

# **Columbine Study Guide**

## **Columbine by Dave Cullen**

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# Plot Summary

On April 20, 1999, Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris walked into Columbine High School with two bombs based on portable propane bottles. The boys had similar bombs in their cars and another across town - a decoy to draw police away from the high school at the crucial moment. They also had dozens of small pipe bombs and each of them was carrying guns and ammunition. They planted the two large bombs and returned to their cars that were strategically parked so that they could shoot anyone who ran from the building after the bombs detonated. But their plan began to go wrong from the first. The inside bombs didn't go off. The two boys, without an apparent backup plan, entered the school again and began shooting and firing off pipe bombs. They killed indiscriminately for a little over fifteen minutes. They had expected to be killed by police but had no intention of being taken alive. They roamed the school for a short time before returning to the library where most of their victims had died. They sat down, set off one final bomb, and shot themselves.

Of their victims, twelve were already dead when police stormed the building. It took more than three hours for the SWAT team to reach the library where they discovered dozens of students still in hiding and the bodies of the shooters. One of the victims, Coach Dave Sanders, had survived the initial shot but bled to death over the hours it took for SWAT to arrive. Dylan and Eric had killed thirteen and severely wounded several others. One of those was Patrick Ireland. He'd been shot in the head and didn't understand what was happening to him. He managed to make it to a window and hoisted his uncooperative body over the edge. He was caught by police and faced months of therapy before he was able to walk and talk again. He graduated as valedictorian the following year.

The investigation took months and many of the parents filed lawsuits in an effort to get information. Several of the lawsuits were settled but others dragged on for years. There were many controversies around the situation. Members of the community, especially students, took offense when the massacre became known as "Columbine." They argued that was the name of their school, not the name of the event. There continued to be rumors that Dylan and Eric were not acting alone. When the six-month anniversary rolled around, many students opted to stay away from school, just in case there was another attack.

Police actions were called into question. Parents of the victims weren't told for sure their children were dead until the following day. One father discovered the truth when his son's photo appeared in the newspaper from an aerial view taken from a helicopter. Others wanted to know there wasn't any way to have predicted and prevented the murders. Some clung to the idea that the boys killed out of revenge for having been bullied but that was proved a false idea. Many couldn't accept the fact that the boys were psychopaths without any empathy or a sense of compassion.



# Chapters 1-9

## Chapters 1-9 Summary and Analysis

In chapter one, Columbine Principal Frank DeAngelis urges the students to be careful over the weekend of prom. In chapter two, Eric Harris, who usually had no problem at all getting a date, was becoming desperate for a date for the prom. Eric and his friend, Dylan Klebold, each saw themselves as rebels although Dylan, with his long braids, was more believable. Both boys were smart seniors at Columbine High School in Colorado who were employed at Blackjack Pizza. Eric and Dylan regularly frequented the smoking area. In chapter three, the author described the Columbine cafeteria as being an "open bubble of space." There were surveillance cameras. Meanwhile, the country was beginning to be plagued by school shootings and parents were openly worried.

In chapter four, it was noted that Eric had plans to attend college to become an engineer but Dylan had no plans; a fact that was upsetting to his parents. The two had plans in place to massacre as many students as possible on April 20, 1999, but on the preceding Friday, both showed up for their jobs at Blackjack Pizza and the new owner made Eric shift manager. In chapter five, Coach Dave Sanders was introduced. He was the keyboarding, typing, business, and economics teacher as well as coach of several teams. Dave and his wife, Linda Lou, often meet up at a place called "The Lounge" after work. Patrick Ireland was wishing his friend, Laura, would take the hint that he likes her as more than a friend. He was also thinking a great deal about the prom. Cassie Bernall, however, had no expectations of having a date but she and her friend, Amanda, dress up and go together. In chapter six, Dylan's prom date, Robyn Anderson, picked him up and they met up with friends. Over the course of the evening, Dylan repeated that he and his classmates had to stay in touch after graduation.

In chapter seven, Cassie Bernall was a member of Trinity Christian Center and had transferred from Christian Fellowship School because she felt led to witness to the students there. The FBI's terrorism unit was on alert that Monday because the anniversary of the death of the Branch Davidian cult near Waco, Texas, was approaching. In chapter eight, Dylan and Eric called the date set aside for the massacre, "Judgment Day." They had planned all the details in three stages. The first would be a set of bombs going off in the lunchroom at the time when the most students were there, creating the largest casualty numbers. The second part called for Dylan and Eric to be at their cars in the parking lots, strategically parked to shoot at those exiting the building without either getting in the other's line of fire. They expected to die during this scene. The next would be massive explosions from both cars, taking out emergency personnel, bystanders and journalists. The date of their planned attack came and went without incident because Dylan didn't believe they had enough ammunition. In chapter nine, Dave Sanders and Mr. D talked about the tough decisions they'd made to put so much time into being educators and Dave revealed his plans to cut back on the hours away from his family.



The author noted that Dylan and Eric had taken care to plan out a great many details. But the boys believed their actions will be puzzling to others and sought a way to offer an explanation. Toward that end, they kept detailed accounts of their actions, their plans and how they accomplished each. Police recovered their diaries, film clips and writings soon after the shootings but, citing the disturbing nature of the documents, didn't release any of it for years.

There was a great deal of introduction early in the book and it was sometimes difficult to keep the characters straight. This remained the case throughout because of the large number of people involved.



# Chapters 10 through 12

## Chapters 10 through 12 Summary and Analysis

In chapter 10, Dylan and Eric left home before daylight on April 20. They go to a grocery store to purchase the propane tanks needed for the attack. Friends noticed they weren't in class and wondered about it. The boys didn't go to school until 11 and parked as planned. Brooks Brown, a friend, confronted Eric about missing a test but Eric said, "It doesn't matter" and urged Brooks to go home. They had left a decoy bomb in another location, hoping to draw authorities away from the school as the real attack began. By the time they arrived at the school, they were already behind schedule. The bombs they were placing in the cafeteria were slated to go off at 11:17 but surveillance tapes showed the boys still outside the commons area with just three minutes to spare. At 11:22, the tapes showed the bombs still in place and intact.

