

# **House of Leaves Study Guide**

**House of Leaves by Mark Z. Danielewski**

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# Plot Summary

It is the year 1997 and a young man by the name of Johnny Truant has stumbled upon a chest full of papers (scraps of papers). The chest belonged to an old man named Zampano. Johnny's friend, Lude lived in the same apartment building as Zampano. Day after day Zampano held his daily ritual of walking around the apartment grounds, feeding the birds and enjoying a peaceful and quiet life. Lude and the other occupants of the apartment building noticed that Zampano was very punctual with his walks and of feeding the birds.

Johnny gets a call from Lude one day and says that the old man hasn't been seen in days. It is unusual for the old man to just disappear as he had. Johnny, out of morbid curiosity, gets in his car and meets Lude at the apartment. Once he arrives, he notices the police cars and ambulance that surround the property. The old man died alone in his apartment and no one really noticed until Lude mentioned that he hadn't been around for a few days.

Lude and Johnny enter the old man's apartment after the police and ambulance leave and Johnny finds deep scratch marks around where the old man's body had been. These marks were deep and looked to be some kind of animal scratches. The old man had no scratches on his body anywhere, which Lude and Johnny found to be strange considering these scratches were just beyond where his body laid dead.

Johnny sees the trunk and opens it noticing all of the scraps of paper within. He takes the trunk home to his apartment and decides to read them. The scraps of paper contained a story, which Johnny slowly put together. The story was actually called the Navidson Record about a family who bought a house in Virginia and eventually runs for their lives from a presence that occupied the internal walls of the house.

Johnny puts the pieces of scrap paper (the story) together day after day and as each day passes, he becomes more obsessed with the story. Although, throughout the story Johnny shows us bits and pieces of his life with crazy woman and loads of drugs, bar scenes and sexual activities, he still returns to his apartment and the sordid tale of the Navidson Record. As he reads the story, he becomes less interested in the outside world. He stops eating, loses his job and is getting evicted from his apartment. He also starts hallucinating about a monster with sharp claws stalking him. He not only dreams about this monster, he sees it in broad daylight and believes it is real. Slowly he loses touch with reality and will not even venture out of his apartment, but for tuna fish and books from the library.

Parallel to Johnny's story is the Navidson family story. The actual events surrounding the couple that moves into the house in Virginia, their two children and the interior of the house that seems to change as an everyday occurrence. A hallway that was not there when the family moved in seems to appear after a few weeks. Will Navidson (the father) notices several things that just don't add up (a hallway, a door and measurements of the house that were not as they once were). The interior measurements of the home are



larger than the exterior measurements are. This is simply incomprehensible to him, his brother and his engineer friends.

Navidson, his brother Tom and three recruits (Holloway, Jed and Wax) put together an exploration unit to explore the mysterious hallway that suddenly appeared in the house. The first day the men are in the hallway about an hour when they notice it is larger than they anticipated. They hold a second, third and fourth exploration, but when the fourth exploration lasts more than five days they begin to fear for the worst. Holloway loses his mind and starts shooting at Jed and Wax. Jed dies, but Wax survives. Navidson performs a rescue mission with his brother Tom and a friend named Reston who is in a wheelchair. They recover Jed and Wax and later capture Holloway's video camera and discover that he commits suicide within the vast hallway.

Navidson and his family flee the house for their lives returning to New York. Tom dies during the escape. Navidson later returns to Virginia leaving Karen and the children in New York. He and Reston continue researching the house. When Reston thinks Navidson has had enough research he suggests he return to his family in New York. Navidson leaves the next morning while Reston sleeps and returns to the house instead. He isn't seen again for six months.

Karen eventually returns to the house in Virginia to find Navidson. She and Reston search every corner of the house and don't find Navidson. Although his car is in the driveway, he is nowhere. Karen stays for days on end and finally one day his gear and videos appear in the children's room. Later, Karen ventures in the dark room and finds Navidson. Although barely alive, he is hospitalized and recovers. The family then moves to Vermont where they continue their lives together trying to forget about the house. Johnny goes on to actually publish *The House of Leaves* under Zampano's name.



# Chapter 1

## Chapter 1 Summary

The first chapter opens with two teasers (or trailers) which are filmed by Will Navidson. One is called *The Five and a Half Minute Hallway*. Navidson records himself walking down the hallway of an old house (*The House of Leaves*) and climbs out of a window, only to return through another window. He opens many doors and climbs through each window, but when he comes to a particular door, voices are heard from speculators behind him. They tell him not to go into that particular door. He reaches his hand in and says it's freezing inside.

The second teaser is called *Exploration #4*. This short film stars Holloway Roberts. He speaks into the camera and says things like, "I'm lost. Out of food. Low on water." It's unclear who's following him, but he says that he's being stalked by someone. The camera also captures several scenes, in which there is blood on the kitchen floor, trees in the winter and a crying child. It is clear that the second short film appears to be unfinished.

## Chapter 1 Analysis

The book begins by informing the reader that Will Navidson's films consisted of *The Navidson Record*, *The Five and a Half Minute Hallway* and *Exploration #4*. The narrator moves on to enlighten the reader that these short films, or trailers, were not popular until years later. He mentions that there were only a few copies of each distributed via VHS, and not everyone has seen the films.



# Chapter 2

## Chapter 2 Summary

Will and his partner Karen move into their new home on Ash Tree Lane with their two children (Daisy 5 and Chad 8). Navidson films the furniture being moved in, the unpacking of boxes and interviews his two children outside by a tree. The children look happy in the sunlight and talk of their excitement about the new house.

The house is in the Virginia countryside in a rural neighborhood. The house is an old style heritage house with a cozy front porch. Will equips the house with video cameras in every room, except for three of the bathrooms. These tapes capture everything the family does within its walls.

Karen and Will have never married and Will tends to travel a lot, which Karen frowns upon. Although their relationship is not the best of relationships, they rely upon one another for stability and comfort.

Halfway through this chapter, Johnny Truant (the Narrator), enters with a story about the bar, his friend Lude and some girls. They are all drinking at the bar when Johnny breaks into a story about how he and Lude were betting on some fights (there is a circle in the street in which two men fight and the winner takes the money). After winning a few of these bets, Johnny decides to step into the circle and fight. He loses, but before he's knocked out, he tells the man he's fighting about a ship coming in that has goods he can sell for triple the profit.

Once Johnny is awake from being knocked out, the man he fought and another man take him into their truck and insist that he take them to the ship with the goods. He does and the captain unloads five crates for \$5,000. Turns out, the crates were filled with Birds of Paradise and these men are arrested later for trying to pawn them to the local zoo.

## Chapter 2 Analysis

This chapter opens with Will Navidson starting his movie *The Navidson Record*. The reader learns of his obsession with video cameras and the filming of his family's every day life. Karen is distant from Will, even though she's dependent upon him. She's been unfaithful to him in the past and they are not officially married. They have been together for eleven years and have two children together. They have a girl, Daisy who is five-years-old and a boy Chad, who is eight-years-old. As they live their first weeks in the house, every moment is captured on film.

The reader is then interrupted by a short story by the narrator (Johnny Truant) who tells a story about betting on street fights and birds of paradise. In summary, the narrator enters a fight, loses and ends up being transported by truck to a ship due to his

confession of a shipment of good worth three times what they'll pay. The goods are bought by Johnny's captors only to be heisted in an arrest days later.





# Chapter 3

## Chapter 3 Summary

This chapter reveals the nature in which Johnny and Lude encountered Will Navidson's work. Apparently, a man named Zampano passed away in a lonely apartment. The apartment was in Lude's building. Johnny is called by Lude early one morning to come and take a look at something. After he takes a look, he leaves with the old man's black trunk. It is filled with writing (the Navidson story). Johnny starts putting it all together and becomes obsessed with this chore.

Simultaneously within the pages of this chapter, the reader is enlightened on how Lude's real name is Harry and Will has a twin brother named Tom. Will and Tom are raised by an alcoholic father who eventually dies of heart failure and their mother leaves them at any early age to pursue an acting career. Growing up they had no true role models.

## Chapter 3 Analysis

Will's excitement for filming his family moving into their new home stems from his lack of having solid parenting as a child. He's not sure what it's really like for a family to grow close, eat dinner at the table together and laugh when having a good time. A normal family is not even something Will understands, but he's trying to build this for his children and Karen.

Lude and Johnny, on the other hand, are just out for a good time. Lude stumbles upon The Navidson Record by chance and brings Johnny into the picture. Johnny has no idea what the letters and fragments of pages within the trunk mean, but he's obsessed with them and brings the trunk home. He eventually reads them repeatedly.



# Chapter 4

## Chapter 4 Summary

The Navidson family leaves for four days to attend a wedding in Seattle. Upon their return, the house seems and feels different. The narrator describes the feeling as uncanny. There is a passage within the trunk written in German that defines uncanny in relation to the house. When Johnny reads the English version (which he finds in the trunk later) he feels as though he's not the same anymore either.

