

# **Dark Matter: A Novel Study Guide**

## **Dark Matter: A Novel by Blake Crouch**

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# Contents

<a href="#">Dark Matter: A Novel Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 1.....</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 2.....</a>	<a href="#">7</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 3-4.....</a>	<a href="#">9</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 5.....</a>	<a href="#">12</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 6.....</a>	<a href="#">17</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 7.....</a>	<a href="#">19</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 8-9.....</a>	<a href="#">24</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 10.....</a>	<a href="#">28</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 11-12.....</a>	<a href="#">31</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 13.....</a>	<a href="#">33</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 14-15.....</a>	<a href="#">37</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">41</a>
<a href="#">Symbols and Symbolism.....</a>	<a href="#">45</a>
<a href="#">Settings.....</a>	<a href="#">47</a>
<a href="#">Themes and Motifs.....</a>	<a href="#">49</a>
<a href="#">Styles.....</a>	<a href="#">54</a>
<a href="#">Quotes.....</a>	<a href="#">56</a>

# Plot Summary

NOTE: All citations in this Study Guide refer to the Kindle version of *Dark Matter*, published July, 26 2016.

If you had a chance to go back and change a decision in your life, would you do it? What might happen if you did? These are the questions author Blake Crouch presents in his science-fiction novel *Dark Matter*.

Years before, Jason Desson decided to focus his life on family when he learned his girlfriend was pregnant. Though he wonders what his life might have been like if he had been able to continue his research into superposition, Jason does not regret his decision. One day, however, he is forced to face what that life might have been like when he is kidnapped by a strange man who asks if he is happy with his life.

Jason left his family to visit an old college friend even though it was their traditional family night. Ryan Holder was awarded the Pavia Prize for his work in science. During his conversation with Ryan, Jason gets the sense that Ryan is angry with him for concentrating on his family instead of on his career. Ryan accuses Jason of giving up. Jason leaves the bar in anger.

On his way home, Jason is kidnapped by a strange man wearing a geisha mask who sends Jason to a version of reality where Jason is a renowned scientist. Jason has created a way for people to travel through the multiverse but he remembers none of it. The people for whom Jason works have just discovered that something is very wrong with their scientist when Amanda Lucas, another worker from Velocity Laboratories, helps Jason to escape death at their hands when she sneaks him into the box. Together, Jason and Amanda begin exploring the variety of universes, trying to get Jason back to the reality from which he came.

After Jason visits several universes in his search for his real home, he finally arrives in the Chicago he remembers. Unfortunately, several other Jasons, who also believe they are searching for their real lives, have also shown up in this same Chicago. Jason must prove to Daniela and Charlie that he is the real Jason while avoiding the other Jasons who are trying to kill him in their attempt to stake their claim on Daniela.



# Chapter 1

## Summary

In Chapter 1, Jason's wife Daniela convinces him to go to a celebration for Jason's friend, Ryan Holder, even though it is their traditional family night. Ryan, who is single, won the Pavia Prize for his achievements in neuroscience. Daniela and Jason's lives have been less dramatic in their achievements. Although Daniela had the talent to become a famous artist she was distracted by life, including her marriage to Jason, having Charlie, and battling through severe postpartum depression. When Jason mentions the Pavia, Daniela tells their teenage son Charlie that Jason was a genius but had given up his work for family. Jason agrees to go to the celebration but promises to be back in 45 minutes. As he leaves the house, he notes the tesseract chandelier, an anniversary gift from his wife. He also does not think that that is the last night that his family would spend in the house together.

As Jason visits with Ryan, Ryan tells his friend he always thought Jason would be the one writing papers and winning awards because he was smarter than Ryan. Ryan seems to be of the opinion that Jason could have changed the world if he had not given up and decided instead to have a family. Jason leaves angry. Without thinking he steps in front of cab and nearly misses being hit. In a daze, Jason buys the ice cream from Whole Foods that his wife and son had requested.

On his walk back to his home, Jason notices someone following him. The person wears a geisha mask and holds a gun. He orders Jason to a white SUV and has him drive to an abandoned power company. On the drive, the man asks Jason a variety of personal questions like what his plans for the following day include and by what name he calls his wife. When Jason asks the man who he is, the man replies that he would not believe him if he told him.

At the building, the man makes Jason take off all of his clothes. Jason obeys as the man directs him down a flight of stairs. When they are almost at the bottom of the stairs, the man gives Jason an injection in his neck and then one in his thigh. He gives Jason a bag of new clothes to put on, and then they sit down to wait. Jason finds himself becoming peaceful and sleepy but fights the feeling even though the man tells him not to. The man also tells Jason there are so many questions he wants to ask him but foremost is his curiosity if Jason is happy with his life. Jason says he likes his life but regrets the loss of his ambition. Charlie had been a surprise to both Jason and Daniela. Jason explains he had a big project in the works but with a baby and new wife could not get the time he needed to work on it. He lost his funding, but never regretted his life as a husband and father.

Jason listens as the man tells him that he can have everything he never got to experience because of his family. He watches as the man injects himself with something



from an ampoule. When Jason asks the man what he has planned for him, the man simply responds that Jason “wouldn’t believe me if I told you” (30).

## Analysis

The author quickly establishes a tone of danger and suspense as Jason is kidnapped by a strange man on his way back home from a celebration for a friend’s accomplishment in science. This event sets the action of the novel in motion as the protagonist is thrust into constant conflict. The way the abandoned power plant is described builds the tone of the story. Jason has already noted he was cold when he was walking home. At the building to which the man makes Jason drive, it is even colder. Jason can hear “low, distant moan of wind” (22) outside the “disintegrating edifice” (21) into which the man takes him.

The author’s use of imagery of decay and neglect set a negative tone. Adding to this feeling of despair, Jason’s mind whirls, making up a scenario of policemen and cadaver dogs finding his body in the weeks or months to come. This line of thinking foreshadows the idea that Jason does not expect his encounter with this strange man to end well.

The interior of the building is described in short, choppy phrases, each of which is given its own paragraph. Jason is quickly noting what the interior of the building looks like and giving the reader the feeling through these choppy phrases that he is able to take in little as his captor hurries him through the building.

Another important element of foreshadowing is seen in the discussion that the man has with Jason just before Jason loses consciousness. He asks Jason if he is happy with his life and then suggests that he has the ability to know what his life would have been like had he abandoned Daniela and Charlie to pursue his career in science.

The fact that Jason’s life, based on his decision to have a family, is a topic of conversation between Jason and his family, Jason and Ryan, and Jason and his captor, establishes the thematic premise that the choices one makes in life and the outcomes of these choices will be an important theme. Ryan, who has dedicated his life to science, believes that Jason has made a mistake by becoming a family man. Jason’s captor seems obsessed with Jason’s life with Daniela and Charlie, as if he wishes he had that life. Daniela knows and acknowledges what her husband has given up in order for them to be a family. On the same theme, Daniela gave up a career in art in order to have a family. At this point, the novel seems to indicate that a person cannot have both a career and a family, or that they cannot be successful at having both a career and a family.

The author employs a number of literary devices in this first chapter to draw the reader in and to establish mood. In the following quote, for instance, a simile is used to describe how the first drug that Jason’s captor gave him affected him: “Before he can answer, something plows through my blood-brain barrier like an eighteen-wheeler. I feel impossibly heavy and weightless all at once, the world spinning and turning itself inside out” (25-26). The drug that Jason is given is described as hitting like an eighteen-



wheeler, an image that helps the reader understand how drastic and strong the effect of the drug was. The fact that the author includes in the description that the drug is passing through the blood-brain barrier indicates that whatever Jason has been given is intended to have some sort of effect on his brain function.

There are two objects of importance introduced in this section. This first is the tesseract chandelier that hangs in Jason and Daniela's home. This chandelier will become a symbol of Jason's real home. The second object of importance in this chapter is the geisha mask that the man who kidnaps Jason wears. This mask is a symbol of the hidden identity of Jason's captor.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Why do you think the man who kidnaps Jason is so obsessed with Jason's life? Why does he tell him that Jason can experience what his life would have been like if he had not chosen the family life?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Do you agree with the idea presented thus far that a person cannot have both a career and a family? Why do you think these two opposite life outcomes are the only ones presented?

## **Discussion Question 3**

How does the author use words and descriptions to set the tone and mood of the novel?

## **Vocabulary**

proximity, precipice, violating, belligerently, hyperbole, ubiquitous, lethargic, portending, brevity, bereft, burgeoning, edifice, defile



## Chapter 2

### Summary

In Chapter 2, Jason becomes aware of people in biohazard suits loading him onto a gurney. He hears someone ask how Jason got out of the box. In an operating room, a man welcomes Jason back and tells him: "Congratulations. You did it" (32). Jason wonders what he did and tells himself that whatever he is experiencing is not real. The man tells Jason his name is Leighton Vance and says he is the chief executive and medical officer of Velocity Laboratories. Jason is decontaminated and then taken to a room to get dressed. Jason tries to tell the man he does not know what is happening but Leighton leaves without acknowledging Jason's concerns.

Alone, Jason tries to piece together the last things he remembers. He struggles to bring to mind his night with his family but cannot remember why he left them. He thinks he almost has it when Leighton comes back into the room and tells him that his tests show he is cleared from quarantine. Leighton takes him to a debriefing room. Amanda Lucas is in charge of the debriefing. People standing behind glass are clapping and cheering for Jason. Amanda tells Jason he has been the only one to return, a statement that Jason does not understand. Jason learns he has been gone for 14 months and that the people want to know what he experienced. Jason thinks about his memories and finally recalls that he left his house in order to go to Ryan's celebration.

Jason slowly realizes that he is not having a hallucination but that something else is happening. He feels he needs to pretend to be the person it is believed he is. He asks Amanda for a break. Leighton leads him to a bathroom. In the bathroom, Jason locks himself inside. When Leighton realizes the door is locked he calls for a security team. Jason slides out a window in the bathroom. Jason knows he is being followed but he continues to run. He finds a cabbie and convinces the man to take him home even though the cab is out of service for the night. The cabbie offers to take Jason to the hospital but Jason tells him that he wants to go home.

### Analysis

Jason wakes in what appears to be an alternate universe. Even though he knows no one at the place where he regains consciousness, they know him and have been waiting for his return. They congratulate him on his return and tell him that he has been gone for 14 months. While they attempt to debrief him on what he saw while he was gone, Jason struggles to remember the last few hours of his life with Daniela and Charlie. Believing it is for the best, Jason tries to pretend to be the person that Leighton and the others believe that he is.

The author again uses short choppy sentences in parts of this section of the novel. These short sentences illustrate the way that Jason's memory comes back to him in bits



and pieces. “A teenager drawing. / Wait. / Not a teenager. / My teenager. / My son. / Not a kitchen. / My kitchen. / My home” (36).

Once Jason realizes he is not in the right world, the first thing he wants to do is to try to get to his home. There is foreshadowing that when he does get home, he will not arrive at the house he remembers. Leighton has given him a bag of things that supposedly belonged to Jason but that Jason does not recognize. He is not familiar with the picture on his driver’s license even though he knows it is him in the picture. He also has a health insurance card and an ID for a gym that he does not recognize.

## Discussion Question 1

How does the author use words and phrases to illustrate the slow return of Jason’s memory?

## Discussion Question 2

Considering that Jason’s captor told Jason that he could have the life he would have lived if he had focused on science, what do you think has happened to Jason?

## Discussion Question 3

Why is Jason’s first instinct to go home? What do you think he expects he will find there? What do you think he will find there?

## Vocabulary

pneumatic, apertures, conjure, quarantine, ascend, protocol, concurrently, auditory, euphoria, immaculate, debriefing, imperceptibly, mediocrity, apoplectic, deranged





## Chapters 3-4

### Summary

In Chapter 3, when Jason arrives at what he believes is his home, he first notices that the door is different. Inside, more and more things are not like the home that he and Daniela made together. The house he enters is expensively decorated but lifeless. He notices several sketches done by Daniela Vargas hung on the walls upstairs. In the master bedroom a display case houses a gold coin with the image of Julian Pavia on it as well as a certificate acknowledging that Jason is the winner of the Pavia Prize. Jason is so disturbed by what he finds in his home that he is sick. He calls Daniela's cell phone but a male voice answers. It is Daniela's number, but does not belong to her.