Deputy Neil Gardner was employed by the sheriff's department but assigned as a resource officer at Columbine. On that day, he left campus at lunch to eat. Meanwhile, the decoy bomb was discovered and the fuse device kicked away from the propane tank so that it didn't explode. Its only purpose was to alert authorities that something was about to happen. None of the other bombs went off at all.

In chapter eleven, the boys had no backup plan. They were already armed at their cars but decided for some reason to leave their spots and go back inside the school. At 11:19, the boys had moved into the school and began firing. Eric's first victims were Rachel Scott who was eating lunch with Richard Castaldo. Rachel died instantly and Richard didn't move, making Eric think he was also dead. Some of the boys' friends, including Danny Rohrbough, was making his way toward the shooters, believing Eric and Dylan were involved in some sort of game. He was shot and killed. His friend, Lance Kirkland, tried to catch Danny as he fell but realized he was also shot. Another friend, Sean Graves, still believed it to be a game until he was grazed in the neck and fell. Lance pleaded for help and one of the boys shot him again. Sean was moved a short distance but wound up left in a doorway. Coach Sanders ran toward the commotion, trying to get other students to safety. By the end of four minutes, most people had taken cover. The first 911 call came in to the sheriff's office and Officer Gardner received word of the situation on his radio. Despite the deaths that had already occurred and the detonation of several pipe bombs, many students and teachers didn't know there was a problem at all. Gardner exchanged shots with Eric but missed. By 11:24, the two boys headed toward the library.

In chapter twelve, media outlets had wind of the story but didn't know exactly what was happening at Columbine. Additional deputies arrived and gunfire continued, sometimes involving officers firing at Eric. The priority became the need to get the large crowd of fleeing students farther from the school and patrol cars were lined up to provide cover for that effort. The vehicles that arrived included an armored truck that had been

working in the area. There were thirty-five police agencies represented and no one seemed to be in charge. Officers didn't enter the school until after noon.

While the author noted that officers were trained for this kind of disaster, there is no way they could anticipate exactly what was going on inside the school or what they were up against. One motorcycle patrolman noted that the weapons were apparently sophisticated. All the officers could manage to do for a long time was wait outside while Eric and Dylan continued on their killing spree.

There were many inconsistencies between the "eyewitness" reports. The school was large enough Dylan and Eric went for some time without being recognized by anyone who was talking to police. Nate Dykeman, however, was friends with Eric and Dylan. Soon after he heard the descriptions of the gunmen, he feared Dylan was involved.



# Chapter 13 through 19

## Chapter 13 through 19 Summary and Analysis

In chapter thirteen, Brad Bernall lived near the school and was at home from work when his wife, Misty, called. Misty had heard rumors of the shootings and Brad stepped outside to see the school swarming with police. Brad remained by the phone and Misty went to the school. Parents are turned back from the perimeter and gather nearby, hoping for word from their children. Meanwhile, newly-elected Jeffco Sheriff John Stone was in command with John Dunaway as undersheriff and Lieutenant David Walcher as incident commander. At 12:06, the first SWAT team entered the building. The fire alarms and strobe lights were still going off and the team depended on hand signals to communicate. A fire truck and suppressive fire were used so that EMTs could reach some of those injured or dead on the lawn. The bodies of Rachel Scott and Danny Rohr were left where they lay. Nate Dykeman called Dylan's house and informed his father of his suspicions - that Dylan was involved. Dylan's dad, Tom was horrified, called 911 to say Dylan might be involved, and then called an attorney. News stations were asked to stop live broadcasts, fearing the shooters would use them to locate officers. A sign appeared in Science Room 3 that read, "1 BLEEDING TO DEATH." In chapter fourteen, students made contact with many people and authorities including news stations.

In chapter fifteen, several students had identified Dylan and Eric as the shooters. Police searched their homes and found Eric's parents "uncooperative," trying to refuse entrance despite a search warrant. FBI Supervisory Special Agent Lieutenant Dave Fuselier was in Denver when his wife called. Fuselier's son was at Columbine and he rushed to the scene. His son was not among the victims but his presence put the FBI in position to take control of the scene earlier than would otherwise have been expected. Meanwhile, students who had escaped the school were reporting a half dozen or more gunmen. A friend of Dylan and Eric's, Chris Morris, knew the boy had been "messing around" with pipe bombs and took the information to police. He was arrested for questioning.

In chapter sixteen, the principal, Mr. D, had run toward the shooting only to intercept a group of girls in time to usher them to safety. He tried to return to the building but wasn't allowed. Patrick Ireland and four friends were in the library when Dylan and Eric entered. All were shot. Patrick was alive but barely functioning. One side was paralyzed and his foot shattered, and there was a buckshot pellet in his brain. He went to a window and, misunderstanding the shouting commands from officers below, managed to push himself out, collapsing onto the armored truck. When his mother, Kathy, ran home to check messages, she found one from St. Anthony's indicating Patrick was there. He survived the first surgery but his prognosis was grim. Meanwhile, a SWAT team inside found some sixty kids in the choir room and led them to safety.

In chapter seventeen, SWAT teams reached the library at 3:15 and discovered the bodies, including those of Dylan and Eric, dead of self-inflicted wounds. Officers were





already working to investigate the depth of the crime and the conspiracy and had discovered that Dylan and Eric had been arrested for breaking into a van and had completed a juvenile program as their sentence. And the parents of their friend Brooks Brown had filed a series of complaints against Dylan for making threats against Brooks. Robyn Anderson, Dylan's prom date, Chris Morris and Zack Heckler were identified as three who had information about the plans for the massacre. Robyn, already eighteen, had bought three guns for Dylan at the Tanner Gun Show in Denver. Dylan's home was declared a crime scene and his parents forced to leave. Eric's parents were also instructed to leave but were allowed to gather clothing and their pets.