Johnny works at a Tattoo Parlor answering the phones and running errands for the owner. After reading the passage, he feels as though something is watching him. He goes into great detail about how he exits the parlor for fresh air and truly thinks something is just out of reach. He explains it as a monster with snarled teeth and claws about to pounce on him at any moment. There is no monster, of course and he eventually regains his composure and returns to work.

The Navidson's re-enter their home to find a new closet. At least, it hadn't been there before they left for Seattle. The closet is empty (no shelves, rod or hangers). It is painted black. Karen finds her pictures of the house taken earlier and notices the room had no doors anywhere. They obtain the blueprints on the house and it doesn't help any. Will proceeds measuring the house and compare his measurements to the blueprints. The inside measurements are larger than the outer measurements, which is impossible. Therefore, Will measures again and gets the same conclusion. They continue to be baffled by all of this.

They contact their Realtor and she tells them she has no idea how an interior room could have been built in their absence. Karen and Will call the police and they come. They are baffled too, and cannot understand why they have been called.

Will finally gives up measuring and calls his twin brother, Tom. Tom arrives a few days later and finds that the interior is not larger than  $\frac{1}{4}$ ", but  $\frac{5}{16}$ ". The men are both thoroughly confused, so Tom calls his office and tells them he's staying longer to help resolve the problem and Will calls an engineering friend. Karen calls her friend Audrie from Washington to come for a visit, so she can entertain herself while the men figure this out. So, the two women (Audrie - Travel Agent and Karen - Ex Model) set out to drink Vodka and build bookshelves).

Mid chapter, Johnny comes in again. He has found a notepad of Zampano's that has phone numbers on it. Zampano was nearly blind, so he called people to come over and read to him. One of the names is Amber Rightacre. Johnny calls her and they meet for a drink. They have a few drinks, and then head over to the Viper, where Lude meets them. Lude can't keep up with their conversation, because they are talking about Zampano's writings within the trunk, so he goes off to find other entertainment. They eventually make their way back to Amber's apartment where her friend, Christine,



shows up and they all do lines of cocaine. They drink more, start playing spin the bottle and kissing each other. A while later after the kissing and touching stops, Johnny goes home.

Navidson's story reappears here and Tom and Will visit Tom's engineering friend. The friend tells Will that he'll come measure the house himself and charge Will. The men laugh and head back for the house. Karen has finished her bookshelf and it's now full of books. One of the closet doors won't stay closed, so Will grabs a book from the shelf. The books fall to the floor and Karen screams.

## Chapter 4 Analysis

This chapter opens with a bizarre closet that appears suddenly in the Navidson home. It was not there when the family left for a wedding in Seattle. They not only call the police, but Will gets in a frenzy and starts measuring the house inside and out. He notices that there is a  $\frac{1}{4}$ " difference on the outside. It's smaller than the inside, which makes no sense at all. He proceeds to call his brother Tom who builds houses for a living, then involves his engineer friend. There's no explanation and the men remain baffled.

The reader also gets another taste of Johnny's life. While thumbing through Zampano's old papers he discovers the name of a girl who used to read to Zampano. Her name is Amber and Johnny meets her for a drink. One thing leads to another and they end up back at Amber's place with her friend Christine drinking more, using cocaine and playing spin the bottle.

The chapter ends with Will pulling a book off the bookshelf. The books fall to the floor and Karen screams. The reader is left wondering why she screams.



# Chapter 5

## Chapter 5 Summary

The significance of echoes is the opening for this chapter. A beautiful mountain nymph named Echo helps Zeus with a sexual endeavor and is punished by Hera by leaving her to say only the last word spoken to her. These fragments of writing are on bits of brown leaf-like paper found in Zampano's trunk. Johnny is reading them when he suddenly feels like he's going to throw up. He coughs instead, and is fine afterward.

Johnny keeps reading passages, such as:

"Thus Echo suddenly assumes the role of god's messenger, a female Mercury or perhaps even Prometheus, decked in talaria, with lamp in hand, descending on fortunate humanity."

"Look to the sky, look to yourself and remember: we are only god's echoes and god is Narcissus."

"The apparent echoing of solitary words reminds us that acoustical echoing in empty places can be a very common auditory emblem, redolent of gothic novels as it may be, of isolation and often unwilling solitude."

The chapter breaks off during the readings and Johnny and Lude are at the Sky Bar. As they drink and talk together Johnny starts to hallucinate. He imagines dying in ones sleep. His detail is vivid in the realization of what sleep has just delivered. He's thinking of Zampano and being alone without even a 911 telephone call, lying in agonizing pain until death finally takes him.

Lude interrupts Johnny's hallucination and they drink more at the bar. A girl named Lucy arrives and Johnny takes her home after a few more drinks. He goes on to explain how they made love on the bed, then the floor. His story continues with a description of what his boss calls the Ghost. The Ghost was one of two bars (depending on his boss's mood). It was either the Garden of Eden on La Brea or the Rainbow Bar & Grill on Sunset.

One day Johnny, Lude and the boss go to the Ghost. Johnny is excited to get the bosses view on some recent drawings he had done. They were tattoo ideas and he worked on them painstakingly. So, Johnny shows the drawings to the boss and he doesn't receive the response he wants. His boss simply tells him to take up typing. Johnny starts hallucinating again and imagines snapping his bosses head off (twisting it off like a cap while his bloody body crumples to the floor). A girl approaches and says hello. His bosses head is, of course, still intact and he says hello to her.

Johnny is enthralled by the girl and tells a story of how she comes into the shop to have a tattoo touched up. It's near her bikini line and Johnny helps her by hanging her pants



up after she takes them off. He can't stop thinking about her and calls her Thumper. She is a local stripper with several names, so he's not sure what her real name is. He just knows that he has a severe crush on her, but she has a boyfriend and a three-year-old child.

We are back to the Navidson family now and it's June. The problem of the sizes mismatching is still unsolved and Tom cannot afford to stay on any longer. He bids his brother goodbye and they agree to keep in closer contact. Communication between Navidson and Karen deteriorates after Tom leaves. They barely speak to one another.

The children are told to play outside, because of Karen's fear of the house. The more they play outside, the further from home they venture. Neither Navidson nor Karen pays attention, until one day when the children's voices seem far away. Both Karen and Navidson race toward the voices of their children to find a narrow hallway that wasn't in the house before. Navidson enters the hallway, but Karen is frozen with fright. Navidson soon returns with both children. Navidson realizes that Karen is claustrophobic. Later that evening Karen asks Navidson to promise not to enter the hallway again. She's crying while in his arms and he promises.

Karen's claustrophobia and panic attacks started at an early age. Virginia Posah is an author who has written about Karen Green and her background. Karen once attended a study and was given Prozac to help with her phobia. She dropped out of the study after a while and only returned to using Prozac when the attacks came on stronger.

Therefore, Karen deals with her claustrophobia by staying away from the dark places that frighten her. The five and a half minute hallway (the one that suddenly appeared and the children found) is forgotten to Karen and replaced by studies of Feng Shui.

Tom returns and installs a door, so the hallway is closed off from the rest of the house. While installing the deadbolts on the door he notices by the echoes that the hallway has grown deeper. Navidson questions his brother about what they should do and Tom tells him he should move.

A few days later, Karen and Navidson have company. The names of the two guests are withheld (blank lines are where the names should be). They all have dinner together and have a few drinks until Navidson mentions the hallway. He wants to show them and Karen gets upset. She's so upset that she makes him sleep on the couch that night. He wakes in his sleep and enters the hallway. It has grown since he was last inside. There are now doorways to the left and right and more hallways within. He gets lost and even with his flashlight he can barely see his way around. He ends up frightened and calls for help from the family. Daisy calls back for him and he eventually finds his way back to the safety of his living room. Karen later feels terrible about making him sleep on the couch. They make love for the first time in a while and things seem more comfortable for both Karen and Navidson.

We are back to Johnny and he's getting supplies from the closet to give to his boss. He needs bottles of ink, so when he enters the closet he starts hallucinating again. He feels



the presence of something else and starts to taste blood in his mouth. As he starts to lose control, he finds himself simply walking out of the closet holding the bottles. He trips on the stairs and the ink gets all over him. His boss runs over to him to ask if he's alright, to which he replies, "Known some call is air am." Johnny's interpretation of this is, "I am not what I used to be." He's referring to the monster in the closet. He feels that the monster has somehow taken a part of his actual being.

## Chapter 5 Analysis

Echoes surround this chapter, as Johnny is enthralled by a girl he calls Thumper. He tells a story of how she comes into the shop to have a tattoo touched up. It's near her bikini line and Johnny helps her by hanging her pants up after she takes them off. He can't stop thinking about her and calls her Thumper. Johnny's hallucinations become increasingly stronger and he actually feels as if he's losing pieces of himself every time he feels the monstrous presence around him.