As he is studying himself in the mirror, Jason hears footsteps downstairs. Leighton's voice calls for him. Jason locks himself into the bathroom. He tries to decide if he will fit down the laundry chute as he hears people beginning to search the upstairs level. They break down the bathroom door just as Jason disappears down the chute. He runs out to back doors and takes cover in a shed. In the quiet of the shed, Jason decides he must be suffering with a brain tumor.

When Jason looks out and sees the people searching for him are gone, Jason heads to Chicago Mercy to get checked out. The doctor questions Jason, trying to determine why Jason believes he has a brain tumor. It is when the doctor asks Jason if he is married that Jason touches his ring finger and discovers that his wedding ring is missing. The doctor promises Jason he will try to get in touch with Daniela. Later, in his hospital room, Jason examines his finger. Even though his ring is gone, there is a slight indentation that proves to him that it was there at one time.

In Chapter 4, Jason returns home to Daniela. She is angry because he is so late but also notices he has a renewed sexual interest in her. He tells her that he almost got run over by a cab, an experience that made him feel lucky to be alive. They make love. Daniela compares it to the first time they were together.

### Analysis

Jason encounters more irregularities in his life when he arrives at home. He discovers that everything about his home is different. There are things there that he does not own and things he does remember, like the tesseract chandelier, are not there. His record player is there but his collection of records is meticulously alphabetized and stored, not like the one at his home. In this dream Jason is the one who has earned a Pavia Prize. His wife's artwork is displayed on the walls but the name on the art is her maiden name. There is no sign that Daniela or Charlie live in the house with Jason. It appears that the Jason who lives in this house never married and never had children. He apparently pursued his career as a scientist.



There are references to several scientific theories throughout this novel. It makes sense that as a scientist that Jason would try to solve his problems using the theories of science. In this section Jason refers to Occam's razor, a principle that states that: "all things being equal, the simplest solution tends to be the right one" (58). Jason decides that the simplest solution is that he is suffering with a brain tumor. He does the most obvious thing to determine his hypothesis, he checks himself into a hospital.

A significant object introduced in this section of the novel is Jason's wedding band. It would, perhaps, be more appropriate to say that the lack of Jason's wedding band is introduced in this section of the novel. The wedding band is proof that Jason is married and that his family does exist. When Jason touches his finger and realizes that the band is not there, he doubts if what he had thought was real was real. An indentation on his finger proves to him that he did once wear the ring. It is this indentation that makes Jason believe he is not going crazy.

Important to keep in mind in this section of the novel is the artwork done by Daniela in the upstairs hallway and master bedroom. In his real life, Jason's wife was never able to peruse her life in art. In this life, it appears she was able to become an artist. Notice also that her artwork that Jason has displayed are signed with Daniela's maiden name.

In Chapter 4 the point of view changes from the first person point of view from the viewpoint of Jason as it has been thus far to a third person point of view. This indicates that the person who reenters the house with Daniela is not the Jason who is now at Chicago Mercy believing he has a brain tumor. From this point forward, the person who has taken over Jason's life with Daniela will be referred to as Jason2, a name by which the man will be called later on in the novel, in order to avoid confusion.

## Discussion Question 1

How likely do you think it would be that someone would have been able to put together this illusion of an alternate universe, just to mess with Jason?

## Discussion Question 2

Do you think Jason is right in his assessment that he has a brain tumor? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 3

Why do you think that Jason has artwork by his wife hung in his house if the two of them are not married? Do you think they know each other in some way in this other life?



## Vocabulary

Minimalist, candid, resonance, triptych, surrealist, pristine, spelunkers, redolent, cognitive, portly, hypothesis, vestige,



# Chapter 5

## Summary

In Chapter 5, Jason learns he does not have a brain tumor but that traces of a surgical anesthetic were found in his system along with traces of a strange psychoactive compound that the doctors did not recognize. The doctor tells him that they were also not able to get in touch with nor find any trace of a Daniela Dessen.

The doctor asks Jason his profession and Jason replies he is a professor at Lakemont College. She tells him that they looked up information on him and asks again if he really thinks that he works at Lakemont. Jason insists that he does. She begins reading information to him, showing him it is from his page on Wikipedia. The information includes his mother's death when he was eight, and that he got a Bachelor's degree and a PhD from the University of Chicago. When she begins reading about his Pavia Award and guest lectures, she notices that Jason looks bewildered. In 2007 he began working as chief science officer at Velocity Laboratories. A missing person report had been filed by his brother eight months prior. He had not been seen in public for more than one year. Jason is told that the hospital has placed a psychiatric hold on him and will transfer him to Chicago-Read, a mental health center.

Once the doctor has left his room and the hallway is clear, Jason walks out of the hospital. He walks until he finds a hotel and rents a room. The hotel is old but not dirty. When Jason gets to his room he looks outside and notices a man standing next to a lamppost smoking a cigarette. He wonders if he is being paranoid when he considers the man might be looking for him.

Jason tries to use his background in science to focus on the questions about his situation that he can answer. He decides to see if he can find where Daniela is. As a reminder of the indentation on his finger where he once wore his wedding ring, Jason ties a loose thread from the curtain. He finds Daniela listed in the phone book under her maiden name. She does not answer the phone.

At her apartment Daniela also does not open her door. In the main hallway Jason notices a bulletin board on which a poster advertises a show by Daniela Vargas. The show is scheduled that night. At the gallery, Jason joins a group of ten people who are led into the small area where "Entanglement," the focus of the show, begins. There is a labyrinth of Plexiglas panels with five entrances. Jason chooses an entrance. A series of looped images show on the panels. As the images fade and Jason is able to see the other people in the labyrinth, he has a feeling of how indifferent they are all toward each other.

When he exits the labyrinth, Jason realizes it is Daniela standing on a dais talking to the people in the crowd. He notices how energetic this Daniela is, like she was when they first met. He wonders if she will recognize him. She does and rushes to him, putting her



arms around his neck. She tells him that she had hoped he would come. Jason asks her where Charlie is. He realizes she does not know who their son is and changes the subject by telling her that he just came through the labyrinth. She tells him she got the inspiration for the project from him and a conversation they had a year and a half ago. The project, in fact, is dedicated to him.

Ryan Holder approaches the two. Ryan asks Jason if he wants to go for a drink. Before they part, Daniela requests Jason to attend a secret get-together at her apartment after the show. Jason learns that Ryan is teaching at the University of Chicago. Ryan asks Jason if the compound he came up with for him had worked out. When Jason does not talk about the compound, Ryan assumes he cannot because of non-disclosure agreements. Ryan thinks Jason is being arrogant when Jason asks what compound he is talking about.

Later, at Daniela's apartment, Jason is drinking with Daniela and Ryan. Daniela pulls out a marijuana pipe and they all smoke. After they have finished, Jason asks Daniela and Ryan how well they know him and if they trust him. Even though it is against his better judgment he tells them from a hypothetical standpoint the story of the night he went to see Ryan and wound up getting abducted. When Jason confirms that the man is not suffering a brain tumor and that the changes in his world are too complex to be a joke, Ryan says the man is crazy. When Jason replies "I'm not crazy" (92) Daniela asks what he is trying to tell them. He says he does not remember the conversation with Daniela that inspired "Entanglement." She tells him that he came by to tell her how he had messed up some choices in his life but none so badly as the choice he had made when it came to leaving her.

In return, Daniela asks Jason for the identity of Charlie, the person he asked about when they first saw each other that night. After hesitating a moment, Jason tells her that Charlie is their son. He shares with them the reality of his life up until the previous day. Ryan offers to take Jason back to the hospital. When Jason refuses to go, Ryan asks Daniela if she wants Jason to stay there. She replies that he can stay. Jason asks Ryan again what compound Ryan made for Jason but Ryan just walks out.

After a shower, Jason talks to Daniela about their lives together. He worries for a moment he has put her in danger by making her part of whatever is happening to him. She asks about Charlie and he tells her. Daniela has tears in her eyes when she tells him to stop. She reminds him that he broke up with her the day after she told him she was pregnant.

Jason wakes in the morning with a fever. Daniela tries to take him to the hospital but he again refuses. Later in the day after his fever breaks, Daniela asks him if she is happy in the other reality, even without her art. That night he joins Daniela in the kitchen. She is cooking an old family recipe that he remembers. He helps her cook without even having to be told the ingredients he needs or the steps to take. They have sex that night. It is like the first time they were together for Jason.



Afterward, Jason tells Daniela he needs to get back to his house on Logan Square to see if he can find any information about what he was working on at Velocity Laboratories. As Daniela is offering to drive him there in the morning there is a knock at the door. Daniela refuses to let the man in so he breaks in the door. He points a gun at them. When Daniela speaks to the man, he shoots her between the eyes. Jason is incapacitated with a Taser and tied up, his mouth covered with duct tape.

## Analysis

As Jason tries to determine what happened to him he turns again to processes he has learned through scientific research to break down and simplify the problem he is facing. “I am not allowed to think I’m crazy. I am only allowed to solve this problem” (79), Jason says to himself as he tries to find a core question to answer. While he wants to know what happened to him, he decides a better question to try to answer is to try to determine where Daniela is.

This reality into which Jason has found himself represents the one in which he might have had if he and Daniela never married. The reader learns in this section that the two met, dated, and Daniela even got pregnant—but Jason decided to focus on his work. Apparently Daniela decided to focus on her art and aborted the baby. Both have become successful in their careers but neither has a family.

Significant in this section is the art display of looped images on the labyrinth of Plexiglas that Daniela has dedicated to Jason. She says that a conversation between the two of them inspired the project. That conversation had taken place about a year and a half before that night at the art show so it was about the time that Jason went missing. Daniela explained to him that he had apparently come to say goodbye to her. He had apologized for his mistakes and said that one of the worst choices he had made had been the one where he left her behind.

This conversation brings to mind the importance of the choices we make and how they can affect our lives. In this particular instance, the Daniela and Jason in the world that Jason believes is not his are the best versions of the people they could have been if they had concentrated on their careers. Those in Jason’s real life are perhaps the best they could have been since they decided to make a family together.

When Jason sees the display by Daniela, he is already feeling lost and alone. In the hospital he compared his feelings as “a crushing sense of emptiness, like it’s raining directly on my soul” (70). The fact that he had already been feeling depressed helps to account for the strong feelings of indifference that people have for one another. He sees them as being completely separated and going about their lives on their own with no regard to others.

Although Ryan could possibly give Jason a clue as to what was in the compound that Ryan made for Jason—a formula that could help Jason to determine what is happening to him—Ryan chooses not to help. He instead seems to believe that Jason is somehow



snubbing him by not telling him what he was working on, so Ryan decides not to help Jason out. Because Ryan was the only one who knew that Jason was at Daniela's house, the reader has to wonder if Ryan did not turn him into the people at Velocity Laboratories.

Although it is long, the following quote boils down the quandary facing Jason as he tries to determine how he should proceed in this strange new life in which he has found himself: "What if all the pieces of belief and memory that comprise who I am — my profession, Daniela, my son — are nothing but a tragic misfiring in that gray matter between my ears? Will I keep fighting to be the man I think I am? Or will I disown him and everything he loves, and step into the skin of the person this world would like for me to be?" (75). Jason wonders if he should be true to the person he knows he is, or if he should try to be the person who lives the life presented to him. He doubts the certainty that his life with Daniela is the real life but at the same time continues to wonder if there is some brain trauma or disorder either that is causing his memories of a life not his or is making him think he is in another life altogether.

A significant object helps Jason to hold onto his belief that his real life is with Daniela and Charlie, and that that life is real. That is the string he had tied around his ring finger. He tied this string with the intention of reminding himself that he had a mark around his ring finger, proof that he had worn a wedding band.