In chapter eighteen, many of the families had reconnected with their children. The Rohrboughs and Bernalls were still waiting and were told there was another bus with students that would arrive soon. In fact, there weren't any more survivors to be taken out of the school. In chapter nineteen, Dave Sanders' family waited for news. At one point they were sent to a hospital but Dave wasn't there and never arrived. The Bernalls went home and Brad watched the scene through binoculars.

The author noted that the Columbine Massacre was the first to be played out on television with those trapped inside calling out on cell phones. He said the public wasn't fully aware at first because some news footage was held back in compliance with police orders, but journalists began to speculate on the events long before facts were known.

The "1" who was bleeding to death in Science Room 3 was Coach Dave Sanders.



# Chapter 20 through 24

## Chapter 20 through 24 Summary and Analysis

In chapter twenty, Brian Rohrbough received a phone call from a friend. The photo of Danny's body on the high school lawn was on page 13 in the "Rocky Mountain News." He had not been notified by authorities. Brian went to the school and demanded Danny's body but the police refused and the body remained on the lawn, uncovered, for twenty-eight hours. The Bernalls went to the back perimeter and pleaded with an officer for news. He confirmed there were no students left alive in the school. At three that afternoon, police arrived with "tentative confirmation" that Dave Sanders was among the victims.

Police had thousands of potential witnesses and were looking for co-conspirators. The collection of evidence was a staggering task and the entire school treated as a crime scene. They stripped the boys' homes and found evidence to make them fear that more attacks were imminent.

In chapter twenty-one, Eric's childhood was described. He was active in sports, moved a great deal because his father was military, and was entranced but afraid of fireworks. In chapter twenty-two, families received the bodies of their children on Thursday. Officials looked into how to get school started again so that students could complete their courses. The students at nearby rivals Chatfield High School began half-day classes and the Columbine students used those facilities the other half of the day. The question of whether to rebuild the school or demolish it was brought up. Reverend Bill Oudemolen preached the funerals of John Tomlin and Lauren Townsend, both members of Foothills Bible Church. By the following Tuesday, hundreds of students were spending time at local churches. Some ministers were blaming Satan but others saw it as "two boys with hate in their hearts." When officials found the "big bombs" inside the cafeteria, they realized the boys had planned a massive attack to kill everyone they could.

In chapter twenty-three, Dylan was a gifted child who was involved in sports. His mother was Jewish and there was some indication that he wasn't overly comfortable with Eric's fascination with Hitler and Nazis.

In chapter twenty-four, Reverend Marxhausen, of the St. Phillip Lutheran Church remembered that Tom and Sue Klebold were members of the church though not active. He sent word he was available if they needed him and they called on him to preach Dylan's funeral. It was an open casket but instead of a traditional funeral, everyone reminisced and questioned the situation. Fearing his grave would be defaced, his body was cremated. Eric's family never revealed where or if a funeral for Eric took place.

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Journalists were everywhere on the day after the shooting and many of the students talked. Their words were blown out of proportion and taken out of context. The author noted that journalists were anxious to hear from the kids and the kids treated the experience "like a confessional." The author also noted that journalists weren't ready for that kind of crime scene and were suddenly thrown into a situation with thousands of kids as potential eyewitnesses. They didn't know what to do other than what they'd always done - report what they were told and draw their own conclusions. It would result in a lot of false reports, including that the shooters had chosen their victims and that they were part of the "Goth" subculture.



# Chapters 25 through 30

## Chapters 25 through 30 Summary and Analysis

In chapter twenty-five, Eric had arrived at Ken Caryl Middle School in seventh grade and he, Dylan, and Brooks Brown soon became almost inseparable. Over the years, Eric repeated "extinction fantasies" to those who knew him, including those in chat rooms. Dylan liked Zack Heckler and thought Zack understood him better than anyone else but they were shy and Eric was the one able to give voice to their ideas.

In chapter twenty-six, Dave Sanders had almost made it to safety before he was shot. Another teacher helped him to cover and called for help. Aaron Hancey, an Eagle Scout and junior student, applied first aid with the help of another student but reported that Dave was seriously wounded. Officials kept saying help was on the way but hours passed and Dave lost consciousness. When the SWAT team arrived, they took the students but refused to move Dave's near-lifeless body. An EMT, Troy Laman, was taken inside but Dave was, "according to emergency triage protocol," already dead. A spokesperson for the family later said the scene was chaos and that they didn't blame the SWAT team for Dave's death.

In chapter twenty-seven, a group of students began wearing trench coats the previous fall and were nicknamed "the Trench Coat Mafia," or TCM. Dylan and Eric were not part of that group but later bought their own trench coats. It was the coats that prompted some early supposition that there were more shooters than the two. In chapter twenty-eight, the author talked about the "myth" of the stereotypical school shooter and the rumor - quickly accepted as fact - that the boys were targeting "jocks."

In chapter twenty-nine, Dylan, Eric and Zack spent lots of time together two years prior to the massacre. The boys would spend the night together, sneak out and do minor mischief to someone's house, and return. Sometimes the victims were accused by Eric of some slight, sometimes not. Kathy and Wayne Harris were contacted by the parents of Brooks Brown about threats made by Eric against Brooks. Police reports were filed but Wayne refused to take serious action, saying the Browns were overreacting to an argument between the boys and that Brooks was "out to get Eric." In chapter thirty, the Browns became suspects by some members of the community. At a meeting that became known as the "Open Space meeting," officials discussed the amount of prior information given to police - including the threats against Brooks Brown. Fuselier, with his first look at Eric's journal, realized that Eric would be the easier of the two to understand.

The author noted that many of the survivors suffered post-traumatic stress disorder, some that was relatively short lived but other cases that lasted for years. There was also a growing community of concern over those with "survivor's guilt."

The myths - that Dylan and Eric were ostracized or bullied, that they were Goth or gay, and that they were targeting jocks - were beginning to be in place before the end of the first day, the author said. He pointed out that people clung to those because they needed something to blame.