On the opposite end of this story is the Navidson's hallway, which is growing tremendously. It has grown to a point where you could literally become lost in the closet and that's exactly what Navidson does one evening. Thankfully, his daughter Daisy hears him and beckons him back to the house.



# Chapter 6

## Chapter 6 Summary

Hillary and Mallory are the topics of this chapter. Hillary is the Navidson's dog and Mallory is their cat. The two of them come running into the house chasing one another. Navidson is taking pictures of the hallway, so the door is open. The animals run directly down the hallway and end up in the back yard. How? It should be impossible, but it happens. Navidson is astounded by this.

Endnotes follow the chapter with Johnny carrying around a piece of paper waiting for Thumper to show up. She shows up at the shop one day and he hands it to her. He had written about her and the scent of pine trees and the August sun. She tells him to call her after reading it and gives him her beeper number. Lude tells him to call right away, but he waits. He decides to call the number at three in the morning. It's her beeper number. He waits for her to call him back.

While he's waiting for the phone call, Johnny thinks about Zampano's death. None of the policemen, nor he and Lude could figure out what the marks were near his body. There were four of them, six to seven inches long and half an inch deep.

## Chapter 6 Analysis

Upon entering the hallway, Hillary and Mallory simply disappear into the darkness and reappear in the back yard. It astounds Navidson, but Karen doesn't see it happen. She simply tells Navidson he should not have let the animals out of the house. On the other hand, Johnny feels like he's losing his mind. His daydreams, or hallucinations, are getting stronger, and he's not sure how to handle them.



# Chapter 7

## Chapter 7 Summary

Holloway Roberts arrives at the Navidson house to investigate the five and a half minute hallway. He brings with him Jed Leeder and Kirby "Wax" hook. Tom and Navidson meet the men at the front door while Karen goes to pick the children up from school. Holloway is filled with visions of stardom at finding something within the Navidson's hallway and Navidson feels the same way.

Navidson and Tom unbolt the hallway door and Holloway is ready to go inside at once. Navidson tells him to be careful of the shifts. Holloway doesn't particularly care for Navidson and it is apparent from the way he speaks to him. Before the men enter the hallway, Holloway flirts with Karen and Navidson gets upset. Navidson speaks to one camera and voices his unhappiness at Karen flirting back with the men. He then goes on to describe a fungus on his feet that has been treated by doctors for nearly two decades. The final diagnosis is stress.

When the three men finally enter the hallway, they record exploration number one. They are given two miles of fishing line by Navidson and bring halogen lamps, gloves and batteries. They come back an hour later and Holloway tells everyone they heard a growl within the hallway just as they ran out of fishing line. So, they decided to come back.

Exploration number two follows the next day. The men bring flares, four spools of fishing line and neon markers. They are also equipped with jars in which to place scrapings into (from the walls). This exploration lasts eight hours and the men find what they call a Great Hall with an enormous staircase. As they talk over the radio, Navidson finds it harder and harder to listen to. He displays signs of jealousy that the men have found these things and not him.

Exploration number three lasts twenty hours and the men spend forty-five minutes to reach the staircase and seven more climbing down it. The men return exhausted and out of sorts from the ordeal.

The chapter breaks into Johnny's life. He meets a girl named Kylie at a bar with Lude one night. She speaks several different languages and is very attractive. He sees her again five months later at a bar. They have a drink, and then take a drive in her BMW. She drives to another town and pulls over where they make love in the car for a while. Johnny describes the act as non-emotional. There is no kissing or eye contact, only sex. She drops him off at his apartment later that evening. She starts to cry as she drives off, but Johnny lets her go instead of trying to call her back and assist her in any way.

The chapter goes back to the Navidson house where Karen's mother calls to tell her more about Feng Shui. Apparently, Karen is in need of a compass to balance the house. She goes out and purchases one, but when she gets back to the house the compass





doesn't work. She goes back to the store and returns the compass for a new one, which doesn't work in her house either.

Johnny breaks in again with the story of his childhood after his father dies. Johnny is placed with a man named Raymond and his family. Johnny fights a lot at school, because he's in seventh grade and talks back to the older kids. They don't like him talking back to ninth graders. Johnny doesn't care, even though Raymond tells him he's only a guest in his home and he should stop fighting. Johnny fights numerous times each day until he finally gets caught. Raymond puts Johnny in his truck and tells him he's taking him to the hospital. He stops in a remote place first and beats Johnny first.

The chapter continues at the Navidson home and exploration number four. For this exploration Holloway, Wax and Jed will spend five days in the hallway. They are more than prepared with equipment this time. As they prepare for this final exploration, the camera catches Wax in the kitchen with Karen, and they kiss a few times. Navidson doesn't see this happen, but when he watches the tape later, he sees it.

## Chapter 7 Analysis

The first night's exploration turns up a tremendously long twisty hallway and the men returning about an hour later after running out of fishing line and hearing a growl in the darkness. The second lasts a lot longer and they find the great hall with the large staircase. The third is by far the weirdest one, because they come back twenty hours later and spend seven of those hours trying to go down the staircase.

While Holloway and Navidson both dream of being in the headlines for the five and a half minute hallway, the narrator of the story tells a sordid tale of Kylie and his sex in the seats of her BMW. He doesn't know if he'll ever see her again. In another break in the chapter, he reveals some of his childhood in a foster home where he gets beat up by the father and continuously fights in school as well.



# Chapter 8

## Chapter 8 Summary

Exploration number four gets under way, and Navidson and Reston set up their equipment in the living room outside the hall's entrance. They will have radio contact with the men for the first 24 hours, but for the remaining four days, they will have no contact. As the men move toward the staircase from within the hallway they contact Reston to tell him everything is alright. They maintain contact every fifteen minutes until they finally lose radio contact.

Navidson is videotaping the events on the outside of the hallway during the remaining days. He captures Karen on the phone with her mother, Reston sleeping, Tom playing with the children and anything else to occupy his time. They are getting restless waiting to hear from the men inside the hallway.

The exploration is supposed to last only five days, but by day seven, there is still no word from the men. On day eight, Navidson and Reston hear faint knocking. They realize it's coming from the other side of the living room wall. Navidson knows he needs to rescue the men, because it is day eight and they only brought enough food and water for five days. Karen is livid, but Navidson tells her there is no other way. Navidson calls this segment SOS and starts taping himself going into the hallway.

Johnny breaks into the chapter with another story of his childhood when he was thirteen years old and got a job at a canning factory. The employment agency thought he was more like sixteen years old. He gets invited to go on a fishing boat with some other young guys. A storm starts brewing and the boat fills with water and sinks. One Haitian man dies and Johnny never forgets what happened.

He actually tells his boss and Thumper when he sees her again. Thumper is so moved by the story that she invites him to have lunch with her at a Thai restaurant. They sit and eat while talking about past sex stories. He's enthralled at how open she is and decides to talk to her about Zampano and the strange hallucinations he's been having. She listens intently to his surprise and tells him he's an o.k. guy. Before she drives him home, she tells him to come down to the club and see her sometime. He thinks he would like that very much.

## Chapter 8 Analysis

This chapter sheds light on the depth of the five and a half minute hallway. It's actually turning out to be an eight-day hallway and then some. As the men continue with exploration number four, it is supposed to be five days long, but after seven days, they still have not returned.



The reader gets a glimpse of Johnny's softer side as well by hearing his story of the fishing boat expedition in which one man dies at sea. He's also getting closer to Thumper as they share their intimate sexual endeavors and Johnny opens up about Zampano for the first time to her.



# Chapter 9

## Chapter 9 Summary

Johnny gets a phone call from a girl named Tatiana who claims to have books that Zampano requested, but never received. It's getting harder and harder for Johnny to leave his apartment. Even reaching for the doorknob brings him excruciating chest pain. He doesn't understand it. Last week he was late for work by three hours and the boss threatened to fire him if he was late again. He's determined to get to Tatiana, so he forces himself out of the apartment, only to hallucinate that a truck veers off the road and hits him head on. He thinks he's dying yet again.

He snaps out of his hallucination and looks toward his car. There is no truck coming down the road, so he proceeds to Tatiana's house. She gives him the books Zampano had requested and they proceed to drink Jack Daniels and Coke. When the bottle is empty, she tells him he can masturbate on her naked body, so he does.

Some of Zampano's writings, which he tried to erase, are presented in this chapter. He writes of a maze built by King Minos to hide his son who has a bulls head and a man's body. King Minos is embarrassed by his son, but cannot bring himself to kill him, so he builds a labyrinth to keep his son hidden from society. The labyrinth is presented to compare the five and a half minute hallway to an actual labyrinth. The men who ventured down the hallway still had not returned.