Meanwhile, Jason should have trusted his gut when he wondered if the man outside his hotel was following him. It is this same man who bursts in the door at Daniela's apartment, shoots Daniela and ties up Jason. The man is described in a way that makes him appear more mechanical than human. Jason describes the man's eyes as being "not so much cold as remote, as if they don't see me as a human being, but rather as information" (107). His cruel action of shooting Daniela is contrasted with his phone conversation with either a wife or girlfriend a few minutes later. In this conversation he is loving and considerate.

## Discussion Question 1

Why do you think the man in the black leather jacket shoots Daniela? What about Jason is so important that it is worth the death?

## Discussion Question 2

Consider the art display that stemmed from Daniela's last conversation with Jason. How are the emotions that Jason takes away from the display significant?

## Discussion Question 3

Compare and contrast the Ryan in this section with the Ryan of the first chapter.

## Vocabulary

proximity, atrocious, lurid, abreast, jetties, mantra, relented, loitering, tensile, nexus, vectors, primal, torques, trajectory, lucid, enigmatically, semicoherent, purporting, eclectic, hypothetical, infiltrates, talisman, mulling, devious, apropos, cruciform





# Chapter 6

## Summary

Daniela, Jason, and Charlie attend a Cubs game. Daniela has noticed how happy Jason has been lately and how he has been unable to keep his hands off her. At dinner that evening, Daniela tells Jason it feels like he is romancing her, something he does not have to do since they have been married for so long. He continues to blame his new outlook on life by being almost hit by a cab. He talks to her about how every choice they make branches them into a new realm in their lives. He believes that there are millions of alternate realities, all playing out in a multiverse at the same time, all versions of themselves if they had chosen different paths in their lives. He also refers to dark matter, the substance that is believed to hold the universe and galaxies together. She asks him if in one of the other universes if there is a version of Jason who stayed with his research.

## Analysis

Jason2 continues to blame the changes that Daniela sees in him on the fact that he nearly got hit by a cab. It is assumed Jason2 had been following the real Jason for a while on the night of attack before he kidnapped him and had seen the near miss with the taxi. The reader might remember that this is one of the things that Jason's captor did not ask him about.

Ironic also is Daniela's question to Jason2 if there was an alternate Jason in another universe who had stuck with his scientific career and had not married her. This is ironic because it appears Jason2, who did dedicate himself to science, has somehow switched places with the real Jason.

As he and Daniela have dinner together, Jason2 talks to her about a force called dark matter, the force from which the book takes its name. Jason explains, "Most astrophysicists believe that the force holding stars and galaxies together — the thing that makes our whole universe work — comes from a theoretical substance we can't measure or observe directly. Something they call dark matter. And this dark matter makes up most of the known universe" (112). He pitches the idea to Daniela that with each choice they make, their lives split into a different universe. This suggests the idea that there are millions of universes where alternate forms of themselves, the people they might have become if they had chosen a different path, live.

## Discussion Question 1

How does Jason2's description of dark matter and the multiverse help to explain what might have happened to the real Jason?



## **Discussion Question 2**

How does Jason2 explain the changes in his personality and actions to Daniela?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Does Daniela seem happy with the changes in her husband? Why or why not?

## **Vocabulary**

redolent, communal, itinerary, apex, nostalgic



# Chapter 7

## Summary

In Chapter 7, Leighton visits Jason in his cell. He apologizes for what has happened. Leighton does not answer when Jason asks if Leighton had told the man who came after him to shoot Daniela. Jason takes his refusal to answer as a yes. Jason imagines himself killing Leighton.

Jason pretends to calm down. He asks for Leighton. When Leighton comes, Jason is let out of his restraints. Based on what he has already experienced, Jason knows he needs to be the man Leighton believes that he is or that he will never be allowed to live. He tells Leighton he ran because he was scared. He is scared, he says, because he does not remember anything about the past ten years. When Leighton suggests that the real Jason is locked away in his head, Jason again questions his beliefs about himself.

Leighton asks Jason how he got to Daniela's apartment. Jason lies and says that he is not sure; he only knows they had dated in the past. He also tells Leighton a story about the time he was away from the lab. He does not mention talking to Ryan, even when Leighton asks if he is sure he did not talk to anyone except Daniela. Leighton tells Jason they killed Daniela only because they have to protect the project on which they are working. He indicates that the man Jason had been would understand why she had to be killed. Jason asks Leighton to show him what they are working on that is so top secret.

Jason is awe-struck when he sees the box. It is located in the hangar in which they found Jason. Jason is surprised because seeing the box is like seeing a dream raised from the dead. His early research was focused on a small box intended to put a tiny object into superposition, a state like the one that Schrödinger's cat was placed into. It was believed that while in the box, the cat was both alive and dead, as if existing in two universes. In one instance the box could be opened and the cat found alive. In the other it could be found dead. But in quantum mechanics it is believed that both of these possibilities branch into two different universes—one where the cat is alive and one where it is dead. If the universe splits every time an observation is made, there are an endless number of universes and realities that exist. The Jason who had lived in that world had created a box where things—even people—could exist in superposition.

In a nearby control room, Leighton shows Jason the video feed of Jason entering the box. He carries a backpack and wears a spacesuit. Fifty minutes later feed from a GoPro camera shows the box Jason entered is empty. Leighton shows Jason another video file where Jason staggers out of the box about 14 years later.

Leighton settles Jason into a bedroom with a laptop loaded with all his research. Jason spends the night going through it. He is familiar with the information in the early folders



but the later notes are foreign to him. When Jason can no longer study the notes he tries to sleep but can only see the blood from Daniela's bullet wound.

Jason is awoken by someone pounding on the door. It is Amanda Lucas, the woman who was in charge of Jason's debriefing. She asks Jason some questions including whether he has seen anything that caused "fear, helplessness, or horror" (129). Jason tells Amanda he witnessed Daniela's murder, an experience that Amanda clearly knows nothing about. She does tell him that she will be helping him to recover his lost memories using techniques like psychotherapy and hypnosis. Before she leaves, she tells Jason that she is his friend and that everyone there is his friend. She also asks for the name of the woman again that Jason believes he saw murdered.

Jason goes back to reading his notes and finds a mission statement he wrote when he first began working at Velocity Laboratories. In it, he suggests the possibility that there are a variety of universes in which everything that might have happened in the past did happen. He asks if it is possible that the world includes a fifth dimension of probability space in which the human mind has developed a way to limit a person's perception to only one universe.

When Leighton finally comes to get Jason he takes him back to the room where the first attempt to debrief Jason took place. After they sit, Leighton explains to Jason how the company has always been a family that has been built on trust. The people watching are not smiling at Jason this time. They all look grim. Leighton accuses Jason of lying to them and not being one of them. Jason tries to leave but the door is locked.

Leighton tells Jason that he told Daniela the truth, and now wants him to tell them the truth. Ryan is led into the viewing room and his face pushed against the glass. Jason notices he has been beaten. Leighton tells Jason that he told Ryan the truth. When Jason asks Leighton if he tracked Ryan down, Leighton tells Jason that Ryan came to them because he was concerned about Jason and the things he had heard at Daniela's apartment. When Jason tells Leighton he wants to leave, Leighton says that is not likely because Jason is the only one who has successfully flown the box and thus, he is believed to have "critical knowledge that we've spent billions and a decade of our lives trying to acquire" (136). Amanda appears to be trying to keep herself from crying.

Leighton questions Jason about the box and where he is from. At first, Jason does not answer. He finally tells Leighton he does not want to talk to him. Someone slams Jason out of his chair and pins him to the floor. He is given an injection in his neck.

When Jason regains consciousness, he is in a cell with Ryan. Ryan apologizes to Jason. He says that he thought if he told the people at Velocity what Jason had told him that perhaps they would include him in their research or reward him in some way. Instead, they just beat him. Jason tells Ryan that he was not the one who kept what was happening at the lab a secret from Ryan, and Ryan finally realizes that the things Jason told him were true. Ryan tells Jason that he had asked him to create a compound that would put to sleep some area of the brain's prefrontal cortex. Jason explains to him how the compound would work in the instance of putting a human being into superposition.



The cell unlocks and Ryan is asked to come out. Leighton tells Jason that what is about to happen is not his choice, but Jason's.

Jason sits in his cell in the dark and thinks about how much he misses his life. He suddenly realizes that the man who abducted him had followed him and studied him because he intended to step into Jason's shoes and take over his life. It was the Jason who built the box who put him in that place. Jason realizes it was some part of himself that did this to himself.

The door to his cell unbolts. He can smell Amanda's perfume. She tells him that Ryan is dead and that men will soon be coming to kill him. He asks for her to help him get out of the building but she tells him that would not be safe since his name and face are all over the news. He has been accused of killing Daniela. Amanda tells him that she can get him to the hangar and asks if he knows how the box works. They make it to the access panel to the hangar and manage to get inside as they see several men running behind them. They get inside the box and shut the door just as the men catch up to them.

Inside, Amanda pulls out ampoules of what Jason assumes is Ryan's compound. In order to get the compound to take effect faster, Amanda says they will have to inject themselves intravenously.

## Analysis

Chapter 7 is a long and pivotal chapter in understanding the mechanics behind what has happened to Jason. The author has chosen to build the novel around a rather complex idea in quantum mechanics. Luckily, the reader only has to have a basic idea of Schrödinger's cat in order to understand what is happening in the narrative. The idea is that there is not just one universe, but an infinite number of universes representing every choice a person could possibly have made in his life. The universe in which Jason lives as a family man with Daniela and Charlie represents the one that came to be because Jason decided to concentrate on his family. The universe in which Jason2 worked with Velocity Laboratories is the result of his choice to focus on his career and not marry Daniela once he learned she was pregnant.

Remember that Jason2 has dedicated all his time to research and work on the box. His level of thinking is much more advanced than the Jason who has spent his time teaching and raising Charlie. Jason and Jason2 have also had different experiences. Jason knows little about how the box works or the mechanics of the company for which he is believed to work. For this reason, it is obvious to the people at Velocity Laboratories that Jason is different from the person who constructed the box.

Velocity Laboratories has invested billions of dollars into Jason2 and his invention. This is why they are willing to do whatever it takes to get Jason back to the lab and gaining information on what he learned during his time in whatever dimension of space to which the box took him. Their investment will pay off for them only if they are able to prove that the box did successfully take Jason2 to some other universe. Of course, they do not



know how successful Jason2's box was or that the Jason that they threaten to kill is the souvenir he has sent them from another universe.

Jason has the first of several very traumatic experiences while traveling the multiverse when he sees Daniela shot. The people from Velocity Laboratories know that he told Ryan and Daniela about his reality of being married and having a child in a different universe. Ryan tells the officials at Velocity, hoping to get a reward. Instead he is beaten and eventually killed because he learns too much after Jason tells him about the life he believed was his. Daniela is killed for this same reason. Because Amanda sneaks Jason out of his cell and into the box, it is assumed that the leaders at Velocity intend to do the same thing to him.

While Jason and Jason2 are very different people, illustrated in part by their tastes in decorating, the Ryan who won the Pavia Prize and the one who did not are also very different. They are both critical of Jason but for different reasons. The Ryan in Jason2's universe criticizes Jason for not getting him any credit in creating the compound that made travel between universes possible. In Jason's life, the Ryan who won the Pavia Prize criticizes Jason for giving up on his scientific career. These differences illustrate the fact that it is not just Jason whose different experiences have molded his personality in a different way but also that Ryan's different experiences have helped to mold his personality.

The Daniela in Jason2's world also is very different from the woman to whom Jason is married. It is as if she has become the most successful version of herself while Jason has become the most successful version of himself. She is a renowned artist. Jason notices that Daniela shows no signs of the wear and tear that she seemed to have developed during their relationship together.

There is one sentence that gives the reader a clue as to how Jason might have gotten out of the box into the Velocity Laboratories hangar. When he is watching the video of himself returning to the lab, Jason narrates: "I see myself stagger out of the box and crash to the floor, almost like I was pushed out" (126). It is when Jason indicates that he was pushed out of the box that he foreshadows his realization that it was actually another version of himself that made sure he would end up in this particular reality.

