshade and catnip. She'd squeeze up next to parked cars and smell inside their gas tank," p. 223.

"Because it's only intangible ideas, concepts, beliefs, fantasies that last. Stone crumbles. Wood rots. People, well, they die," p. 237.

"For crying out loud," she says. "This is way out of bounds. I said you could rape me. I did not say you could ruin my pantyhose," p. 253.

"All these names for the same place, all these symbols for the real thing. The Federation of Feminist Health Care Centers calls it the urethral sponge. The seventeenth-century Dutch anatomist Regnier de Graaf called this same mass of erectile tissue, nerves, and glands the female prostate. All these names for the two inches of urethra you can feel through the front wall of the vagina. The anterior wall of the vagina. What some people call the bladder neck," p. 311.

"I say, "Do you think Jesus automatically knew he was Jesus from the start, or did his mom or somebody tell him and he grew into it?" p. 346.



Topics for Discussion

How much do you think Victor's childhood affects his later sex addiction?

Why do you think Victor so readily accepts he could be Jesus Christ?

Given that so much is proved false in the story, how trustworthy is the narrator in general? For example, he claims he went through some portion of medical school, but cannot help his mother when she is dying.

Do you think Palahniuk presents Victor's sex addiction as a problem he needs rather than one he wants to get over? Do you think the discoveries at the end of the book could cure him of his addiction?

What is the importance of Denny's wall and why do you think they begin rebuilding it at the end?

How much of the addictions and behavior of the characters in general come from a need for attention?

Do you think Victor's recollections of his mother when he was a child correspond to her character in the story's present tense?