Johnny meets Lude at a bar later in the evening. Lude is sitting with a girl named Natasha and her girlfriends. They point toward Johnny several times and Natasha looks nervous. Johnny gets irritated by the whole scene and leaves the bar, leaving Lude behind with the girls. He ventures to another bar where he starts drinking shots of tequila. He meets an Australian girl and they end up going back to her place to have sex. He only remembers bits and pieces due to the amount of tequila he had, but he knows he had fun. He finally leaves her place and cannot find his car for a few minutes, but does eventually find it and drives himself home.

The chapter returns to the hallway in the Navidson house. The men make it down the staircase on day four. Holloway continues to mark corners with foot long neon markers and lets out the fishing line so they will find their way back. They also continue to take samples from the walls and store them in glass jars.

When they finally start heading back from the long hallway the staircase is further away than they had anticipated. It takes them twelve hours to get back to the stairs. They notice that the first neon marker has been mutilated, like something chewed it to pieces. Their fuel for the campfire stove and their water has disappeared as well.

Holloway pulls out his Weatherby 300 magnum and loads it in fear of whatever has done this. The men creep slowly around each corner (moving away from the staircase)



and start to hear growling again. At first, it seems far away, and then it slowly gets closer to them. The men follow Holloway as they move further and further away from the staircase chasing the growl, which they cannot seem to find. Jed and Wax tell Holloway they should return to the staircase. Holloway yells at them in fury and tells them there's no way he's aborting this mission without finding the creature that's growling in the dark. They plead with him that their supplies are short and they need to head back. He refuses, so the men head back without him. They wait at the staircase for him for hours and then try to sleep for a few more hours. Still, there's no Holloway, so they decide (with much guilt) to head up the stairs without him.

As the men climb the stairs they notice at each spot where they had left food and fuel for the stove, it has vanished. The neon markers become more devoured at each location also. At one of the locations, they notice that the water jug is still full, so each man guzzles water. When Wax goes for a second drink, a rifle is fired and he's hit in the armpit. Holloway comes out of nowhere wondering how he ended up with Jed and Wax. Wax is bleeding and crying for the men to help him. Jed runs to him and yells for Holloway to help. They use their medical kit to bandage Wax's wounds and Jed tries to get Holloway to help carry Wax. Holloway will have nothing to do with helping carry Wax and squabbles about going to jail because he has shot a man. Jed threatens him that he'll only go to jail if he does not help carry Wax, but Holloway just disappears into the darkness again.

As Jed carries Wax there are several more shots fired as they make their way through the hallway. Jed finally cannot carry Wax any longer and sits down to cry. A few hours later, the camera comes back on and Jed is speaking into the camera saying that if they don't find their way out soon, Wax will die. He relays the accounts leading up to his current situation and starts knocking on the floor. This is the knocking within the walls of the Navidson house that everyone heard.

We are back to Johnny again and another story of a seventeen year old girl who came to him one day. He slightly remembers her, but cannot seem to place where they had met. She leads him to a back yard under some banana trees, strips him and makes love to him on the spot. Afterwards she tells him that they had met before, but didn't make love. She wanted to make love to him before she got married (in four months). He is troubled and hurt by this, so after they part ways he ingests more alcohol to help numb the pain.

Jed tries again to carry Wax. As they move forward, Wax is beginning to go into shock and Jed keeps trying to reach Navidson on the radio. The next clip shows Jed locked in a room with Wax. He has the camera pointed at the door and there is knocking coming from the outside. Whatever is knocking will soon knock the door open.

## Chapter 9 Analysis

This chapter reveals the ultimate challenges the men face as they spend nearly eight days in the hallway surrounded by darkness and cold. Holloway finally loses his mind



firing his gun blindly in the dark, hitting Wax. Jed cares for Wax as Holloway disappears again into the darkness. Jed fears for their lives, but never stops carrying, dragging and pulling Wax around each corner.

Johnny continues to spill sexual stories from his childhood and more recently as his hallucinations build. He finds it harder to leave his home and starts to black out as he drinks more heavily.



# Chapter 10

## Chapter 10 Summary

Tom, Navidson and Billy Reston are heading down the hallway in an attempt to rescue Holloway, Jed and Wax. Reston, however, is in a wheelchair, so once they reach the Grand Hall, he can go no further. Navidson tells Tom to come with him on the stairs and they will maintain radio contact with Reston. Tom, however, cannot go because he is too afraid and sick to his stomach. Navidson gets angry with his brother, but Reston steps in and tells Navidson he will have to go alone and leave Tom with him. Navidson apologizes to his brother, and then he proceeds to the stairs alone.

After about five minutes, Navidson has reached the end of the staircase. He thinks he may be at the wrong staircase, because Holloway's notes portray a much longer staircase. Reston jumps out of his wheelchair and climbs down the stairs to meet Navidson while leaving Tom alone. Navidson realizes he'll have to take Reston with him, so he fetches his wheelchair and brings it down the stairs to continue their journey. Tom stays behind with the radio. The assessment of the house is, "the house, the halls, and the rooms all become the self-collapsing, expanding, tilting, closing, but always in perfect relation to the mental state of the individual."

Johnny's story continues as he goes to see a doctor about his hallucinations. He spends less than half an hour, spills his guts and is prescribed some pills and an appointment to see another doctor. He's upset by this and does not go to the other appointment. He doesn't take the pills either. He's afraid to sleep, but he's more afraid of the pills. He feels as if he's going mad, but isn't ready to commit himself yet. He throws the pills out, scours his apartment, empties his liquor into the sink, and decides he's going to remember his dreams. He will continue with a clear head or not at all.

Navidson and Reston stop to camp for the night. Navidson decides to take first watch and Reston takes second watch. The night is uneventful. The second night is interrupted with a cry in the distance. The two men follow the direction of the cry for hours until they hear it again. They also pass the neon markers as they travel and wonder what has devoured them. They come to a door without a knob and determine that the cries are coming from behind this door. Navidson puts his shoulder to the door several times and finally it flies open to reveal Jed and Wax.

No sooner does Jed laugh with delight than a bullet shatters his skull. Navidson sees his head hit the floor and the blood splatter. Reston pulls out a gun and fires back at what appears to be Holloway. Navidson drags Wax and Jed out of the way, as he hears doors shutting behind Holloway. He's escaped after shooting both Wax and Jed. The men work quickly to make their tent into a stretcher to carry Wax and Jed. Navidson reaches Tom on the radio and tells him to meet them at the bottom of the stairs.



## Chapter 10 Analysis

The men are overwhelmed with the short staircase, when originally it was anticipated to be over 300 miles in length. It takes Navidson and Reston only five minutes on the staircase. When they finally hear cries, they discover Jed and Wax behind a door without a knob. The horrific scene that follows is incomprehensible, as Holloway shoots Jed in the head and kills him. He then escapes through an interior door, but Reston tries to shoot him back anyway without contact. They have at least found the men and will now try to get Wax and Jed out of danger while trying to figure out what happened to Holloway to make him go mad.





# Chapter 11

## Chapter 11 Summary

This chapter opens with the differences between Tom and Will Navidson. Tom is the lighthearted drifter who takes one day at a time where Will is the more famous one who conquers each day as his own.

There are notes within the next few pages that describe the biblical story about twins. "Esau's a hairy, dimwitted hunter. Jacob's a smooth-skinned, cunning intellectual." Their father is blind and tells Esau he has only one blessing and if he brings him meat, he will bless him. Jacob tricks his father by pasting hair onto his hands and gives his father a bowl of stew, so the father blesses Jacob thinking it is Esau. When Esau returns, his father tells him of the betrayal and that he has no second blessing.

Zampano and a woman named Denise Neiman worked on the story of Esau and Jacob for a while until it was to Zampano's satisfaction. One day Denise returns to Zampano to find that the pages are missing and his fingers are in bandages. He does not tell her what happened, just that it does not matter. She is baffled by this, but makes Zampano something to eat to ease his pain. She uses the bathroom and finds most of the pages crumpled up in the garbage pail. She folds them, puts them in her pocket and later puts them in the bottom of the trunk now owned by Johnny. Johnny finds them and there are splatters of blood on the pages. No one knows what happened to Zampano that made him shred some of the pages and put the rest in the trash.

The chapter breaks with a transcript of Tom's story of the days he spent in the hallway with Reston and Navidson.

On day one, he voices his opinion that the place must be haunted. He maintains radio contact with both Navidson and Karen on separate channels. He calls them both and tells them he's alright. During the night, he worries about being eaten by a monster, but calls Karen again and she tells him the children can hear voices.

He starts day two by smoking a joint outside his tent, followed by writing jokes in his journal. He calls Navidson and Karen again and teases Karen telling her to order him a pizza. He wants the deliveryman to bring it down to him. She tells him he should come back, but he will not.

Johnny breaks into the chapter having abruptly shouted at a customer. Thumper leads him outside and tells him he had better get a grip on himself. He then starts telling the story of ecstasy bought by him and Lude in November. They did a lot of it, drank and smoked marijuana at the same time. They both kept logs of all the one-night stands they had as well. Lude's list is much longer than Johnny's.