## Discussion Question 1

Why do you think that the people at Velocity Laboratories not recognize that Jason had come to them from a different universe?

## Discussion Question 2

Why do you think that Jason2 did not prepare Jason better for his trip to Velocity Laboratories? Did he hope that his doppelgänger would be killed?



## Discussion Question 3

Why do you think Amanda is the only person at Velocity Laboratories who showed any compassion for Jason? Do you get the sense that there was a love interest between her and Jason?

## Vocabulary

carabiners, periphery, formidable, translucent, pristine, ingenious, decohere, surreal, meticulously, legitimately, psychogenic, rampant, filaments, scenario, inertia, triaging



## Chapters 8-9

### Summary

In Chapter 8, Amanda and Jason wake in a hallway. There are doors spaced about 12 feet apart, stretching into infinity. Jason is filled with wonder that he is actually experiencing what he has heard about only in theory. They walk a mile past doors. Amanda asks what they will do. Jason tells her they will experiment by trying a door and seeing what happens. They select a door and walk into a Chicago that appears to have been hit by some sort of disaster. Ash falls from the sky. There is no sign of life. Buildings are destroyed. Amanda and Jason return to the box.

They take another dose of the drug to transport them back to the hallway. Amanda tells Jason that she saved his life because she had never signed on to work for a company that killed people. She asks Jason if he is impressed with himself, since it was a version of him that built the box but he tells her that he still does not understand how it was done.

The next door they open leads to a scorched forest. As they move on down the corridor, Jason wonders what will happen to them when their supplies, in the backpack that Amanda grabbed, are gone. Meanwhile, Amanda complains that the long line of doors makes her feel disoriented, just like she had felt in North Dakota during the blizzards.

Amanda and Jason wind up back in the hangar at Velocity when they open the next door. They see themselves running toward the box. Jason has been beaten. Leighton and his men catch up with them. They shoot Amanda and Taser Jason. The Amanda traveling with Jason shrieks when she sees herself get shot. Leighton notices the doubles and is surprised. Amanda and Jason slam the door on the box. Jason opens door after door looking for some place for them to rest. They finally open a door where snow is falling. Amanda walks into it, desperate to get out of the box.

They walk toward the houses but the subzero cold and wind soon becomes dangerous. Because Amanda's legs are bare in her skirt, Jason picks her up and carries her. He considers the possibility that they will freeze to death when he sees a house in front of them. They are on the level with the second floor windows. Jason breaks a window and pulls Amanda inside. Jason finds the family who once lived there. They have starved to death. Their bodies are lying in sleeping bags in the living room.

Later, Amanda and Jason thaw out by the fireplace. He tells Amanda he suspects the family who had once lived there went someplace warmer. He does not tell her he had hidden the bodies in the office. They talk about their situation and Jason reminds Amanda of her comment that being in the hallway was like being in a blizzard. He wonders if her comment led to the snowy world in which they found themselves. They realize they had also just thought about how there was a possibility that different versions of themselves had gotten caught in the hangar at Velocity before they opened





the door to see that scenario. With this information in mind, they come to the conclusion they are the ones who control what is behind the doors they open.

The next day they find the box, which is buried in snow by that time. Back in the box, they take another dose of the medicine. As they wait for it to take effect Amanda tells Jason that he is different from Jason2. She described Jason2 as being hard and driven. Jason tells Amanda that he has decided that it was Jason2 who put him into the strange world. Amanda responds that it made sense because Jason2 was obsessed with thinking about the path not taken. She explains to Jason that Jason2 would have rationalized that he was doing Jason a favor by allowing Jason to see what his life would have been like if he had followed his desires to be a scientist.

Jason begins to feel his anger rising but Amanda reminds him they are about to be trying doors again. He has to remain calm. With 44 ampoules left, they have 22 chances to get Jason back home. He is slightly distressed when he learns that Jason2 went into the box with 100 ampoules but is determined that if Jason2 could figure out how the box works, he could do the same.

In Chapter 9, Daniela notices changes in her husband's daily routine. He interacts with Charlie differently and is more lenient with him. She wonders what is wrong. Even though she wants to know what is happening, she also does not want to know. She chooses not to ask.

## Analysis

For a person caught up in a strange nightmare like Amanda is, she seems strangely calm and scientific about their situation. Amanda is a psychiatrist, not a scientist like Jason, so she does not completely understand the mechanics behind the box. Even though a version of Jason created the box, he does not understand the mechanics behind the box. Amanda does help Jason to try to figure out the delicate workings of the box.

In the course of their acts of choosing doors, Jason connects their thought patterns with the conditions they encounter when they open a door. Amanda, for instance, had previously described the disorientation she felt in the hallway as being like the disorientation she felt during a blizzard. They had also just talked about the possibility that they had left versions of themselves in the hangar at Velocity where those versions were probably killed when they opened a door into the hangar and witnessed a version of Amanda being killed and a version of Jason being beaten.

From Jason and Amanda's experience with the box so far, the reader gets an idea that Jason2 located his world with Daniela and drugged him to get him back to the world at Velocity. Jason2 had the advantage of studying Jason's relationship with Daniela before taking over the position. Jason had no prior information about the world into which he was pushed. This explains why he so quickly alerted the officials of Velocity that he was an imposter. Even with his prior knowledge of Jason and his relationship with Daniela,



Jason2 still does not have all of Jason's routine completely right. Daniela has noticed enough things off about the way he goes about his daily routine that she wonders what going on with her husband.

Jason and Amanda use aspects from science as well as psychology to try to figure out the situation in which they have found themselves. They begin their experience using experimentation, the building block of science, to determine where the doors in the infinite hallway. As Jason tells Amanda when she asks what they will do: "Like any good scientist, experiment. Try a door, see what happens" (153). Psychology comes into play when Amanda explains to Jason how Jason2 must have rationalized his actions in putting Jason into his life at Velocity. "It's Human Behavior 101"(180), Amanda tells Jason when she explains that because Jason2 had wanted to know what it would be like to live in Jason's life, he assumes that Jason would want to know what it was like to live in Jason2's life.

An interesting question is posed when Jason discusses with Amanda Jason2's personality. She pauses in answering a question and he asks: "Am I putting you in a doctor-patient confidentiality quandary?"(179). Amanda reasons that because he and Jason2 are technically the same person, she will not be breaking any rules by discussing the things she observed about Jason2. The question is still legitimate, however, because although they may be the same person fundamentally, Jason and Jason2 are very different in other ways. This illustrates how different experiences can change the personality even of the same person.

Mention is made that Jason2 was obsessed with the road not taken. The box he creates allows him to see what it would be like to make different choices and live with those choices. It also sets up dangerous consequences, such as the one where Jason wound up in an unfamiliar world against his will and the one in which Amanda and Jason walked in on a universe still containing versions of themselves.

## Discussion Question 1

Jason thinks that Amanda's comment about the blizzard caused them to open the door on the world trapped in a blizzard. If this is true, why did Jason open doors on several different scenarios before he reached the blizzard?

## Discussion Question 2

Do you think this ability to travel between universes is actually possible?

## Discussion Question 3

Discuss the probability of Amanda and Jason winding up back in the hangar at Velocity Laboratories. How does this experience affect Amanda?

## Vocabulary

tangible, recursive, ambient, ominous, undulating, finite, euphoria, vertigo,  
doppelgängers, vortex, emaciated, scenario, minuscule



# Chapter 10

## Summary

In Chapter 10, Amanda and Jason decide to write down details about the type of world in which they want to enter before they open the door, and then focus their full energy on the world they hope to discover. On their first try, they arrive in a slightly futuristic version of Chicago. Although Amanda thinks the version of Chicago is what was in her head, Jason is disappointed because it is not his home.

Back in the corridor, Jason tries to determine what he should write in order to find himself at his home. They hear a noise and see a man covered in mud coming down the corridor. When the man gets closer, Jason realizes it is a version of himself. The man seems shell-shocked and emptied out.

Later, in front of the door he has chosen, Jason thinks to himself that he wants to go home. He finds himself in the abandoned power plant—the plant to which Jason2 took him the night he abducted him. As they walk toward town, Jason and Amanda notice there are no cars on the road and no people out. Pieces of clothing, some red and some black, hang from windows of homes. They find a car with the keys inside and drive to Logan Square. On the abandoned Interstate, Amanda begs Jason to consider the idea they need to go back. They hear an Emergency Alert System message on the radio telling residents that the 24-hour curfew is still in effect. Those with sick people in their homes should display a red piece of cloth while those with dead people should display a black piece of cloth.

Jason arrives at his home and discovers his wife is sick and his son is dead. Daniela believes she is seeing a ghost because Jason also died of the disease. A Humvee pulls up behind the car Amanda and Jason drove to the house. Two people in biohazard suits approach them. The man says that because Daniela has reached the point where her eyes are hemorrhaging, there is not help for her. The man gives Jason auto-injectors with enough morphine to put Daniela out of her suffering.

Even though Amanda continues to beg Jason to get them out of the situation, Jason stays with Daniela until she dies after he gives her the morphine. Jason is crying as he tries to drive himself and Amanda away. Amanda tells him that Daniela, his wife, is still alive and he can still get to her but Jason is still an emotional wreck from what he just experienced. On the interstate Amanda realizes they are being followed. A voice from a megaphone orders them to pull over. Jason speeds back to the power plant. They barely make it in time to get safely back to the box.

In the safety of the box, Jason walks for nearly an hour before he has expelled the emotional energy. He breaks down and cries as Amanda holds him.



When Jason wakes later, he opens the door to find an evergreen forest. Amanda follows him in few minutes. Amanda tells Jason that she believes he led them to the reality in which Chicago was in the clutches of an epidemic because of his experience with his mother's death. She knows this because it was the reason that Jason2 never got married or had children.

They still have 40 ampoules left, 20 chances to get their destination correct. They decide to stay together because Amanda tells Jason she believes she can help him get home. Jason tries again writing in the notebook. He creates a detailed description of the world in which he hopes to arrive.

## Analysis

A change in structure occurs in this chapter of the novel. As Jason and Amanda choose doors in the hallway, each trip is preceded with a label in bold lettering indicating how many ampoules they have remaining. This gives the reader a running total of how many chances the two have left to get their line of thinking right so that they can find the reality from which Jason came. This structuring also creates a sense of foreboding and tension as the numbers tick down.

In order to try to align their thoughts, Amanda and Jason try writing down their expectations in a notebook in order to help their brains take them where they want to be. Amanda's attempt at this process works better than Jason's. Amanda explains to Jason that it is because he carried emotional baggage with him—the fear of losing his family to illness the way he lost his mother—that he wound up in the version of Chicago in the midst of an epidemic.

Scary in this section of the novel is the version of Jason that appears to be shell-shocked and badly injured. Because he is inside the corridor it means that someone must have given him the medicine to make him arrive in that corridor. The only two known realities in which anyone would have access to this medication would be the one where Leighton exists and the one where Jason2 is living with Daniela. Since Jason2 does not know that Jason is experimenting with the box, it means that Leighton must have been the one who dosed this injured Jason and then set him free in the corridor.

Even though Jason's gut feeling, and Amanda, warn him that they need to go back to the box when they begin to notice how desolate the streets of one of the versions of Chicago they visit are, Jason continues going because he is so desperate to see Daniela. Jason gets what he wants, he sees his wife, but her condition is desperate because she is dying of a highly contagious disease. His son is dead. In order to help Daniela, Jason has to give her an overdose of morphine in order to put her out of her misery. Even though Amanda tells him later that the woman he knows as his wife is still alive in a different universe, the experience imprints itself on Jason's subconscious.



## Discussion Question 1

Why does Jason continue on to his house even though he senses, just like Amanda does, that there is something very wrong in the version of Chicago they have entered?

## Discussion Question 2

Why do Amanda and Jason decide to stay together in their search for Jason's home? How might it benefit both of them if they were to separate?