# Chapters 31 through 39

## Chapters 31 through 39 Summary and Analysis

In chapter thirty-one, Dylan's diary began much earlier than Eric's and was much larger but his early entries were filled with pain and conflict. He wrote of suicide, believed in God but questioned God's decisions, and admitted to being drunk a great deal of the time. In chapter thirty-two, a vigil was held at a shopping center with seventy thousand mourners, despite the rain. Rachel Scott's brother, Craig, was in the library when Dylan and Eric shot two of their victims, Matthew Kechter and Isaiah Shoels. Soon, the media was filled with the story of Cassie Bernall who was asked if she believed in God and was shot seconds after she answered, "Yes." In chapter thirty-three, Wayne continued to watch Eric after reports that Eric was drinking but quickly trusted him again and the drinking continued. When Eric, Zack, and Dylan reached the age to get jobs, they went to work at Blackjack Pizza but then Zack got a girlfriend and the threesome was divided. A report about Eric's website - filled with information about their "missions" and pipe bombs - was taken by police but nothing happened. In chapter thirty-four, Patrick Ireand continued to struggle to recover, was transferred to Craig Hospital for treatment, and learned of the murders.

In chapter thirty-five, Zack, Dylan, and Eric got caught breaking into lockers at school. Eric's and Dylan's parents grounded the boys and forbade them contact with each other. Eric and Dylan regrouped but Zack was no longer part of the tight-knit group. Eric and Dylan were in trouble several times, including once for stealing electronics from a van. In chapter thirty-six, investigators soon explain the idea that there were four shooters by realizing that some students described Dylan and Eric with their trench coats and some without. The conspiracy theory was explored and dropped when all the boys' friends offered up similar stories - they knew there were guns and pipe bombs but had no idea of the plan.

On April 30, prosecutor Kate Battan met with the Klebolds but the lawyers put a stop to any real questioning and Eric's parents were never questioned at all. That same day, the National Rifle Association held a meeting in Denver though the mayor urged them to change their plans. Among those demonstrating against the NRA was Tom Mauser, father of victim Daniel Mauser. In a tragic coincident, Daniel had told his father just two weeks earlier about a "loophole" in the gun laws that excluded guns purchased at trade shows. Nine days after the shootings, the media corps pulled out to cover tornadoes in Oklahoma. In chapter thirty-seven, the boys were seen in court for having stolen electronics from the van and the judge later recalled believing they would get their lives back on track.

In chapter thirty-eight, the story of Cassie Bernall's death became so engrossing that there was talk of making her a martyr. Then conflicting stories came out and, coupled with the 911 calls, proved that Cassie was shot without saying a word to her murderer, Dylan.



In chapter thirty-nine, Fuselier discovered writings in which Eric had expressed the thought that natural selection was no longer working. Eric has a plan to kill himself and take over where natural selection had failed in just more than a year from the date of those writings.

Cassie's mother, Misty, had agreed to write a book prior to the discovery that Cassie's death hadn't happened as originally believed. In fact, Dylan had slapped the table, yelled, "peekaboo," and shot Cassie without giving her time to say anything. Misty wrote the book anyway but focused on Cassie's life prior to the day of the murder. Cassie and a friend had been caught up in some out-of-control teenage angst of their own. Misty discovered letters in which the friend suggested murders and suicides. Cassie was furious and threatened suicide. She was kept at home and allowed out only for church services. When she made a profession of faith, her parents were skeptical but it turned out to be real. Despite this, she didn't feel she fit in, worried about her weight and about boys. Ironically, just a short time before her death officials from her church had discussed ways of helping her fit in better.



# Chapters 40 through 47

## Chapters 40 through 47 Summary and Analysis

In chapter forty, the author pointed out that many people wanted to understand why Dylan and Eric went on the rampage. The problem with that was that the boys were psychopaths and most people couldn't understand how their minds work. According to the author, the lack of empathy was a key factor in diagnosing a psychopath and Eric and Dylan displayed that classic trait. There was also the theory that each of the boys "fed" off the other. This seemed to be the case with Eric and Dylan. Eric sought the excitement but was unable to maintain it. Dylan was always running toward excitement that might erupt at any time, feeding Eric's need while allowing Eric to remain the dominant part of the duo. In chapter forty-one, Fusselier expected to meet with resistance to a diagnosis of "psychopath" because the boys were so young when their plots were first hatched, but found agreement instead.

A major question being posed in the months after the shootings was whether authorities could have - and should have - predicted it. While the Jeffco Sheriff's Office denied having warnings, the Browns told everyone they'd gone to the police with their fears.

Meanwhile, Patrick continued to progress and was soon showing his hallmark determination. Another of the victims, Anne Marie Hochhalter, remained on life support. When she was eventually able to understand she would probably never walk, she cried.

There began the efforts to rebuild. The idea of razing the school was discussed and dismissed but it was agreed that the library had to be completely changed. The parents of the thirteen victims were angry and felt a little paint and new furniture would not be enough. In late May, Isaiah Shoels' family sued the parents of the killers for a quarter of a million dollars, prompting some to criticize the action as greedy.

In chapter forty-two, Fuselier continued to evaluate what he knew about Dylan and Eric and came to believe the boys had never just snapped as some people wanted to believe. Instead, he believed the arrest for breaking into the van created the catalyst that fueled their rage. He described it as a time when their freedom was curtailed. The boys poured out their rage in their own and each other's year books. When they were sentenced to a juvenile program and community service, Eric put all his charm into play in order to gain the approval of those in charge. Dylan did the opposite, caring little for what he was supposed to do and failing to meet goals. Dylan took the attitude that it didn't matter because he was soon to die anyway.

In chapter forty-three, Kathy Ireland had a conversation with Patrick as he was still fighting to recover. She asked if he understood who had shot him. Patrick's response was that it didn't matter and he begged her to forgive Dylan and Eric. She admitted she'd worried about Patrick building up anger but he led the way to forgiveness. When





the school reopened the following August, Patrick led the student body inside for the first time since the tragedy.