When December rolls around they are out of ecstasy and Johnny is hung over. He and Lude go to a bar and they see a woman who appears to be a porn star. She's what



Johnny calls "deformed." She has platinum hair, huge breasts, caked on makeup, very long fingernails and overly large lips. Johnny goes over to talk to her and only gets a few questions in before the bar starts to close. He walks her to her truck and on the way, they see a stray Pekinese dog. The dog appears to be scratched up and shaking. The girl, Johnnie, is taken by the dog and so is Johnny. He lets her take the dog, because she has a yard and he has only a small apartment. She takes the dog in her arms and puts him into her truck, then brings Johnny home to his apartment, but he does not invite her inside. As he approaches the front door, he hears a thump, so he looks down the road to find the Pekinese dog lying on the pavement near the curb. She had thrown the dog out the window of her truck and now the dog lay dead. He can't believe it.

Tom's story continues with day two. Karen calls him and is crying about her Feng Shui. She tells him that everything has gone missing, the compass, the figurines, everything. He asks if the children have moved anything and she tells him the children were the ones who asked her if she moved it. She's very frightened and wants Navidson to come back. He radios Will to alert him about Karen, but the connection is too fuzzy.

## Chapter 11 Analysis

The stories between Johnny and the Navidson house run very parallel in this chapter. It starts with the biblical story of twins, and then switches from Tom's transcript of his days in the hall to Johnny's crazy outlandish sex stories.

First Tom is frightened to even be in the hall and remains at the foot of the stairs to keep in radio contact with Navidson and Reston, but once Navidson radios him and tells him to come to the foot of the stairs, he simply cannot do it. He tries, but ends up running back to the safety of the landing.

Johnny, on the other hand tells an absurd story about meeting a girl in a bar who seems to want to care for a sick dog they find together, then hurls it out of her truck window after dropping him off at his apartment. If he had known how strange this woman was, he would have insisted on taking the dog for himself.



# Chapter 12

## Chapter 12 Summary

As Navidson and Reston make their way to the foot of the stairs, they realize Tom is not there. Navidson starts to get upset when a rope is lowered down to them. He realizes that Tom has not left them stranded, but has come up with a better idea by make shifting a gurney to hoist the men to safety. Wax goes first, Jed second and Reston third. As Reston is ascending, the rope in Navidson's hands begins to rapidly pull. The staircase begins to stretch leaving Navidson behind. He reaches for the rope, but it's too late. The rope snaps.

Johnny misses three weeks of work and doesn't realize it, as he returns one day to find his replacement doing his job. His boss hands him his last paycheck and tells him to get professional help. He makes his way back to his apartment and continues to read the notes about the "house." It's occupying his every thought these days and he's even thrown out all of his friend's phone numbers and insulated the interior of his apartment with egg cartons. He doesn't want to go anywhere or do anything anymore.

His every waking moment is spent on reading the Navidson Report. He has been without alcohol, sex and drugs for six weeks now and still wakes in the night with the hallucinations of being killed. His throat is sliced by the monster with the long claws and it tears his ribs out of his chest. He sometimes cannot remember the dreams, but he knows he dies in them. He even remembers events he's attended, but they have a different outcome as he remembers them now. He went to a party thrown by a millionaire named Tex and hallucinates that he envisioned the house as a ship that slowly sunk. He saw people drowning and bodies being torn apart, but knows it could not have happened. He's losing his mind and doesn't know how to stop it from happening.

The chapter closes with a caption of Navidson at the bottom of the staircase wondering how he'll get back up. Tom had received Jed, Wax and Reston safely.

## Chapter 12 Analysis

Under the circumstances, Navidson is stuck at the bottom of the stairs with no hope of getting to the safety of his home. The staircase suddenly stretched leaving him behind after the other three men arrive safely up the pulley Tom had made.

On the other side of the story, the reader is feeling Johnny slowly lose his mind altogether. He doesn't show up for work for three weeks and suddenly decides to go in. His boss is shocked to see him and informs him he's been replaced. This doesn't seem to faze him very much, as he's content to sit in his apartment alone reading the Navidson report.



# Chapter 13

## Chapter 13 Summary

Teppet Brookes is Chad's teacher. She notices that his drawings are unlike the drawings of the other children. When told to draw a picture of his home Chad draws a square with no windows and no doors. In the center is a black pit and there are pictures of snarling animals all around the perimeter. Brookes suspects child abuse, so she visits the kindergarten room to have a look at Daisy's drawings. They are nearly identical. Instead of calling Children's Services, she decides to take a drive and visit the Navidson house. She arrives at the house and hears screams, so she knocks loudly on the door. Reston answers the door and asks her to come inside and help him. She's horrified by the scene of two bloody men lay on the floor while the man in the wheelchair has bloody hands. The children are sitting at the top of the stairs singing together.

The police and ambulance arrive a few minutes later and Brookes leaves. She cannot bear the scene and never sees the children again. Karen leads a policeman to the hallway, gives him a flashlight and tells him to find her husband. He enters the hallway and returns ten minutes later by himself. He doesn't utter a word, just leaves the house. He's interviewed later and tells reporters the hallway was never ending and eerie.

For four days, Navidson is still missing. The camera catches Karen pacing the house, the children are left to fend for themselves and Tom is continuously drinking. Reston keeps up hope that Navidson will return, but the hallway has gone back to a smaller, average sized hallway. They pass the time together hoping for the best. At 5:09 in the morning as Karen dozes off on the couch, Navidson limps out of the hallway exhausted and dehydrated.

Johnny breaks into the chapter explaining that it's September and he hasn't seen Lude since June. Lude knows Johnny has not gone mad from drugs, as he sees the trunk and all of the papers, sketches and measuring tape strewn everywhere inside the apartment. He tries to tell Johnny to get rid of the trunk and all of the papers, but Johnny gets defensive. He gets so defensive that Lude backs away from him and calls him scary and weird. Johnny tries to apologize, but Lude won't hear it. He tries to talk Johnny into going to a party, but he declines. Lude gives up after a while and Johnny is left alone to the Navidson Report, as he contemplates suicide.

Navidson views Holloway's last tape and it reveals his madness and the feeling that he's being stalked by a creature. The creature will not strike and Holloway cannot figure out why. He tells the camera that he deserves to die as he has shot two men, but later in the tape, he says that he does not deserve to die. He screams into the darkness at the unseen creature and says he doesn't want to die this way. He places the rifle to his chest and shoots himself in the last scene.



Johnny feels as though Zampano lives inside him, although he cannot actually explain how this is possible. Then, the scene breaks to the Navidson house where the family is trying to escape. The camera inside captures Karen packing her things in her bedroom when the wall collapses. Chairs begin to slide, the china cabinet falls and the floor begins to sink. Navidson finds Karen unconscious on the bedroom floor and the children are missing. He carries Karen to the car and goes back to try and find the children.

Tom runs back into the house and follows Daisy's cries. He finds her and brings her to the safety of Navidson's arms. Chad, however, has remained outside not wanting to be part of the chaos within the walls of the house. Tom tries to exit the house, but every step forward drags him two steps back. The walls and ceiling continue to stretch and bend around him as Navidson tries to enter the house through a window to save his brother. They all watch in agony as Tom starts bleeding through the nose, mouth and ears. The house swallows him up and he disappears in front of their eyes.

## Chapter 13 Analysis

The heaviness of the final moments of the house and Navidson's return are apparent in this chapter. Everything ends as Chad's teacher attempts to find out why the children are drawing such terrible things by visiting the home. She finds a blood bath awaiting her that she cannot handle. As she flees the home, the police and ambulance arrive to take the body of Jed and Wax. We find out later that Wax survives, but not without permanent scars on the inside and outside.

As the house crashes around them, the family struggles to escape. The unfortunate event is the loss of Tom who is the timid brother. His strength in this chapter shines through as he rescues Daisy and struggles for his own life to the end.

The reader also realizes the deterioration of the narrator, Johnny, who now believes Zampano lives within his own body and is so consumed by putting the pieces of the puzzle together of the Navidson Report that he cannot even leave his own apartment. There are two things deteriorating here; the house and Johnny Truant's sanity. It seems neither will ever be the same.

# Chapter 14

## Chapter 14 Summary

Navidson goes to Lowell and takes care of his brother's personal effects in October. He tells Karen he'll return by Thanksgiving, but does not return. Karen calls Fowler, whom she previously had an affair with. Karen has a fear of being left alone, whether with her children or not. She gets mad when Navidson goes away on trips and she has to stay behind. Fowler makes her feel comfortable.

Johnny breaks in with the story of his mother's locket. She left it to him when she died and he has always kept it hidden in a locker. Inside the locket is the first letter he had ever written to his mother (he was 11-years old at the time). She had saved it inside the locket. He will never part with it. He comments, "I will sell body parts first."