## Discussion Question 3

How is it that Jason cannot understand Jason2's reasoning that it would be best for him to not get married because he feared he would lose his family to illness?

## Vocabulary

mirage, asymmetry, hologram, proximity, queue, pinnacle, periphery, derelict, vibe, ominously, inertia, claustrophobia, futuristic, scenario, teeming



# Chapters 11-12

## Summary

In Chapter 11, Jason feels revolted as he walks around a version of Chicago that looks like his, but all of the street names are wrong. They have visited four versions of Chicago that have all been almost right. Jason and Amanda stay in a hotel—the same one in which Jason rented a room when he first arrived in Jason2's version of Chicago. They clean themselves up and go out to eat. On the way back from the restaurant, they stop at the Village Tap for a nightcap. Jason recognizes the bartender but he does not recognize Jason.

That night, Amanda crawls into bed next to Jason. She tells him that he is a better man than Jason2. Even though Jason does not want her to, he tells Amanda that he needs for her to get back into her own bed.

In one trip to a version of Chicago, Jason talks to a version of Amanda who never knew him. It is after Jason spends the day sitting outside the home that another version of himself shares with Daniela that Amanda tells him that they have to separate. She was out of her mind when he finally came back to the hotel late that night. She had been afraid he had left her. Amanda reasons with him that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over expecting different results. She believes that in order for them to get different results, they need to separate from one another.

In Chapter 12, Jason wakes to find that Amanda is gone. He feels terrified and alone. A group of teenagers beats him up as he walks back to the box in yet another foreign version of Chicago. Three of Jason's six remaining ampoules are broken during the beating. The boys also have stolen his money. He begs on the street for more cash. One night after Jason drinks, he finds himself standing at the foot of Daniela's bed imagining himself killing the version of Jason that is with her. At the last moment, Jason realizes that is not where he belongs. He decides to spend his last two ampoules trying to reach his Daniela. In preparation for his next door, Jason writes about the first time he saw Daniela. He is thinking of that woman when he opens the next door.

## Analysis

The author continues to refer to different hypotheses formulated to help explain human behavior. Two particular examples of this include the reference to the uncanny valley and the definition of insanity. Jason feels he is experiencing the effect of the uncanny valley when he arrives in a Chicago where things look like his home but all the streets have different names. Amanda talks to Jason about the definition of insanity when she fears that he is driving himself crazy by doing the same thing over and over in order to try to get a different result.



It is suspected that Amanda parts ways with Jason not only because she senses there is nothing she can do to help him but also because she has feelings for him that he will never reciprocate. At one point Amanda tells Jason that he is a better man than her Jason. She even goes so far as to get into bed with him one night. Even though he is aroused by Amanda, Jason asks her to move back to her bed. Amanda seems to understand from this that she will never be able to take Daniela's place in his life.

While Amanda tells Jason that what they do in order to find Daniela fits the definition of insanity, these actions are not the only signs that Jason might be getting close to suffering a psychotic break. Jason recognizes that his writing is changing as he becomes more and more desperate to find his way home. He notes that in his notebooks "every page is filled with my increasingly manic scrawl" (234). The description of his writing as being "manic" indicates Jason is moving toward a psychotic break. When he is approached by the teenage boys, Jason does not even have the inner strength to protect himself. It is almost as if he hopes to die.

## Discussion Question 1

Do you think Amanda made the right decision in parting ways with Jason? Why was this parting necessary for the story line?

## Discussion Question 2

Discuss Jason's deteriorating mental status. What has caused his to break down both mentally and emotionally?

## Discussion Question 3

Why do you think references to hypotheses from science and psychiatry continue to be included in the novel? What does it say about the narrator?

## Vocabulary

aesthetics, revulsion, apocalyptic, imminent, compensate, luminescent, trajectory, pinnacle, binary, multifaceted, permutations, purge, abject, insufferable, derisively





# Chapter 13

## Summary

In Chapter 13, Jason steps out of the box into the abandoned power plant. When he exits the box, he notices an empty ampoule in a crack of the floor. Jason believes this ampoule is a good sign.

At his house, Jason realizes it is his home because things are just like he remembers—down to the dent in the bumper of his Suburban. When he stands up from examining his vehicle, Jason realizes that someone has been watching him. Thinking it is a neighbor suspecting him of planning to steal the car, Jason chides himself for not being more careful.

That night in a hotel, Jason thinks through his plan to kill Jason2 and take his life back. Planning to buy a gun, Jason goes to Field and Glove, a store to which he went with Charlie to buy sports supplies. The woman at the counter recognizes Jason even though he does not know her. She tells him that he has been in four times before to buy a gun, but did not have the money or the proper ID any of those times.

Startled by his experience, Jason hails a cab and asks the cab driver to take him to a hotel—any hotel of his choice. In that hotel's business center Jason checks his email. He finds one entitled "Welcome Home the Real Jason Dessen." A link in that email leads to a chat room where he is given the username Jason9. A variety of other Jasons discuss their ideas to kill Jason2 and bury him in the same park that Jason considered.

While he is in the chatroom, Jason7 contacts Jason in a private message and asks if he wants to partner with him against the others. Meanwhile, one Jason says he has already killed two Jasons. Jason is so freaked out by what he has learned that he leaves the computer center and goes back to his hotel room. He realizes all of these Jasons want what they believe is their life back. He is stuck in a game of chess against himself.

The phone rings in Jason's hotel room. Jason answers it. There is no sound but breathing. When he hangs up, it rings again but only one time. Jason realizes it is one of the other Jasons trying to locate him. He decides to listen to his gut and leave the hotel room. In the hallway, Jason watches as a man who looks just like him gets off the elevator. He points a gun at Jason. Jason runs down the stairs only to encounter another version of himself in the alley. This Jason has a knife. Jason gets away from them and runs to a packed sports bar where he hides in the crowd.

After one of the Jasons checks the bar, does not see the real Jason and leaves, Jason gets himself a drink. He notices as an obnoxious inebriated man is hauled out of the bar. Because of all the other Jasons who are keeping an eye on his house and trying to kill any Jason they see as a competitor, Jason tries to come up with a way to get Charlie



and Daniela out of the house so he can convince Daniela he is the version of himself who is her husband.

Another Jason wanders into the bar, seems surprised to see the real Jason there, but sits beside him. This Jason has a knife wound on his face. They discuss when they arrived in that world and then notice they are finishing each other's sentences. After their chat, the two promise not to follow one another. The man tells Jason the question lies in which of the versions of Jason deserve Daniela and Charlie. He also tells Jason that he will not hesitate to kill the original Jason if it comes down to it.

Because he feels it is against his best interest to go back to his hotel, Jason falls asleep under a tree. Just as he is going to sleep, he realizes that in order to beat the rest of the pack of Jasons he has to do something completely random that he would never dream of doing in real life.

Jason wakes up with a crazy idea. He buys a cigar and a lighter and then goes to a diner for breakfast. After eating, Jason lights the cigar. He makes a disturbance when people ask him to put it out. The waitress calls the manager. Jason speaks to him belligerently. A police officer eating in the restaurant checks out what is happening. Because Jason refuses to put out the cigar, the officer arrests him.

At the police station, Jason calls Daniela. He asks her to come bail him out of jail. He also asks that she pick Charlie up before she comes to get him, a request that she refuses. After a good deal of time passes, Jason decides something has happened and that Daniela is not coming. The sound of the door unlocking surprises Jason. The guard tells him that Daniela posted bail.

Jason is happy to see Daniela standing in the lobby of the police department. He knows she is his wife. Daniela immediately realizes that Jason looks different from the way he did when he left the house in the morning. For one thing, he has grown a beard. He asks her to sit with him for a minute and talk. He tells her that he will explain everything after she calls a cab. She balks, but he asks her to trust him.

Jason tells Daniela what happened to him the night of Ryan's party but she thinks he is trying to trick her. Telling her that he should be in his office at the college, he dials his office on her phone. It is Jason2 who answers. Jason arranges to trick him by telling Daniela to tell Jason2 that she wants to go back to the Florida Keys, like they did the previous Christmas even though in reality they never made such a trip. Jason2 responds that they will make it work somehow.

When she is off the phone, Jason tells Daniela that he will explain what is happening but that they need to pick up Charlie because they are all in danger. Jason uses Daniela's phone to send a text to Charlie telling him to be out in front of the school in ten minutes. After they pick up Charlie, Jason asks the driver to go to Water Tower Place, a mall where they can talk but will still have plenty of people around. Once they are seated, Jason tells Daniela and Charlie everything. When he is finished, Both Daniela



and Charlie tell him that they believe him. Charlie tells his father that he knew something was not right, that he had been different for the past month.

Daniela asks why Jason got himself arrested and lured her to the police department. He explains that other versions of Jason made his way back to their world as well. She asks if these versions of Jason are trying to make their way back to Daniela and Charlie just like the real Jason was. He says that they are. Sensing they are not safe there, Jason asks Daniela if she is with him. She says that she is.

## Analysis

There are two objects in this section of the novel that Jason recognizes and that lead him to believe that he has finally arrived at home. One of these objects is the empty ampoule with the top broken off that Jason sees in a crack in the floor of the Cago Power Plant when he steps out of the box. The other object is the bumper on Jason's Suburban. He remembers causing this dent only a few weeks before he was kidnapped so he doubts he is any version of Chicago other than his own.

The person whom Jason glimpses watching him as he is examining his Suburban foreshadows that there are actually a good many Jasons who are watching him. Jason does not think much about this man at first, only that he must be a neighbor thinking that Jason is considering stealing the car. When he learns that there are many other versions of Jason who have come from different universes looking for their wife, Jason is beginning to realize that he is going to have more competition in getting back Daniela than just Jason2.

Before Jason realizes he has more competition than just Jason2 in getting Daniela back, he considers murdering Jason2 and hiding his body. When he goes through the process that he believes he needs to follow in order to kill Jason2, Jason feels his mental, scientific side taking over from his emotions. "I feel the physicist side of my brain creeping in, trying to take over the controls. I'm a scientist, after all. A process-minded thinker. So I think of this like a lab experiment" (251-252). Jason does not want to murder a person, even in order to get his life back, so he finds a way to separate himself from what he plans to do.

The narrator in this section references the Prisoner's Dilemma. Prisoner's Dilemma is a game theory in which rational people betray each other and do not cooperate with one another even though it seems that it would be best for them to cooperate with each other. When Jason learns that there are a variety of different Jasons all fighting to claim Daniela, he feels as if he is fighting himself for his wife. He sees what is happening as "A terrifying spin on the Prisoner's Dilemma that asks, Is it possible to outthink yourself?" (262). Jason is not only competing with other people for Daniela's affections, he is also competing with people who think just like him in order to get Daniela. Proof of their similarity in thinking is illustrated by the information shared in the Internet chatroom. A variety of Jasons, just like the real Jason, had already thought about shooting Jason2 and burying him in Kankakee River State Park.



The Jason with the slash on his face, the one who has a beer with the real Jason, breaks down what will ultimately become the focus of the decision that will determine which version of Jason will get Daniela. That Jason says: “Who deserves them is the question, and there may be no answer” (271).

Notice also a comment that this same Jason makes to the real Jason before he leaves the bar in which the two men drank a beer together: “If it comes down to you and me, I won’t let you stop me from being with Daniela and Charlie. I won’t like it, but I’ll kill you if it comes to that” (271). Apparently all of the Jasons have the same desire to be with Daniela regardless of what they have to do in order to achieve their goal.

Occasionally, there have been references in analysis sections to the “real” Jason. This reference indicates that Jason is Daniela’s real husband in this particular universe. In this novel there are an infinite number of universes, some of which have a version of Jason. More versions of Jason were created every time Jason entered a different universe looking for his reality. These Jasons, like the real Jason, all think that they are married to Daniela and that they need to find the right version of her so that they can kill Jason2 and take their lives back.

## Discussion Question 1

What does it mean for Jason that all of the competitors that he has for Daniela are all versions of him?