In chapter forty-four, Eric had really wanted to eliminate the human race. He was, however, realistic enough to know that was beyond his power. What was within his power was to blow up a high school. He began with pipe bombs and kept careful records of his progress and the results of his test fires. He quickly realized he also needed guns. In chapter forty-five, the months after the shootings were fraught with anxiety and rumors. Many believed Eric and Dylan were not capable of pulling off their attack alone and that there were more killers waiting for their next opportunity. The six-month anniversary prompted a huge number of absences. Anne Marie Hochhalter's mother, Carol June, walked into a pawn shop, bought a gun, loaded it and killed herself. It was later revealed that she was suffering from depression.

Also at the six-month mark, twenty families filed notice of their intent to sue the sheriff's department, including Tom and Sue Klebold. Mark Manes, the man who had sold the guns to Eric and Dylan, and Phil Duran who had "brokered the deal" faced criminal charges.

In chapter forty-six, Eric had named his shotgun Arlene. While Eric's anger was growing, Dylan's personal writings during this time were focused on love. In chapter forty-seven, Dave Sanders' daughter had the one lawsuit that really had a chance, alleging it had taken too long for help to arrive, that there were repeated false promises that help was nearby, and that officials refused to allow others to carry Dave out where he could be helped. The majority of the other lawsuits had a single goal - to force the release of information. One of the first pieces of information released indicated all the killings had occurred within the first sixteen minutes.

Four months after the shootings, the school was scheduled to reopen. Students and the community expected a huge contingency of journalists but by then, they'd become angry at the constant coverage. Many of the newspapers had begun referring to the shootings as "Columbine" which angered the students - Columbine was the name of their school, not this horrible event. The students and parents took control of the situation. They decided to block the majority but consented to allow a few journalists access. One complained that was more restrictive than White House policies. They held the opening ceremony outdoors and parents and community members formed a human chain to keep the journalists at bay.

Eric had bought the guns without his father's knowledge but ordered clips from a store. That store called the Harris house to say the clips had arrived but his father, Wayne, answered the phone. He apparently never considered it might have been Eric who ordered the clips. He thought it was a mistake.



# Chapters 48 through Afterward

## Chapters 48 through Afterward Summary and Analysis

In chapter forty-eight, Dylan and Eric had tried to make plans of how to get the bomb into the school and finally decided they would simply walk in with them. One of Dylan's teachers recounted a story he'd written for a creative writing class about the impact of murder. The teacher contacted Dylan's parents and his guidance counselor. None of them were particularly worried but none of them knew that Dylan and Eric had been making pipe bombs. Dylan and Eric went with Manes for target-practice a couple of times. On several occasions, Dylan gave people information about their plans though it wasn't ever taken as a serious threat. At one point he told Zack they had bought guns.

In chapter forty-nine, the search warrant executed on the afternoon of the massacre was made public and confirmed the Browns had told police about Eric's threats. With one exception, a judge ruled the police could not be held responsible for their actions "under fire" on the day of the shootings. The judge also noted that police "should have headed off the massacre" but were not "legally bound" to have done so. The case filed by Dave Sanders' daughter was settled for one and a half million dollars. Patrick Ireland's case was settled for just more than a hundred thousand. Other lawsuits were settled as well, and it turned out that the homeowners' policies of Dylan's and Eric's parents paid off.

Patrick headed off to college, having given up his dream of architecture school because he knew he couldn't hold up to the rigorous pace. He married a girl he met at Colorado State. A result of the murders was a new process for handling situations. Rather than stopping in the hope of talking to the shooters, similar situations would be dealt with by storming the scene and neutralizing the threat.

In chapter fifty, the "basement tapes" were released. The tapes showed Dylan and Eric, ranting and detailing various aspects of their plans. They also addressed their parents and talked about how seriously their actions would affect them. At one point, Dylan apologized for the amount of rage but said his parents "put it in me." Dylan also said his parents would feel guilt over his actions. One of the videos was of Eric alone. He said, "It is a weird feeling knowing you're going to be dead in two and a half weeks." He also said it was "hard on me." Dylan's personal writings seemed to indicate he was wavering up until five days before the shootings. Then he wrote, "Time to die."

In chapter fifty-one, the fifth anniversary commemoration was held. Anne Marie Hochhalter was present in her wheelchair. She said she'd struggled for a long time but that peace had come gradually as she accepted that she'd never walk again. Fuselier prepared to retire and was granted permission to release his findings. Tom and Sue Klebold were sure "jocks and bullying" remained at the heart of the matter. In the fall of 2003, a notebook with information about Eric's website was found. The new Jeffco Sheriff released the information and called for an investigation.



Brad and Misty Bernall moved away. Misty had written the book and the church had embraced the idea of Cassie as a martyr. When the evidence proved Cassie had been shot without having the opportunity to utter a single word, Misty was angry. The rumor of Cassie as a martyr continued.

In chapter fifty-two, the author recapped the events on the day of the massacre. Eric and Dylan had fired shots from outside, moved inside, killed the remainder of their victims over a course of only a few minutes, then entered a "quiet time" in which they roamed around, apparently aimlessly. There were plenty of students available but Dylan and Eric passed them by without shooting any of them. Fuselier explained that Eric had probably already become bored with killing and Dylan was simply ready to die. Things hadn't gone as they'd expected. They thought the bombs would start a fire but the smoke had set off sprinklers and the school was flooded. They'd also thought police would kill them but they were faced with a decision - how to kill themselves. They went into the library and shot themselves, Eric by firing into his mouth and Dylan by firing into his temple.

In chapter fifty-three, a permanent monument was erected. Parents were allowed to write a special tribute to their slain children. Brian Rohrbough ranted about Columbine being "a godless school system" and ending with a Bible verse, "There is no peace for the wicked." He was asked to "tone it down," but refused and was allowed his say.