## Chapter 14 Analysis

This chapter reveals a little in the early life of Johnny. He's abandoned by his mother at an early age and, when she passes away, he's given a locket she always wore around her neck. It has a letter he wrote her when he was a little boy. On the other side of the locket, it is obvious to the reader that Karen loves Navidson, but has some deep rooted issues when it comes to confined places and being left alone.



# Chapter 15

## Chapter 15 Summary

Karen sits on a park bench four months after leaving the house in Virginia. She has not seen Navidson since he left to take care of his brother's things four months ago. She's not sure what to do. She is contemplating selling the house, but Navidson won't leave it. He's still there with Reston conducting experiments.

While left behind Karen works on the film for Navidson. She shortens it to thirteen minutes and sends it to everyone she knows and some Navidson knows. Their comments are presented in this chapter. Most of them are architects, scientists or professors. Their opinions vary, but mostly contain questions regarding the soil specifications under the house, the crumbling of substance and how many metric tons of substance it would take to create the hallway, wall structure, wind pressure earthquakes and variance of motion within the structure. They are skeptical and want to piece together how they manipulated the film. Quite different than if they actually believed it was possible.

Johnny breaks into the chapter as Thumper calls him on the phone. He's been waiting for this day for a very long time. She invites him over for dinner, but he says no. Before any more conversation can take place, the phone company cuts them off. Johnny has failed to pay the bill and it has finally caught up with him.

Karen works on the Navidson film again, this time piecing together pictures of Navidson from early childhood. She lets the film speak for itself as his life progresses before her eyes. When she's finished, she decides she will not leave Navidson or sell the house. She wants to reconcile, but she's not sure how she will go about it.

## Chapter 15 Analysis

The cold reality of what the house has done to Karen and Navidson comes through in this chapter. Even though they have been through a horrific ordeal, she loves him and will not let the years they have spent together slip away from her. She will go after him and work things out.

Johnny, on the other hand, has now lost his phone and the only connection with the outside world. The reader feels he will only slip further into hallucination within the confines of his little apartment and the clippings from the Navidson Report.



# Chapter 16

## Chapter 16 Summary

Objective data is compiled in this chapter concerning the aspects of the house. No changes in geometry, no dust, radios with limited range, etc. Comments on notes such as, "What we have here is a nice banquet of igneous, sedimentary and metamorphic samples, some granular, possibly gabbro and pyroxenite, some with much less grain, possible trachite or andesite." There are also charts containing levels of carbon, potassium, rubidium, lutetium, thorium and uranium.

Johnny is slipping from reality. He leaves his apartment only to buy more tuna fish or get books from the library. He's received several eviction notices and his neighbors are afraid of him. He's also lost 18 pounds so far and his nights were filled with nightmares that made him scream out loud.

He remembers his mother used to write him letters all the time. She apologizes in one and Johnny thinks she's apologizing for the pan of hot oil she accidentally spilled on him when he was four. It scarred his arms and chest.

## Chapter 16 Analysis

Even though Johnny cannot remember his mother and didn't know her very well, she holds a special place in his heart that no one else can fill. During his lonely nights in his apartment waiting for the nightmares to begin, he thinks of his mother.





# Chapter 17

## Chapter 17 Summary

Navidson spends months on Reston's couch as the two of them research the properties of the house. Navidson is now broke and at the end of his rope, so Reston has a heart to heart talk with him about wrapping things up and calling National Geographic. He agrees after several drinks of Jack Daniels and says he'll do it in the morning and go home to Karen afterwards.

The next morning, Navidson has vanished and did not call either the National Geographic or Karen. Reston finds his car parked in front of the house, wheels his wheelchair up to the door and goes in. He finds no Navidson, and surprisingly, there is no hallway any longer either.

References are quoted from BFJ Criteria (The Criteria), Kellog and Antwerk and Norman Paarlberg who have written on the subject of the Navidson Record. These references refer to Tom as a hero in the end showing great strength and endurance by saving Daisy and display Navidson as follows, "Navidson has one deeply acquired organizing perception: there is no hope of survival there. Life is impossible. And therein lies the lesson of the house, spoken in syllables of absolute silence, resounding within him like a faint and uncertain echo...If we desire to live, we can only do so in the margins of that place."

Navy writes Karen a five-page letter saying how much he loves her, how much he misses her and how Delial turns out to be a Pulitzer Prize winning photo. He is drunk while writing this letter and it trails off in several sections mentioning the kids in one section and how much he misses Delial toward the end. He closes with how much he loves and misses Karen.

Karen's side effects of the house are described as, "With the eventual exception of Navidson, she was the only one who attempted to process the ramifications of that place. The labor she put into both film shorts resulted in more moderate mood swings, an increase in sleep and an end to that nettlesome cough."

Navidson describes on Hi 8 journal entries some dreams he has had. They are broken down by The Haven-Slocum Theory accounts for the profound physiological consequences of Navidson once he went back into the house.

The chapter breaks with Johnny waking up in a cold sweat. He gets up, finds some candles to light (because his electric has been cut off for a while), rinses his face with water, and then talks about his dream. He's in some sort of vessel. He feels as if he's being hunted or followed by something. He runs around corners and down corridors finding only a frat boy holding an axe and a garbage can lid. As Johnny inspects himself in his dream, he is deformed. His fingers are melting and hair and lumps are growing



out of his body. The frat boy wants to chop him up into little pieces, and sometimes in the dream, this actually takes place. Johnny always wakes in a cold sweat from the horror of it all. He sleeps with guns at his side, but they do nothing for him while he dreams.

## Chapter 17 Analysis

Navidson spends time with Reston as they continue to research the strangeness of the house. They cannot come up with any solid answers, so the project is abandoned. Even though Navidson agrees to let go, he does not, as he returns to the house the next morning before Reston wakes up. When Reston finally reaches him, his car is in the drive but he is missing.

The reader feels sad for both Navidson and Johnny. Navidson has lost his brother, Tom and cannot seem to get over it and Johnny has lost his mind altogether. He is continuously plagued by nightmares, will soon be evicted from his apartment and is withering away to nothing due to lack of sleep and food.



# Chapter 18

## Chapter 18 Summary

Karen spends time with her mother on the phone and decides to drive to Virginia while her mother watches the kids. Her mother believes she's going to sue Navidson and put the house up for sale. Karen visits the real estate agent first and explains the situation to her. The real estate agent feels sorry for Karen and tries to comfort her. She tells Karen she has done some research on the previous owners of the house and it has had twenty owners within the last fifty years. It is now, however, built on a cemetery or Indian burial ground.

Johnny interrupts the chapter with an update on his life. For some reason in his writing, he replaces every "s" with an "f." He's finally being evicted from his apartment and sells his beloved mother's locket. He receives \$4,200 for the locket and keeps the chain. He writes Thumper a letter and brings it to his old boss to deliver for him, then searches for Lude. He finds out from a local bar that Lude is in the hospital, so he visits him there. Lude looks terrible, but tells Johnny that's it's o.k. Apparently, the man responsible for Lude's condition was Kyrie's old boyfriend. Lude tells Johnny he's going to sue him once he's out of the hospital and he and Johnny will go to Vegas and bet the money on red. Johnny just chuckles, but Lude is really glad to see him after so many months. Lude falls asleep from all the painkillers he's been taking and Johnny leaves. He goes to Lude's apartment, slips an envelope with \$500 dollars in it under the door, returns home to pack and leaves his apartment for the last time.

The chapter returns to Karen who returns to the house in Virginia. The realtor is in the driveway while Karen enters the house. It's dark and the electricity is off. The camera shows Karen turning the switch on, but no lights come on. She yells for Navidson, leaves and returns the next morning. The electricity is on the next morning (she phoned the electric company to turn it on). Karen decides to move back into the house.

Reston joins her in her search for Navidson. They scour every inch of the house, almost daily, with no sign of him anywhere. She continues to call the kids nightly at her mother's house and writes in a journal. The realtor brings perspective buyers, but Karen eventually tells her she's changed her mind and no longer wants to sell the house. One night she actually hears Navidson's muffled cries from within the house. Reston arrives the next day and stays late, but doesn't hear anything.

After Reston leaves, she notices things appear in the children's room. Navidson's camping gear and Hi 8 tapes show up out of nowhere. She calls Reston and tells him to come over, then starts watching the tapes. The chapter ends with something looming over Karen's shoulder, but she's distracted by the tapes and does not turn around.



## Chapter 18 Analysis

This chapter reveals the true love Karen carries for Navidson. It's been nearly six months since she's seen him, yet she fails to give up on him. She leaves the children with her mother and ventures to Virginia to the house she is immensely afraid of. Even though she's terrified, she moves back into the house in search of her lost Navidson.

Johnny has not been officially evicted from his apartment and having nowhere to turn, sells his mother's locket, which he vowed never to part with. He visits friends for the last time and even leaves a note for Thumper. The reader doesn't know what will happen to Karen or Johnny.