## Discussion Question 2

Discuss the conversation between Jason and the Jason with the slash on his face. How does this conversation help to develop the idea that Jason and his doppelgängers are all versions of the same person?

## Discussion Question 3

How have all of the different versions of the real Jason been created?

## Vocabulary

decapitated, vigilante, infringed, resolute, precluded, duped, mundane, undulates, inebriated, belligerent, deference, detonation, leeward, inherently, indelible, famished, imperceptibly, ordinance, dulcet, mezzanine, anonymous



# Chapters 14-15

## Summary

In Chapter 14, Jason and Daniela clear out their savings and checking accounts. They put a rental car on credit card and take off with no destination in mind. Daniela gets a load of texts and phone calls from various phone numbers. All of them claim to be Jason calling or texting to tell her that she is not safe. They all refer to the fact there are a number of Jasons in existence. Jason has Charlie and Daniela turn off their cell phones since the phones can be tracked.

That evening, they reach a town called Ice River and find an isolated, abandoned cabin which they break into. They eat takeout for dinner and then start a fire in the fireplace. Jason learns that Charlie has a girlfriend named Angela and that he got his learner's permit. After Jason tucks Charlie into bed he goes to the master bedroom where he hears Daniela crying in the bathroom. He asks if he can come in. When she composes herself, she asks how she can really know that he is her husband. She also admits feeling sick about the time she spent with the man who she believed was Jason. When he asks she tells him about her time with the strange Jason, explaining that it was like the beginning of their relationship at first but then she realized Jason was different in many little ways. She asks how they can fix the situation in which they have found themselves.

Jason cannot sleep that night because he is thinking of the best way to fix their problem. He finds a computer and logs onto the chat room. There are at least 109 versions of Jason communicating on the site. Jason tells them that Daniela and Charlie are with him. He suggests that they meet back at the old power plant and have a lottery to determine who gets to stay with Daniela. He also suggests that they destroy the box so that no other Jasons will be able to find their way to that particular universe. He promises to talk to Daniela about his proposal and then get back to the others.

The next morning, Jason tells Daniela about his proposal to the other Jasons. She is angry that his best idea is to raffle her off. He tells her it is the only way he knows to make life in Chicago safe for her and Charlie. That night they walk to the village where they eat dinner and watch a movie. Back at the cabin they make love. In the middle of the night, Daniela wakes and tells Jason she does not want him to leave. Jason wakes again later and goes to the sink for a glass of water. He notices a strange shadow in the yard.

An injured man is dragging himself to the house. Jason meets him in the yard. The other version of himself tells Jason that another one of them injured him in an attempt to kill him. As the man dies, the real Jason looks around and notices the tires of his rental car have been slashed. He hears a gunshot in the distance. Inside the cabin, Daniela is calling Jason's name. He tells her that the other Jasons have found them.



As Jason moves to make sure the doors to the house are locked, he tells Daniela and Charlie to gather their things. In the living room Jason notices how cold it is and realizes the doors must have just been opened. A lamp turns on and the Jason with the knife slash across his face orders the real Jason to take off his clothes. There is another version of Jason lying on the floor, dead.

When the Jason with the slash on his face tells the real Jason he has already killed four of them that night and will kill him as well, the real Jason realizes that not all of them are alike. The real Jason runs for the Jason with the slash and manages to break his nose but the Jason with the slash overpowers him and soon has him on the floor. A gunshot rings out and the real Jason looks up to see another Jason, Jason2, holding a gun. The real Jason knows it is Jason2 because he is wearing a wedding ring.

Daniela walks into the room and orders them to stop. To determine which is the real Jason, she asks what they did that night. To the other Jason she asks how he could do what he did to her and her family. He replied he was haunted all of his life because she was the one thing that he had not gotten. She criticizes him, telling him that he should have stayed with her when he had the chance.

Jason2 is critical of the real Jason and what he considers his mundane life. The real Jason tells Jason2 that even if he kills him, it will not make Daniela want to be with him. Charlie walks toward Jason2, distracting him. The real Jason takes the opportunity to knock the gun out of his hand. He grabs the knife and stabs Jason2 in the stomach. As Jason2 is dying, he holds the wedding ring out to the real Jason. He also tells him to look in the glove box of the Suburban. As they run for the car, they continue to hear gunshots from the area of the cabin. Even as they try to drive away, one of the versions of Jason stands in front of them and fires his gun. The real Jason wonders that there is a version of himself who would risk hurting Daniela and Charlie.

Once they are on the road, a safe distance from the other Jasons, Daniela asks how they will live if there are versions of Jason who plan to continue trying to hurt them. The real Jason is not sure but he asks Daniela to look in the glove box. Inside, there is a small leather bag.

In Chapter 15, Jason realizes that even though he and his family will have to leave everything they have built together that he has never been happier.

When they arrive at the lower level of the power plant, the real Jason realizes that the some of the other Jasons did not leave Chicago but showed up early for their chance at the lottery. Daniela whispers to Charlie and Jason that they will not run. She has them link arms and walk toward the crowd of Jasons. The Jasons are between them and the box. They tell the Jasons there will be no lottery because some of them broke the rules by attacking the family the night before.

One of the Jasons speaks up. He says the decision is a matter of what Daniela wants. He orders the Jasons to let them pass. They make it to the box and close the door. Jason gives them all doses of the drug. As they walk through the corridor of doors,



Daniela proposes that one of the Jasons might find their way to them since they all think alike. Jason says that will not happen because he is going to let Charlie choose the door.

Charlie opens a door and Jason sees the sunlight, smell the earth after a storm. They all walk through together.

## Analysis

In a previous section, the Jason with the slash on his face told the real Jason that Charlie and Daniela needed to stay with the Jason who deserved them. One of the Jasons in the chatroom types: "All that matters is our wife and son living out the rest of their lives in peace and safety. If you feel otherwise, you don't deserve them" (310). The question is posed that if these Jasons are all versions of the same person, how can one be more deserving of Daniela than the others? Later, when Jason faces off against the Jason with the slash on his face, the Jason with the slash on his face says that he will kill as many of the Jasons as he needs to in order to get Daniela. His statement makes Jason reconsider his belief that all of the Jasons are fundamentally alike.

Eventually, the question the Jasons decide they must answer in order to determine who will get Daniela is not one over which they have any control. They realize that Daniela should be allowed to stay with the version of Jason with whom she wants to stay. This works well because it would be difficult to determine which version of Jason was most deserving of Daniela. The real Jason's idea about holding a lottery to determine who should get Daniela is also a bad idea since she could wind up with one of the violent versions of Jason.

One of these versions of Jason even shoots at the Suburban in which Daniela and Charlie are riding with Jason. "How broken must this version of me be to risk hitting Daniela and Charlie?" (330-331) Jason wonders as this version of himself chances hurting Daniela, the person for whom all the Jasons claim to be fighting against each other.

Daniela questions Jason about the version of herself who had become a renowned artist. Even though Daniela has her life as an artist, Jason tells his wife that he suspected that the artist Daniela had regrets about her life. "I think sometimes she woke up in the night wondering if the path she took was the right one. Afraid it wasn't. Wondering what a life with me might have been like" (314), Jason tells Daniela when she asks about her happiness as an artist.

Jason also discusses the regrets he has had in life but has realized that it does not matter what choices a person makes, there will always be room for regret. It appears it is human nature to wonder what might have happened in one's life if they had made different choices in his life. "I suppose it all comes down to wanting what I didn't have. What I perceived might have been mine through a different set of choices" (334), Jason tells Daniela when they discuss regrets and questions they have about their lives.



Significant objects in this section of the novel include Jason's wedding band and the leather pouch that is in the glove box of Jason's Suburban. Jason recognizes Jason2 because he is wearing the wedding band. After Jason has stabbed Jason2 and Jason2 is dying, Jason2 hands Jason back the wedding ring, symbolically giving Jason back his life with Daniela. The leather pouch is the one that Jason recognizes as being specially fitted to hold ampoules of the drug that Ryan created. He realizes that Jason2 is suggesting to him that he, Daniela and Charlie may need to escape to another universe in order to live in peace.

## Discussion Question 1

How can Daniela, Charlie and Jason be certain that one of the Jasons will not follow them into the new world in which they choose to live?

## Discussion Question 2

Do you think this ending is the most appropriate one for the novel? Are all the questions you had about the story answered?

## Discussion Question 3

What sort of life does the author forecast that Daniela, Charlie and Jason will live in? How does he use words to set a mood for their new life together?

## Vocabulary

redolent, concentric, inebriation, converge, supernova, eradicate, obsidian, fissures, stoic





# Characters

## Jason Dessen

Jason Dessen is the protagonist of *Dark Matter* and the narrator for some parts of the novel. He is the husband of Daniela Varga-Dessen and Charlie Dessen.

Even though Jason wonders what might have happened if he had been able to dedicate himself to his scientific research, he is happy with his life.

One day, Jason is kidnapped and transported to a different universe in which he did dedicate himself to science and created a box that had the ability to transfer people between versions of the universe.

Even though Jason feels the people in this alternate reality believe he is a different person, he remains committed to his belief that he is not a renowned scientist but instead the husband of Daniela and father of Charlie.

Just before Jason is about to be tortured and/or killed because he is not the same man who once worked for Velocity Laboratories, he receives help from Amanda Lucas in entering the multiverse where he hopes he can find his life with Daniela.

When Jason finally locates the correct version of Chicago, he discovers that the city is full of other versions of himself who are also trying to prove themselves to Daniela and believe they are the real Jason.

It is a key component of Jason's personality—his desire for Daniela to be happy regardless of all else—that convinces the other Jasons to let Daniela stay with the Jason whom she believes is her real husband.

Through the course of his travels through the multiverse, Jason learns how one's experiences can change and mold his personality.

## Jason2

Jason2 is the version of Jason who has created the box that allows people to transport between different versions of the universe based on the decisions made by themselves and by others.

Jason2 figures out how to work the box and studies Jason's life so that he can take over his position as a husband to Daniela and father to Charlie. Jason2's motivation for taking over Jason's life is his desire to learn what his life might have been like had he gotten married to Daniela when he learned she was pregnant instead of leaving her in favor of pursuing his work as a scientist.



Jason2 uses the locator feature on Charlie's phone to find where he, Jason, and Daniela went after Jason convinced Daniela that he was the real Jason. In Ice River, he tries to kill Jason but Charlie distracts him, allowing Jason to stab Jason2 in the stomach.

Because Charlie helps his father kill Jason2, Jason2 realizes that Charlie and Daniela have chosen Jason and realize he is the man with whom they made their lives. Jason2 hands the wedding ring back to Jason, symbolically giving him his life back. He also tells Jason about the leather bag of ampoules stored in the glove box of the car he drove to Ice River.

## Charlie Dessen

Charlie Dessen is the 15-year-old son of Jason and Daniela Vargas.

Charlie represents the breach where Jason and Jason2 split. When Jason learned that Daniela was pregnant, he decided to marry Daniela and have a family even though he had to give up his career as a research scientist in doing so. Jason2, on the other hand, told Daniela that she and her unborn baby deserved better than him. In Jason2's world Charlie did not even exist because Daniela chose to abort him rather than becoming a single mother.

Charlie is significant to the plot of the novel because he is the one who sends a text to his girlfriend when he, Jason, and Daniela attempt to hide out from the other Jasons in Ice River. Charlie's text alerts Jason2 to their location. Other Jasons follow Jason2 when he makes the trip to Ice River.

At the end of the novel, Jason lets Charlie open the door to the future where they will make their lives. He is symbolically allowing his son to choose his own future.

## Ryan Holder

Ryan Holder is Jason's friend from college.

In Jason's real life, Ryan goes on to become a renowned scientist. He even wins the Pavia Prize. It is after attending a celebration for Ryan that Jason is kidnapped by another version of himself and sent to a different version of his life.

In the version of Jason2's life, Ryan has not achieved the scientific renown he did in Jason's life. Ryan did, however, create the compound that allows part of a person's brain to shut down so that they can experience the multiverse. In this world, Ryan does not feel he has gotten proper credit for the work he did.