In the Afterward, Linda Mauser hated the fact that people expected her to have finished grieving for her son after ten years but she finally felt ready to begin to speak out and did so through a blog. She and her husband adopted a daughter to help fill the "gaping hole" left by Danny's death. Outwardly she seemed to have adapted but she admitted to remaining angry.

Valeen Schnurr was happy by the time the tenth anniversary rolled around. She had been in the library that day. She had been shot by Dylan about the same time her good friend, Lauren Townsend, was killed. Valeen had begun to pray and Dylan asked if she believed in God. She said she did and, for whatever reason, wasn't killed. She said she'd felt cheated that Cassie got credit and hated that some people didn't believe her at first. She struggled in the years after the shooting but eventually returned to school to become a counselor. She came to forgive Dylan and Eric for shooting her but it took much longer for her to forgive them for killing her best friend, Lauren. Val's body showed the scars of her ordeal - one arm was horribly disfigured - so that she would never forget. But she came to realize that she'd won a battle simply by living when Dylan and Eric had wanted her dead.

Throughout many of the lawsuits and arguments, the parents of the victims simply wanted answers. They wanted to know "why," which was frustrating for everyone involved. An interesting aspect of this was that the parents of Dylan and Eric were also looking for those same answers. Some of the lawsuits were settled with the agreement the parents of the killers speak. They agreed but only if their testimonies were held private but victims objected, saying the information could help prevent another tragedy. A judge finally agreed to seal the testimonies for twenty years.



Fuselier pointed out that Dylan, in the basement tapes, appeared dominant. He was often louder and the more boisterous of the two but Fuselier noted Dylan's tendency to look for Eric's approval after his rants.

The attitude of Tom and Sue Klebold seemed to be that of parents who have found a way to go on with their lives after the horror of what their son did. They differentiated between the actions of Dylan as a murderer and the actions of Dylan as a suicidal teen. They said they failed to see how much pain he was in, thereby failing to prevent his suicide. They apparently didn't believe they should have predicted or prevented the murders, but that they should have seen that he was suicidal.

The horror of the massacre was so complete that people continued to look for someone to blame. Dylan and Eric, by committing suicide, eliminated the possibility of revenge by the families of their victims. The man who sold the boys the guns was sentenced severely, partly because there was such an outcry for someone to blame. Then there came the accusations against all the people who should have figured out the two boys were homicidal. There were plenty of clues along the way but when each was taken individually, there seemed little to indicate the depth of the rage. It was noted that Eric was an impressive manipulator. He convinced people that he was a typical teen but the tapes and his writings indicated a cold-blooded psychopath. The bottom line was that people wanted to find a reason why the boys did what they did.



# Characters

## Dylan Klebold

Dylan was a student at Columbine High School when he and a friend, Eric Harris, entered the building with guns and bombs, killing thirteen and injuring dozens of others. Dylan was quickly identified as a "math prodigy," and began school early, entering a program for gifted students. He participated in sports at an early age. He was born in Colorado. His mother was Jewish and the family practiced a blended religion observance that wasn't focused on any formal church setting. Dylan was quiet and left fewer clues in the forms of notes and journals than his counterpart, Eric. Dylan worked at Blackjack Pizza and left the house on April 20, 1999, just as he did most days. He picked up supplies, including weapons and the makings of bombs, and spent the morning with Eric before entering the school to begin the killing. Dylan was the follower of the two and it seemed he was wavering in the months leading up to the attack. Many of his personal writings were about love and focused on a girl he liked. However, five days prior to the shootings, he apparently made the resolution to go through with it and his writing changed. The FBI analyst noted that Dylan seemed the more boisterous of the duo and to some, it may have seemed that Dylan was the leader. However, he gave clues that he was subservient to Eric such as looking toward Eric for approval during the filming of the Basement Tapes. Dylan's family held a private funeral service for him a few days after the killings. Fearing that his grave would be defaced, his body was cremated.

## Eric Harris

Eric was the son of a military father although his mother stayed home to devote her time to Eric and his brother. Eric was academically gifted and was able to charm his way through almost any situation. When Eric and Dylan were sentenced to a juvenile program, Eric set out to make them believe he was devoted to completing the program. He wrote what appeared to be a sincere letter of apology to the man who owned the van Eric and Dylan had broken into. He kept his grades up and by all appearances, had turned his life around. Eric was the more outspoken of the two and went to great lengths to leave behind detailed journals and information, apparently in an effort to explain himself. He was often with Dylan and another friend, Zack Heckler, and the leader of the three when they ran "missions," perpetrating petty mischief on the homes of those Eric chose. Eric was accused a year prior to the massacre of making threats against another classmate, Brooks Brown. Eric's father made him apologize to the Browns but thought they had blown an argument between the boys out of proportion. Eric was on a prescription anti-depressant at the time of the killings. Some people believed he'd been off his medication when he shot his classmates and committed suicide but the autopsy revealed that was not true. Eric's body was found in the library along with Dylan's and several of their victims. Information about his funeral was never revealed.



## Patrick Ireland

This person was one of the victims shot in the library. Patrick was shot in the head and was unable to focus or speak coherently. He managed to get to a window and hoisted himself over the sill. Police caught him and took him to the hospital where he began the slow process of recovery. When his mother asked him later if he realized who shot him, he told her he wanted simply to forgive them and let it go. His mother later admitted she'd worried that he would harbor hatred but he was the one to lead her to a peaceful resolution. He graduated as valedictorian.

## Coach Dave Sanders

One of Eric and Dylan's victims, he was a coach and taught keyboarding, typing, business, and economics. Dave was in the school when the shooting happened and was among the early victims. However, he lived for several hours while SWAT was trying to clear the building.

## Cassie Bernal

One of Eric and Dylan's victims, she transferred to Columbine High School because she believed she was being led to witness to the students there. She had trouble fitting in. She was rumored to have told Dylan she was a Christian just before he shot her. However, it was later proven that she was shot without being given time to say anything at all.