# Chapter 19

## Chapter 19 Summary

This chapter mentions events that happened prior to Karen arriving at the house in Virginia. When Will Navidson stayed at Reston's place he would review every piece of footage there was regarding the house. He seemed to leave no stone unturned. New York City gallery owner, Timothy K. Thuan was noted for saying:

"Will Navidson is one of this century's finest photographers, but because his work defines him as a photojournalist he suffers to this day that most lamentable of critical denunciations: 'Hey he just shoots what happens. Anyone can do that, if they're there.' And so it goes. Buy that guy a beer and sock him in the eye."

## Chapter 19 Analysis

This chapter is very short, but reveals the consciousness or unconsciousness of people and the way they feel about space. Is it really empty? Or, is there really something occupying space that the human eye cannot see?



# Chapter 20

## Chapter 20 Summary

The films found by Karen reveal Navidson's exploration when he goes into the house by himself after leaving Reston. He carries an abundance of items behind a mountain bike. He takes with him a 1962 hand crank camera, lenses, tripod, microcassette recorder, extra batteries, extra LCD tapes, 10 rolls of black and white film, sleeping bag, gallons of water, flashlights, matches, toilet paper, socks, medical kit, neon markers, food and one book. He carries these items on a two-wheel trailer behind his bike.

The bike has a mileage calculator and the first night he manages to ride 163 miles. He sets up camp for the night and begins again the next morning. For five days, he travels hundreds of miles each day. No matter which direction he turns, he's heading downhill. He turns around several times after traveling downhill to find that even in the opposite direction he's still traveling downhill.

On the twelfth day, Navidson notices that the walls start changing around him. Sometimes they are closing in on him (the ceiling too) and other times they are more spread out and the ceiling seems much higher. This day both ceiling and walls seem to be so far away that he's not sure he's traveling in a straight direction. He's moving at 30 miles per hour on his bike and fears he will fall off the edge if he comes to the end of this hallway. There is an end and he feels it coming. He tries to slow down and ends up dumping the bike over. The trailer crashes and he scratches his leg up in the process. He decided to spend the night.

When he wakes the next morning, he notices a staircase above him. He climbs until he reaches a small chamber-like room with no windows and no doors. His bike and supplies are left behind. He carries only a small pack on his back. When he reaches the end of the staircase, the only thing there is a vertical shaft. He climbs the shaft and enters a small room with one door. He opens the door to find another corridor. It appears to be long. He travels down the hallway and it gets smaller and smaller. Soon he's on all fours and eventually crawling on his belly. He finally sees a room with a window, but as he approaches the window, it vanishes leaving only blackness again.

He travels several more days losing track of what day it is and what time it is. His batteries stop working, so his camera stops functioning. He records on his voice cassette recording and stops occasionally to read the book he brought with him (House of Leaves). He's starting to get disoriented and dizzy. He gets nauseous occasionally and has to throw up. He's not sure how much longer he will survive in the complete and utter darkness.

He reads his books with only twenty-four matches. When each page is finished, he lights it on fire. Eventually he burns the cover and the spine. He's going insane. He



knows he's dying and there's nothing he can do about it. He sits in silence and remembers his children and Karen.

## Chapter 20 Analysis

This chapter reveals the ordeal Will Navidson went through while alone in the hallway after his family's hasty retreat. He endures the challenge of the bike ride for hundreds of miles each day carrying a trailer behind his bike. He seems to go downhill no matter which direction he travels. The deeper he gets within the hallways, the more complex they become. He's only got about two weeks worth of rations and water. He sleeps when he reaches exhaustion and then rises early for yet another day of traveling. When he's nearing the end of his food and water, he uses light from the flares and flashlights to read *The Book of Leaves*. The chapter closes with him missing Karen and the children and thinking he will soon die.



# Chapter 21

## Chapter 21 Summary

Lude is dead. He took pills and injected dope into his body (way too much), got on his motorcycle and drove it into the side of a building at over 100 miles per hour. Johnny feels numb knowing that his dear friend is now dead. Johnny's journals are being read now. He is staying in a hotel, yet he calls it an asylum. He hears screaming coming from every room around him. He finally leaves the hotel and sleeps under park benches.

Kyrie's boyfriend, Gdansk Man, thought Lude wasn't enough. He comes after Johnny. He finds him, stops the car and beats him in the face. He blackens Johnny's eye and bloodies his nose, then walks away. Johnny feels the anger rise inside of him like an inferno. He reaches for an empty Jack Daniels bottle, smashes it against Gdansk Man's head, and does the rest with his fists. He smashes him in the face over and over again until he's unconscious. Kyrie comes toward Johnny with her nails flailing in the air and he just looks at her. This is enough to stop her dead in her tracks.

Johnny is back to hallucinating again. He reads his journals and realizes he's missing time from May until October. He can't figure out what he's done since May. He can't remember any of it, so he reads his journals, which he has written in every day. He enters a bar and starts talking about the 1622 Powhatan Indian Insurrection, which left almost 400 dead. He remembers being asked to leave.

Johnny feels his mother near him now more than ever. He dreams of her and even hallucinates about her. He remembers her letters to him throughout the years. His hallucinations contain the blood, the claws of the creature and he's searching for his mother. He can hear her, but cannot seem to find her.

His journals reveal that in September he visits friends in Seattle. They are both doctors and they nurse him back to health. They take him out with them and feed him health food and he exercises twice every day. He starts counseling at the local hospital and they put him on medication. He feels better than ever and is back on track. He's thinking clearly and doesn't hallucinate about his mother or the monster any longer. He decides it's time for him to leave and make it on his own, so he bids his friends (both doctors) goodbye and heads back home.

The next few entries in his journal depict that he's been lying about the two friends who are doctors. He's never been to see a counselor and has no medication. It's confusing, but Johnny says that was all made up nonsense. The next few entries are of him trying to get in touch with Lude, making dinner plans with Thumper and pawning his weapons for \$850. A few more entries, one of which announces Lude is dead and his dinner with Thumper. He kisses her on the cheek and hugs her as he leaves her house bound for Flagstaff, Arizona.





Johnny goes to a bar after arriving in Flagstaff. With only three dollars left to his name, he sits at the bar. The beers are only a buck each, so he orders three for the band and water for himself. The band plays a song with the lyrics, "I live at the end of a five and a half minute hallway," to which Johnny must inquire about.

He approaches them afterwards and they tell him the song is inspired by a book called House of Leaves by Zampano. The guitar player pulls the book out of a duffel bag and hands it to Johnny. He can't believe his eyes. Johnny held in his hands a book he had actually written and cannot remember it. The band tells him they wonder if Johnny Truant ever makes it to Virginia to see the house and whether or not he met the girl of his dreams. He toys with the idea of telling the band that he is Johnny Truant from the book, but decides against it. He gives the book back to the band and thanks them. He leaves the bar, sits under a tree in the park and falls asleep.

## Chapter 21 Analysis

The events that take place between May and October are a blur to Johnny. The memories come in and out in a haze, but he remembers Lude dying. This must be what wiped out Johnny's memories before Lude's death. Johnny actually has to go back and read his journal entries to remember the events that had taken place. The reader feels sad for Johnny having lost Lude and for everything he has had to suffer thus far, but is shocked to find that during this black out period he has actually written The House of Leaves and noted Zampano as the author.



## Chapter 22

### Chapter 22 Summary

This chapter returns to Karen alone in the children's bedroom viewing the tapes that suddenly appeared while she is searching for Navidson. She feels something behind her, goes to get a flashlight, returns to the bedroom and ventures in. She disappears from the camera view for a while. About forty five minutes later she appears in the backyard holding Navidson in her arms. He's awful shape and has to be taken to the hospital. He suffers frost bite and loses a hand and his left eye. He will also have to use a cane for the rest of his life, but he is alive.

### Chapter 22 Analysis

This chapter reveals the strength Karen shows when entering the dark room. She is claustrophobic and afraid of the dark, yet she ventures into the dark room and puts one foot in front of the other in hopes of finding Navidson still alive within the darkness. It is remarkable to the reader that she not only finds Navidson, but he's still alive.



# Chapter 23

## Chapter 23 Summary

Will, Karen, Chad and Daisy move to Vermont. Will and Karen finally get married. Navidson is recovering well and their new home has pictures of the family and friends covering the walls. They are making a new and fresh start together and the children look happy and unaffected by the events that happened nearly one and a half years ago at the house in Virginia.

### Exhibits

Six exhibits follow chapter 23 from Zampano. They are items he wanted to include in the movie. One is pictorial examples of architecture, two is hand shadows, three is illustrations, four is the Reston interview, five is pages from an Air Force manual and six is Karen's anxiety scale.

### Appendix

Here Zampano provides a table of contents for his manuscript.

### Bits and Pieces

There are literally bits and pieces of writings taken from all different sources. Some include dreams about vampires, while another contains entrapment within a maze. It goes on to describe Zampano's morning walks and thoughts of cats dying all around him.