Hoping to get some reward, Ryan tells the officials at Velocity Laboratories about Jason's strange claims. Instead of receiving praise, Ryan is beaten by the officials at Velocity. He is later killed because of what he knows.



## **Amanda Lucas**

Amanda Lucas is the woman from Jason2's world who works as the psychiatrist for Velocity Laboratories.

Because Amanda was so familiar with Jason2 from working with him as his psychiatrist, she is able to quickly recognize the differences between Jason and Jason2.

After she learns that the officials at Velocity Laboratories killed Daniela and Ryan, she helps Jason to escape into the box where they try to find Jason's real life.

Amanda gets attached to Jason and eventually has to part ways with him because she sees the possibility of him driving himself crazy searching for his world. Even though she wants to fix things for Jason, she knows that she is not able to do so.

## **Jason with the Slash on His Face**

This version of Jason with a knife slash on his face is significant because he sits down with Jason and has a drink in a bar. It is a moment of peace between the two different versions of the same man. The Jason with the slash on his face does not threaten Jason that night and the two agree to go their different ways peacefully. Before he leaves, however, the Jason with the slash on his face tells Jason that if it comes down to it, he will kill Jason in order to get Daniela.

The Jason with the slash on his face is the first one to threaten to kill Jason in Ice River. He says that he has already killed four Jasons that night. The Jason with the slash on his face is shot by Jason2.

## **Leighton Vance**

Leighton Vance is the chief executive and medical officer at Velocity Laboratories.

He claims to be Jason's friend but when Jason begins displaying some strange behavior, Leighton accuses Jason of not being the man he was before.

Leighton is responsible for ordering that both Daniela and Ryan be killed because of what they know about the company and its work.

## **Daniela Vargas-Dessen**

Daniela Vargas-Dessen is the wife of Jason and mother of Charlie. She is significant because she, like Jason, achieves only a fragment of her potential because she gets pregnant and becomes a wife and mother instead of pursuing her creative ability.



## **The Man in the Leather Jacket**

The man in the leather jacket that Jason sees outside his hotel room in Jason2's world is a hit-man hired by Leighton to kill Daniela in that reality.

## **The Clerk at Field and Glove**

This clerk recognizes that Jason has been in to try to buy a gun before. She feels he is trying to manipulate her and orders him not to return to the store again.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## Geisha Mask

The geisha mask is used to hide the identity of the man who abducts Jason. It is a symbol of that strange man (Jason2) and his desire not to be seen because he looks just like Jason. This geisha mask appears in Chapter 1.

## Tesseract Chandelier

The tesseract chandelier is a symbol of Daniela and Jason's relationship. It is also a symbol of the house that actually belongs to this couple. Daniela gave Jason the chandelier as an anniversary gift. He notices it before he leaves the house in Chapter 1. When Jason goes into his house in Jason2's world in Chapter 3, he knows something is wrong when he does not see the chandelier.

## Jason's Wedding Band

Jason's wedding band is a symbol of the relationship between Jason and Daniela. The band is first mentioned when Jason notices that it is missing in Chapter 3. It makes another appearance in Chapter 14 when Jason is able to recognize Jason2 because he is wearing the ring.

## Loose Thread

Jason ties a piece of loose thread around his ring finger. This symbolizes the ring and the indentation that ring left on his finger. To Jason the string is a reminder that the indentation was there and that his life with Daniela is his real life. This piece of thread first makes an appearance in Chapter 5.

## Daniela's Family Recipe

Jason's ability to help Daniela out with her family recipe in Chapter 5 symbolizes how well he knows her. It is when he tells her the ingredients she uses for topping for the soup and shows he knows how to prepare them that she begins to suspect that what Jason is telling her is true.

## The Box

The box represents Jason's intelligence and the abilities he had as a single person. Because he got married, Jason was unable to achieve the fullness of potential.



## **The Ampoules**

The ampoules filled with the compound that Ryan created for Jason symbolize the number of chances that Jason and Amanda have left to return to Jason's real life.

## **The Slash Across Jason's Face**

This slash is a symbol of the version of Jason with whom the real Jason had a beer and shared a conversation. Even though the two separate peacefully, this Jason with the slash tells the real Jason that he will kill him if he has to in order to get Daniela.

## **The Multiverse**

This setting in the novel symbolizes a threshold where one can choose a different reality in which to live. Jason must choose from different doorways here that lead to different realities based on his or other people's choices.

## **Charlie**

Charlie is actually a symbol of the point at which Jason's life and Jason2's life branched off from each other.



# Settings

## Chicago Mercy

Chicago Mercy is the hospital to which Jason goes when he decides that he is suffering with a brain tumor. The doctor who oversees Jason's case tries to commit Jason, but Jason leaves the hospital in secret.

## Hotel Royale

Hotel Royale is the hotel that Jason checks into after he realizes he is not safe in his own home in Jason2's world. In later visits to different versions of Chicago, Jason and Amanda stay in this same hotel.

## Oomph

Oomph is the art gallery where Jason reconnects with Daniela in Jason2's world. It is this gallery where her work "Entanglement," a work that is dedicated to Jason, is displayed.

## Village Tap

Village Tap is the bar to which Jason goes often. In his life with Daniela, it is where the celebration for Ryan, after he won the Pavia Prize, is held. In a later version of Chicago, Amanda and Jason visit this bar for nightcaps.

## Logan Square

Logan Square is the place in Chicago where Daniela and Logan lived together in an old brownstone.

## Velocity Laboratories

Velocity Laboratories is the place where the Jason2 worked and created the box. The real Jason winds up here after Jason2 kidnaps him and sends him, through the powers of the box, to take his place in his world.

## The Cago Power Plant

The Cago Power Plant is the place to which Jason2 takes the real Jason in order to drug him and transport him to his life at Velocity Laboratories. Amanda and the real



Jason later land the box at the Cago Plant in one of their trips to a different version of Chicago. In his last trip to Chicago in this box Jason believes he has finally landed in his world because he sees a broken ampoule on the floor of this version of the abandoned plant.

## **Field and Glove**

Field and Glove is the name of the store where the original Jason, along with several copies of him, attempts to buy a gun.

## **Lobby of the 14th District Precinct**

It is in the lobby of the 14th district precinct's police department that the original Jason convinces Daniela to come and pick him up after he gets arrested. In this lobby, Jason tells Daniela that he is her husband and the man she has been living with is another version of him.

## **Cabin Near Ice River**

The cabin near Ice River is the place to which the real Jason and Daniela go into order to try to get away from all the other Jasons who are following them.





# Themes and Motifs

## The Scientific Method

Because Jason is a scientist, many of the techniques he uses to solve problems in the lab bleed over into his everyday life. At various points in his journey, Jason turns to the scientific method in order to decide how best to handle a situation in which he has found himself. Not only is the scientific method used to help Jason deal with problems, but also, he and his psychiatrist friend Amanda turn to theories from aesthetics and psychology to help them understand why people they meet act as they do and why they react to certain situations in the way they do.

Twice in this novel, Jason relies on the scientific method to help him determine how he should go about finding an answer to the quandaries in which he finds himself. When he first realizes he is in a different version of his life, he depends on the scientific method to help him break down his problem and come to a decision about what he needs to do first. Using this method, Jason comes to the decision that his first thing to do is to locate Daniela. Jason also turns to a scientific line of thinking when he decides that he must kill Jason2 in order to take back his life. This switch to scientific thinking keeps Jason from thinking about what he is planning on doing on an emotional level.

Because he will not let himself believe he is going crazy in the strange place in which he has arrived after he was kidnapped, Jason turns to a scientific theory to help him determine what has happened to him. He refers to "Occam's Razor," the idea that, "all things being equal, the simplest solution tends to be the right one" (58). Following this principle, Jason decides that he must be suffering from a brain tumor. It is the only way that he can easily explain how his entire perception of his life had changed so drastically.

When discussing what Jason2 has done to Jason, Amanda refers to the idea of Human Behavior 101 in order to explain Jason2's actions. She reasons that because Jason2 wanted to know what his life would have been like had he gotten married, that Jason2 figured that Jason would want to know what his life would be like if he had stuck with his research project. The idea is that we expect other people to want the same things that we do.

The concept in aesthetics of the uncanny valley is also mentioned in this novel. This idea indicates that a person is revolted by something that is close to being real, but not quite real. It is usually used in connection with the study of robotics. Jason gets an idea of what this feeling is like when he visits a version of Chicago that is very close to the one in which he lived with Daniela, but the street names are all different.

When Amanda tries to convince Jason that they need to try a different method in order to get them to Jason's old life in Chicago, Amanda refers to the definition of insanity. She tells Jason that insanity is defined as: "Doing the same thing again and again and



expecting different results” (234). She points out to him that they have been trying the same process over and over hoping that they will get different results. When Jason does not cooperate with Amanda’s suggestion, she pushes his hand by leaving him on his own to find his way.

## The Impacts of Regrets

Because Jason2 interfered with the workings of the universe in order to experience what life would have been like if he had made a different choice, he created a good deal of unrest and evil. Jason2 not only jeopardizes his own research project, he also puts Daniela and Charlie in danger when he manipulates the universe to put himself into the place of the Jason who had decided to have a family instead of focusing on his career. In the end, a variety of displaced Jasons fight over who should get to live with Daniela as a result of Jason2’s actions.

Even based on the idea that there are an endless number of universes in the world, things should not have gotten as out of hand as they did when Jason2 interfered in the workings of these universes. As explained in the novel, each person’s life branches into two different universes each time he makes a choice. The person is not aware of the other universes and there is no way for people to move back and forth through these universes.

When Jason2 decides he wants to follow his desire to see what his life would have been like if he had become a family man, he throws the entire multiverse idea into chaos. His research allows him to travel from one universe to another. The problem arises when the real Jason, with his desire to get his wife back, begins searching for his home universe and leaves copies of himself in other universes that are also able to travel between universes. These Jasons all converge in one universe to try to get back the one thing they believe is theirs.

These Jasons, unlike the real Jason, are willing to kill in order to get Daniela back. One even goes so far as to shoot at a vehicle in which Daniela and Charlie are riding in an attempt to kill the real Jason. Jason believes this version of himself must have truly seen horrible things in the universes he visited in order to risk putting Daniela and Charlie in danger to get what he wanted.

Although Jason2 probably thought his experimentation and desire to see what life would have been like if he had made different decisions would be inconsequential, it had devastating effects on a variety of people. Jason is traumatized by the way he is treated at Velocity Laboratories once the people there learn he is not Jason2. He is again traumatized when he has to witness Daniela shot, execution style, and then again in another version of the universe when he has to give her a fatal dose of morphine because she is suffering with an incurable illness.

Daniela is traumatized by the reality that she has been living with a man for the past month that looks like her husband even though he is not her husband. She is shocked



when she learns about the number of Jasons who have been released into the universe and the things they are willing to do in order to have a life with her. Meanwhile, the Jasons fight against each other in order to prove which one of them is the best one for Daniela.

## What Defines an Individual

This novel presents a fantasy in which a scientist learns how to manipulate the subconscious and enter a place where he can travel to different universes. The scientist believes his ability to travel between universes will give him the ability to experience what his life would be like if he had made different decisions. As Jason is forced to follow this path, his idea of himself as an individual as well as his idea of his own identity is shaken. He sees through his experiences how the choices a person makes can help define that person's identity.

Because Jason is the main character and narrator in the novel, the reader can see the differences in Jason's personality from universe to universe most clearly. As a family man, Jason's home is decorated differently than the way his home is decorated as a single person. These differences in decorating styles indicate a difference in personality. Even though Jason2 and Jason are the same person, they have evolved with different habits that make it easy for the people who know them best to know something is different about them. The workers at Velocity Laboratories quickly realize that Jason is a different person from Jason2. Daniela also notices the differences between Jason and Jason2 though she does not react to them like the people at Velocity Laboratories do.