## Lieutenant Dave Fuselier

The father of a Columbine student, he was also an FBI analyst at the time of the Columbine massacre. He went to the scene because of his son but soon became deeply involved in the investigation. He examined the Basement Tapes, journals and other materials of both boys, and eventually came to the conclusion they were psychopaths.

## Rachel Scott

Eric's first victim, she was eating with her friend Richard Castaldo on the grass when Eric opened fire on them. Rachel's death was instantaneous, having been shot in the chest and head. Her body lay exposed on the lawn for more than a day after the shootings.



## **Danny Rorhbough**

The second of Eric's victims, he was apparently rushing up the stairs toward Eric when Eric shot him. There were rumors that he was holding the door and ushering other students to safety when he was shot but that was later disproved by forensics. His father found out he was among the dead when he saw a newspaper photo of Danny's body on the lawn of the school the day after the shootings.

## **Valeen Schnurr**

One of the victims, she was actually the girl who was praying right after being shot. Dylan asked if she believed in God and she told him she did. Val was angry for a long time because no one believed her but eventually came to peace with the situation. She said she had been able to forgive the boys for shooting her but had more trouble forgiving them for killing her best friend, Rachel Townsend.

## **Brooks Brown**

A friend of Dylan and Eric, he had trouble with the boys when Eric made threats against him. Brooks' parents had gone to police with the information, including details from Eric's website. That information would later become a questioning point with people asking if officials should have predicted that Eric and Dylan would go on a murderous rampage.



## **Objects/Places**

### **Columbine High School**

This is the site of the massacre perpetrated by Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris in which fifteen, including the two gunmen, were killed.

### **Blackjack Pizza**

This is where Eric and Dylan worked at the time of the massacre.

### **The Lounge**

Where Coach Sanders and his wife, Linda Lou, often met for an evening with friends and dancing.

### **Trinity Christian Center**

This is where Cassie Bernall attended worship services.

### **Christian Fellowship School**

This is where Cassie Barnall attended school prior to transferring to Columbine.

### **Judgment Day**

This is the name Dylan and Eric gave their planned date of the massacre.

### **The Tanner Gun Show**

This is where Robyn Anderson bought three of the guns for Dylan and Eric.

### **Foothills Bible Church**

Where the funerals of Lauren Townsend and John Tomlin were held.





## **The Trench Coat Mafia**

This is a group of students known for wearing trench coats to school, initial reports blamed them for the shootings.

## **St. Phillip Lutheran Church**

This is where a private funeral service for Dylan Klebold was held.

## **Arlene**

This is the name Eric gave his shotgun.

## **The Basement Tapes**

This is the name given the series of tapes created by Dylan and Eric as they ranted about their hatred and outlined their plans to bomb the school.



# Themes

## The need to understand Dylan's and Eric's actions

The author pointed out repeatedly that people wanted to know why Dylan and Eric walked into the Columbine High School and killed thirteen of their classmates. The short answer is that they were psychopaths filled with rage, wanting to do a great deal of damage to the world but settling on the attack on the school. The boys had set out with a plan to bomb the school and to shoot those who were fleeing the scene. The bombs didn't go off so they went inside with the intention of simply killing whoever came into contact with them. Many people wanted there to be a reason behind the killings so badly that the myth of Dylan and Eric killing jocks, students who had bullied them, or targeting specific ethnicities was reported as fact. Even when that was disproved, the myth continued and it was probably a way some people had of coping with the horror of the crimes. There were some parents who sued the county solely for the purpose of gathering information. Those parents wanted the documents gathered and compiled following the shootings released. They also wanted the parents of Dylan and Eric to answer questions. There were problems with those efforts to gain answers. First, the parents of Dylan and Eric had no clue why their sons committed the murders then killed themselves. Another problem was the magnitude of the evidence. There were thousands of documents, pieces of information, and pieces of forensic evidence. Even the experts trained for the job had trouble analyzing the information.

## The need to retake their identity

The students at Columbine High School and the members of the community soon realized the media and the public were equating "Columbine" with the shootings. They wanted to make it clear that Columbine was their high school and not just defined by the horrific the event that happened there. There were some who considered razing the high school as the only option. Those were soon overridden by those who wanted to renovate the existing structure. The compromise was to renovate the school but to completely restructure, refurbish, and rearrange the library so it no longer resembled the room in which the majority of the students, along with Dylan and Eric, had died. When it came time for the formal reopening of the school, many of the students simply wanted to get back to the business of being a student. Brian Fuselier, the son of the FBI agent who was the first official from that agency on the scene, was among those. Toward that end, hundreds of community members set up a perimeter and refused to allow the majority of the media access to the dedication ceremony. That event was prompted by the media's handling of the event in the early days following the massacre. Initially, students and community members had spoken to the journalists without hesitation. Later, they tended to refuse comment and closed ranks in an effort to keep their school out of the mainstream media.



## The need to blame someone

Patrick and Dylan killed themselves after killing twelve other students and a teacher. They'd intended for the death count to be much higher and had actually expected to be killed by police but committed suicide when that didn't work out. An attorney for the parents of one of the boys' parents warned them immediately after the shooting that the public would need someone to blame. That proved to be true as many people believed the parents of Patrick and Dylan were responsible and should be held accountable. There followed a series of lawsuits against the parents of the two boys. There were also lawsuits against the officers who responded to the school when the shooting began. Ironically, Tom Klebold was among those to file lawsuits, alleging that the officers should have taken a proactive stand against Dylan and Eric when they received information about the boys' activities ahead of time. Another example of this theme was seen when the man who sold Dylan and Eric the guns was brought to trial. His attorney realized the people needed someone to blame and that because of Patrick's and Eric's suicide, he would become the person they could blame. There were people later who felt someone should have put all the clues together - the boys' barely-concealed rage, the fact they'd bought guns and built pipe bombs, and their hints that they were near the breaking point.