Daniela is not the only one who notices differences between Jason and Jason2, Amanda notices these changes as well. At one point she tells Jason that he is a better person than Jason2. This could be because Jason has dedicated his life to other people and has learned to be giving and focus on others instead of concentrating only on himself and his work.

When Jason meets the Daniela who lives in Jason2's world, he is surprised by how energetic and young she looks. She is not the severe woman who seems beaten down by life with whom he lives. When he looks at the version of Daniela who has been able to dedicate herself to her art, he understands what a toll childbirth, Daniela's depression, and the stress of being a wife and mother has taken on her. Again, even though they are fundamentally the same person, there are differences in Daniela because of the choices she made along the way.

Even though there is no way for a person to be able to avoid making choices, the author seems to be warning the reader to make one's choices carefully. There are always consequences of one's choices. There are good and bad things that come from each choice. A person ultimately has to live with the version of himself he becomes because of the choices he has made.



## Listening to One's Gut Feelings

Although listening to one's gut feeling or first impression is possibly the least scientific method one could follow, there are instances in which following one's gut may be the best action one can take. There are several instances in this novel where even the scientifically-minded Jason decides it is best to listen to his gut. There are also examples of bad situations that Jason encounters because he does not do what his gut tells him to do.

When Jason first tells his story to the Daniela he meets in Jason2's world, she suggests that he follow his gut feeling. "What does your gut tell you" (96), Daniela asks Jason when he tries to determine exactly what is happening to him. At this point, however, Jason does not even have enough information about what has happened to him to have a gut feeling.

Later, when Jason realizes there are other versions of himself trying to kill him, Jason tries to decide if he should listen to and follow his gut reaction. "What if I'm right and don't listen to my gut" (265), Jason asks himself when he thinks two phone calls placed to his hotel room were made in order to pinpoint his location. In this situation Jason does follow his gut feeling and is able to escape before the Jason arrives to kill him.

It is when Jason and Amanda arrive in the version of Chicago devastated by the plague that Jason chooses to ignore his gut. "The vibe here is wrong, Jason. Can't you feel it" (195), Amanda asks as they walk the empty town streets. Even though Jason silently agrees with her, he does not turn back. He instead forces them to go on and finds Daniela in the last stages of a fatal disease while Charlie is already dead.

## Can One Be Happy and Still Have Regrets?

One of the main questions posed by this novel is if a person can be happy with his life even if he has regrets. This is the question that Jason2 poses to Jason when he kidnaps him and prepares to send him to Velocity Laboratories. Every decision a person makes opens them up to a possibility they will regret the way his life turns out. Jason as well as other characters struggle to accept their regrets as the outcome of their free will and to be happy with the decisions they have made.

Because Jason2 is so scientifically minded, the reader cannot be sure if he really regrets not having a family or if he is just curious about the experience. Regardless, Jason2 is curious enough about life as a family man that he interferes with Jason's life to satisfy his curiosity. Before Jason2 sends Jason to Velocity Laboratories, he asks him: "Are you happy in your life?" (28). Jason says that while his life is not exceptional, his life is good. He indicates here that he realizes his life could have been exceptional but that he had never regretted his decision to make a life with Daniela.

Meanwhile, Daniela has her own regrets. The version of Daniela in Jason2's world regrets not carrying her baby to term and raising him. The version of Daniela in Jason's

world regrets not having been able to become a great artist. In retrospect, the Daniela in Jason2's world cannot imagine being happy without her art while the Daniela in Jason's world cannot imagine being happy with her husband and Charlie.

All in all, Jason and Daniela come to the decision that everyone has regrets. These regrets, however, do not determine a person's happiness in life. Even though a person may miss out on one great opportunity because of a choice he made, they may open their lives up to a different sort of great opportunity. They also agree that once a person has made a decision they have to live with that choice instead of trying to cheat the system, like Jason2 did.

# Styles

## Point of View

This novel is related from two different points of view. The parts of the story that focus on the original Jason are told from the first-person point of view. This allows Jason to tell his story from his own perspective. Since he moves from alternate world to alternate world, Jason is the only one who can tell his story because he is the only character in the novel who experiences what he does. The author could have used an omniscient, third-person narrator but it would have created a distance between the reader and Jason. The author builds the story so that the reader will feel emotionally close to Jason—a relationship that is strengthened by the first-person point of view.

There are also parts of the novel that are told from the point of view of a third-person omniscient narrator. These parts of the novel are the ones that Jason is not in. The changes in the point of view help to clarify the parts of the novel that include the real Jason and those that include Jason2.

## Language and Meaning

The language in this novel uses a good deal of references to scientific procedures and theories. The references to these procedures and theories are consistent with the main character and narrator of the novel because he is a scientist. He spends his time using these theories and procedures to solve problems in his work, so it makes sense that these problem-solving methods would bleed over into his day-to-day life.

A good deal of phrases from astrophysics and quantum mechanics that the reader may not completely understand are also included in the novel. The novel uses term “dark matter” as its title. This dark matter is a substance believed to hold the universe together. Another term used often in the novel is superposition. It was in this area of study that Jason had hoped to make his name. Luckily for the reader, it is not necessary to understand the workings of these complex scientific ideas in order to understand the novel.

## Structure

This 342-page novel is divided into 15 chapters. The first chapter is dedicated to Jason’s life before he was abducted as well as his abduction. Although the novel is not divided into sections, there are three distinct parts of the novel. One part of the novel details the time that Jason spends in Jason2’s world. This part ends abruptly when Jason and Amanda enter the box. They visit this world for a short time before seeing Amanda get shot.



The second distinct part of the novel deals with Amanda and Jason's attempt to locate Jason's world with Daniela. Just after Amanda decides it would be best to part with Jason, he winds up in the world in which he had hoped to find himself. The final distinct part of the novel describes how Daniela, Charles, and Jason outsmart the other Jasons and begin a new life together.

The novel climaxes in the section where Jason, Daniela, and Charlie have escaped to the cabin in Ice River only to discover that the Jasons have followed them. The defining scene takes place in the living room of the cabin where Jason stabs Jason2 after Charlie distracts Jason2. Jason2 realizes that Daniela and Charlie realize this version of Jason with whom they have lived with all of their lives and the one with whom they want to spend their lives. The novel turns when Jason2 gives Jason his wedding ring, symbolically giving him his life back.



## Quotes

Standing happy and slightly drunk in my kitchen, I'm unaware that tonight is the end of all of this. The end of everything I know, everything I love."

-- Narrator (Chapter 1)

**Importance:** The night that Jason goes to see Ryan at his celebration at the Village Tap, he does not realize that it is his last day at his house. They will never live there as a family again.

I say, 'My life is great. It's just not exceptional. And there was a time when it could have been.'"

-- Jason (Chapter 1)

**Importance:** When the man who abducts Jason, Jason2, asks Jason if he like his life, this quote is the answer that Jason gives to him.

I examine the money clip. Under the cash and the credit cards, there's an Illinois driver's license with a headshot that's me but that I've never seen, an ID for a gym I've never been to, and a health insurance card from a carrier I've never used."

-- Narrator (Chapter 2)

**Importance:** Even though the items that Leighton returned to Jason as his property are in Jason's name and bear his pictures, he does not recognize any of them.

The ring is gone, but the proof of its existence lingers as a faint indentation around the base of my finger. It was there. It left a mark. That means someone took it."

-- Narrator (Chapter 3)

**Importance:** After Jason wakes up in the Velocity hangar, he begins to wonder if his life with Daniela was real. It is when he notices the indentation on his ring finger that shows where a wedding ring was once worn that he knows that his life with Daniela was real. Jason ties a string around his finger in order to remind himself of the indentation on his finger, his proof that he was married.

Something happened while you were out,' she says."

-- Daniela (Chapter 4)

**Importance:** When Jason2 first approaches Daniela in their house, she notices that he is different. She asks if something happened when he was out, suggesting perhaps he met a young girl who turned him on sexually. The statement is ironic because something did happen to Jason while he was away from the house, but she could never imagine what exactly happened and probably would not have believed him if he told her.

It says finally that a missing-persons report was filed on your behalf eight months ago by your brother, and that you haven't been seen publicly in over a year."





-- Dr. Julianne Springer (Chapter 5)

**Importance:** When Dr. Springer talks to Jason about what is happening with him after he checks himself into Chicago Mercy, she confronts him with the information that he has been missing for more than a year.

What if all the pieces of belief and memory that comprise who I am — my profession, Daniela, my son — are nothing but a tragic misfiring in that gray matter between my ears? Will I keep fighting to be the man I think I am? Or will I disown him and everything he loves, and step into the skin of the person this world would like for me to be?"

-- Narrator (Chapter 5)

**Importance:** Jason wonders what it would take to make him deny the life he believed was his and become the person that the people in this strange world in which he found himself believed he was.

This is Daniela with an energy like the first time we met fifteen years ago, before years of life — the normalcy, the elation, the depression, the compromise — transformed her into the woman who now shares my bed: amazing mother, amazing wife, but fighting always against the whispers of what might have been."

-- Narrator (Chapter 5)

**Importance:** When Jason sees Daniela at her gallery showing, he recognizes that she has the same energy that she had when they were first married, before the pregnancy and the bout with postpartum depression.

Look, I don't mean to bitch,' he says, 'but I just feel like I did a lot of work for you and Velocity in the dark. You and I go way back, and I get that you're in a different place in your career, but I don't know... I think you got what you wanted from me and..."

-- Ryan (Chapter 5)

**Importance:** In the strange world in which Jason finds himself, Ryan asks Jason for what purpose he used the compound for that he hired him to prepare. It appears he feels shortchanged because he was never told what the compound would be used for and that he was not publicly given any credit for the work he did.

And I realized that you hadn't stopped by to catch up. You had come to say goodbye. Then you told me that our existence was all about choices and that you had blown some of them, but none so badly as with me."

-- Daniela (Chapter 5)

**Importance:** Daniela tells Jason about the conversation they had that had inspired her show entitled "Entanglement." His comments to her indicate that he regretted the decision to abandon her and dedicate himself to science.

This other Jason, the one who built the box — he did this to me."

-- Narrator (Chapter 7)



**Importance:** It is after Daniela had been shot and Ryan taken off to be killed that Jason realized that it was a form of himself, the one who created the box, who arranged for him to replace him in the world that resulted from Jason's decision to commit himself to science instead of becoming a family man.

No, the box would only connect us to alternate realities at the same point in space and time.

-- Jason (Chapter 8)

**Importance:** After Jason and Amanda arrive in the Chicago that has been destroyed and is covered with ash, he explains to her that the time is the same in both that place and the place from which they had come. There is no time travel involved in the box.

Watching his mother die was the defining event of his life. It played a critical part in why he never married, never had kids. Why he sunk himself into work."

-- Amanda (Chapter 10)

**Importance:** Because Amanda had been so intimately close to Jason2, she knew that one of the experiences that made him decide not to marry was the experience of watching his mother die when he was a small boy. Amanda worries what effect watching Daniela die of a highly contagious disease will have on Jason because of that previous experience.

Crumbled buildings and gray wasteland don't hold a candle to standing on a corner I've passed a thousand times and realizing that the street names are wrong."

-- Narrator (Chapter 11)

**Importance:** Although the reality of a destroyed Chicago seems it would be most disturbing, Jason admits that his most disturbing version of Chicago is one where all the street names are different.

Resting in a crack in the concrete six inches from the base of the generator: an empty ampoule with its neck snapped off. In all the abandoned power plants I've passed through during the last month, I've never seen this."

-- Narrator (Chapter 13)

**Importance:** Jason feels hope when he sees an empty ampoule in a crack in the concrete at one version of the abandoned power plants. He knows someone who had worked the box had been there at some point.

Daniela says, 'Life doesn't work that way. You live with your choices and learn. You don't cheat the system.'"

-- Daniela (Chapter 14)

**Importance:** Daniela tells Jason2 that he does not have the right to go back and try to take advantage of another man's choice and the life he built. Daniela indicates that he

should live with the choices that he made. She indicates that Jason2 is cheating the system by trying to get a do over.