# Style

## Perspective

The book is presented in the third person from a limited perspective. This limited perspective is stretched past typical limitations by the fact that the author did a great deal of research before writing the book. The author, who is a journalist, did not insert himself into the action but wrote the book as though he were writing a series of newspaper articles. Though it's apparent the author did extensive research, the perspective is limited by a great many factors. For example, the tapes and writings left by Dylan and Eric are used to create the analysis of the motivations of the two boys. However, the two boys knew their writings and tapes would be used for that purpose, meaning they probably weren't being truthful so much as they were performing for their intended audience. For example, the boys talked about their deaths with little more than a flicker of remorse and apparently no dread at all. Another limitation is the author's ability to interview those who were present and on their memories. Those people were mostly students and all were under tremendous strain. Their memories may or may not be accurate. Finally, the author depended on police reports. Those reports are the official records and journalists routinely depend on those for information. However, they are fallible.

## Tone

The tone of the book wavered between dread and hope, depending on the topic being discussed at the moment. The actions of Dylan and Eric were well documented and the nation watched in horror as the events at Columbine unfolded. The massacre was widely publicized and most people who read the book are already aware of the basic facts as those were reported around the time of the event. There was no surprise that Dylan and Eric went through with their threats to bomb the school and kill students. Most readers will already know the identities of several of the victims and will know that Dylan and Eric killed themselves as part of their spree. The author also presented the heartache experienced by many of the parents, including the horror experienced by the parents of the two killers. The dread of the event and the fate of the fifteen (including Dylan and Eric) was countered by the stories of the survivors. Patrick Ireland was one of those. Patrick was shot in the head but managed to hoist himself through a window where police were waiting to take him to a waiting ambulance. Patrick's determination to survive and thrive despite his ordeal was one story of hope presented by the author.

## Structure

The book is divided into five parts identified by title. The titles are: Female Down; After and Before; The Downward Spiral: Take Back the School; and Judgment Day. The parts range from more than fifty to more than ninety pages each. Within each part are



chapters. The chapters are also titled with details from the chapter. Examples of titles include: Dads; Last Bus; Betrayed; The Parents Group; Aftershocks and An Emotion of God. The lengths of chapters vary with some as brief as three pages and others more than twelve. The book also includes an Afterward called "Forgiveness," the timeline leading up to the massacre, acknowledgements, notes, a bibliography, an index, and a reader's guide. The book is not presented in chronological order. For example, the author gave details about the shootings in chapter eleven but then elaborated on those details later in the book. The book is also not presented as a means of following any particular person from the story. For example, the author gave updates periodically about the progress of Patrick Ireland, mentioning him throughout the book. This was somewhat confusing in many cases and some readers may have trouble keeping track of the huge cast of people involved.



## Quotes

"Eric and Dylan planned to be dead shortly after the weekend, but Friday night they had a little work to do: one last shift at Blackjack." (Chapter 4, p. 16).

"Eric and Dylan expected their attack to puzzle the public, so they left an extraordinary cache of material to explain themselves." Chapter 8, p. 35).

"Eric has staggering confidence in himself. He left no indication that he planned for contingencies. Dylan left no indication that he planned much of anything." (Chapter 11, p. 45).

"One room at a time, the team worked methodically toward the killers. It would take three hours to reach their bodies." (Chapter 13, p. 61).

SWAT teams searched the building for over three hours, but the killers were lying dead the entire time. They had committed suicide in the library at 12:08, forty-nine minutes after beginning the attack." (Chapter 17, p. 83).

"'Dylan isn't here anymore for people to hate,' he said. 'So people are going to hate you.'" (Chapter 17, p. 91).

"Columbine was fundamentally different from the other school shootings. It had not really been intended as a shooting at all. Primarily, it had been a bombing that failed." (Chapter 22, p. 124).

"'We had 1,800 kids rushing from the school,' said Jeffco sheriff's spokesman Steve Davis. 'The officers had no idea which were victims and which were potential suspects.'" (Chapter 26, p. 144).

"Dylan would cry out, cursing God for making him a modern Job, demanding an explanation for the divine brutality of His faithful servant." (Chapter 31, p. 174).

"In addition to why, the public had two pressing question: Should authorities have seen Columbine coming? And should they have stopped it sooner once the gunfire began?" (Chapter 41, p. 248).

"The planet was beyond him; even a block of Denver high-rises was out of reach. But he could pull off a high school." (Chapter 44, p. 277).

"They decided to just walk right in with the bombs. It was a bold move, but textbook psychopath." (Chapter 48, p. 305).

"They didn't have a lot of money, but they had insurance. It turned out their home owner's policies covered murder by their children." (Chapter 49, p. 319).



"Everything had a touch of triviality. Calculus really did turn out to have no practical application in his life." (Chapter 50, p. 336).

"But mostly Tom and Sue were bewildered. They were convinced that jocks and bullying had been behind it, but jocks and bullies are everywhere and few kids are trying to blow up their high school." (Chapter 51, p. 339).

"The fire set off the sprinkler system across the room. The boys had been going for an inferno; they caused a flood." (Chapter 52, p. 351).



## Topics for Discussion

Describe Dylan and Eric. What were they like? What were their strengths and weaknesses?

Describe Columbine High School. Describe the massacre. What were the plans Dylan and Eric came up with? What was the reality?

What were the main questions the public wants after the massacre? What were the answers to those questions? Were those answers satisfactory?

Describe what happened to Dave Sanders. What was the criticism around his death? Do you believe the criticism was warranted? What was changed about how SWAT teams react to similar situations after Columbine?

Describe any four of the shooting victims, how they were shot, and their fates.

Describe Cassie Bernall. How had she come to be at Columbine? What was the popular myth about the moments prior to her death? What was the reality? What was the effect of that on her family?

What was the attitude of the community toward the families of Dylan and Eric after the massacre? What were the attitudes of Dylan's and Eric's families? How did they settle the lawsuits against them? What was basis of the lawsuit filed by the Klebolds?