After the bits and pieces of writing are a few pages with pictures of the actual scraps of paper, poems, more pictures of the documents and numerous letters written to Johnny from his mother while she was institutionalized. Her health and mind seemed to deteriorate with each letter. She even wrote one in code and told Johnny how to decipher it. She was under the impression they were being watched by the staff where she was staying.

## Chapter 23 Analysis

This is a positive and refreshing chapter, although short, which reveals the healing of the family after they move to Vermont after enduring such pain and sorrow within the walls of the home in Virginia.



# Characters

## Johnny Truant

Johnny is the narrator of the story. He's a man in his 30's with a troubled past. His father dies when he's young and shortly thereafter, he's abandoned by his mother and is raised in the foster system. His foster father, Raymond, beats him continuously and tells him to keep himself in line or he'll suffer more beatings.

Johnny attends school and takes his anger out on the other children. He gets in fights nearly every day, sometimes more than once per day and gets in trouble with the teachers. The more he fights, the more Raymond beats him.

Once grown and on his own, he travels a bit and meets his friend Lude. They have a lot in common, as they frequent bars and take new women home every few days. His life is filled with sex and booze. He lands a job at a tattoo parlor, and then Lude introduces him to one recently departed man's chest of words. The departed old man is one Zampano. Johnny takes a liking to the old man's chest full of papers and writings and takes it home with him.

Johnny tells his story of reading through the papers, which turns out to be the Navidson Record and his life slowly starts to fall apart as he doesn't eat or sleep much while he's obsessed with the writing.

## Holloway Roberts

Holloway was born in Menomonie, Wisconsin. He's a 48-year old professional hunter and explorer. He has done numerous things from leading expeditions into the mountains with his men to caving expeditions where they would explore the underground creatures and interior of each cave. They would challenge themselves to climb the highest mountain and brave the elements around them.

He is a very confident man with a lot of courage. He's the type of man you want around in life threatening situations. He stands firm, assesses the situation and takes control. Sometimes he can be too controlling and loses track of the mission. When confronted with a survival situation, he tends to take over and do what he thinks is best rather than ask the others within the group. This tends to lead to mutiny with his companions.

When Holloway was presented with a tape of the five and a half minute hallway, he was ready and willing to come investigate the Navidson house. Holloway thought he would become famous due to the nature of the hallway. He thought he would be one of the first to explore this uncharted territory and wanted to get there before any news crew arrived on the scene to steal his glory.



## Will Navidson

Will Navidson, despite his chaotic upbringing, turns out to be a very intelligent and skilled man. He is opposite his fraternal twin brother Tom, who tends to be laid back and carefree. Will and Tom's parents were rather distant from them. Several times throughout their childhood, their father would act out in violent rages smashing the windshield of the family car with a thermos and damaging other family items with rage. Will is stable and has Karen and their two children whom he takes good care of. When he sets his mind to something, he doesn't quit until he's finished. The job has to be done right as well. He's not one to do something half way.

He and Karen purchase the house in Virginia and find the strange doors and hallways that simply appear out of nowhere. Will starts investigating and calls upon his brother Tom and some friends to help him solve the mystery of these appearances. He simply must find the answers to his questions. He doesn't stop, even after he finds there really is no answer. The house has a presence of its' own and neither engineers nor scientists can seem to figure it out.

Still Will Navidson refuses to give up, as this is his nature. He nearly dies in the end trying to figure out what the hallway consists of and thinking it must have an end. All things have an end. As it turns out for Will Navidson, this hallway does not have an end, but a mind of its own.

## Karen Navidson

In the beginning of the story, Karen is not married to Will. Yet, in the end, they take their vows together. Karen's upbringing is not pleasant, for her stepfather rapes her and her sister. First, he forces Karen into a well while he rapes her sister, and then forces the sister down the same well while he rapes Karen. Because of this, Karen is claustrophobic and afraid of the dark.

She lives her life quietly after the events of her childhood and stays with Will. They have two children together (Daisy and Chad). Karen has feelings of insecurity every time Will leaves town for business trips, so she has marital affairs. One is known to Will, but he suspects others and he is right. Even though Karen has the affairs, she never leaves Will. She is committed to him and he makes her feel secure.

Toward the end of the novel, Karen is so dedicated to Will that she overcomes her fears and rescues him from the five and a half minute hallway. She ventures through the dark with a flashlight and finds him on the floor nearly dead. Afterwards the family moves to Vermont to continue their life together and try to put the past behind them.



## Tom Navidson

Tom is Will's fraternal twin brother. His parents were never there for either child. They were nearly non-existent, wrapped up in their own personal battles. Tom, unlike Will, passed his time by drinking a lot of alcohol and smoking marijuana on a daily basis.

Tom is called into the investigation on the house due to the fact that he works in construction, and the fact that he's Will's brother. They hadn't spoken in years when Will calls Tom for help, but Tom doesn't hesitate to come to Virginia to aid his brother in his time of need. Tom still continues to booze and smoke while investigating the strange occurrences within the house, but tries to keep it to a minimum knowing his brother does not approve.

Toward the end of the investigation when two men are dead and one is near death, Tom can't control the booze and the smoking any longer and does it constantly. In the end, Tom loses his life to the presence in the house. He is able to rescue Daisy in the end and hand her to Will, but he does not make it out alive.

## Zampano

Zampano is an old man that resides in Lude's apartment complex. Lude and the other residents see him out walking the grounds on a daily basis, sometimes feeding the birds. One particular day Lude notices that he hasn't seen Zampano around for a while. The police are called and Zampano is found lying dead on the floor of his apartment. Lude calls Johnny, they enter Zampano's apartment after the police, and paramedics finally leave and discover a trunk full of papers. The papers contain writings of all sorts. There are poems, phrases and pieces of a story written on them.

Johnny takes the trunk back to his own apartment and starts to read them, discovering that the story is called The Navidson Record and it's about the Navidson family's experience with a strange house in Virginia. Within the story, Johnny also gets to know Zampano's background. Zampano was a strange man who rarely left his apartment. He frequently had college students come over and read books to him. It is revealed later that Zampano was nearly blind and a lot of his books were in Braille. When the old man dies, he leaves no indication of family anywhere. It seems he was a lonely old man who passed away with nothing but a trunk full of scraps of paper.

## Daisy Navidson

Daisy is Karen and Will's five-year-old daughter. She and her brother Chad like the new house in Virginia and take to entering all the rooms to play. As the days go by, they spend more and more time together exploring the house and the yard. Daisy tends to be more exploratory than Chad, as she prefers the inside of the house and he prefers the yard. As the strange doors appear and the long hallway, the children try to explore them as well.



Karen soon finds that the hallway is dangerous, so she tells the children not to play inside it. They do as she asks and explore elsewhere. As Will starts his investigation on the house, he and Karen pay less attention to the children leaving them alone most of the time to fend for themselves. Daisy and Chad both feel the strangeness of the house and later are afraid of everything within it. Her fears appear in drawings that Chad's teacher later discovers and she drives to the house for a visit. In the end as the family frantically leaves the house in survival mode, Daisy is rescued to Tom. She makes it out alive, but Tom does not.

## **Chad Navidson**

Chad is Karen and Will's eight-year-old son. He and his sister Daisy like the new house in Virginia and take to entering all the rooms to play. As the days go by, they spend more and more time together exploring the house and the yard. As the strange doors appear and the long hallway, the children try to explore them as well.

Karen soon finds that the hallway is dangerous, so she tells the children not to play inside it. They do as she asks and explore elsewhere. As Will starts his investigation on the house, he and Karen pay less attention to the children leaving them alone most of the time to fend for themselves. Chad feels the strangeness of the house and later tends to prefer the yard instead of the inside of the house. His fears appear in drawings that his teacher later discovers and she drives to the house for a visit. In the end as the family frantically leaves the house in survival mode, Chad is already in the yard ready to go.

## **Lude**

Lude is probably Johnny's only friend. Lude doesn't have much of a background. He's one of those friends that hangs out if there are drugs and alcohol. He and Johnny frequent the bar scene constantly and try to hook up with every girl they see. Lude keeps a log of all of the girls he's slept with and shares it with Johnny. Johnny does the same thing, but his list is not nearly as long as Lude's list.

Lude maintains that the girls he's been with adore him, while truth be told, they really don't care for him that much. He's fun and tells a lot of stories, which Johnny backs up while they are trying to impress the girls. Johnny confides in Lude with his nightmares and Lude is always there for him.

Lude is the one who introduces Johnny to Zampano's chest of papers, but he doesn't understand the obsession that follows. He tries to maintain contact with Johnny even after he locks himself in his apartment with the chest. Lude visits him and tries to get him to burn the papers, but Johnny will not. In the end, Lude dies from crashing his motorcycle into a building at 100 miles per hour and Johnny feels very alone.



## Pelafina Lievre

Pelafina is Johnny Truant's mother. She lives the latter part of her life at The Three Attic Whalestoe Institute. She abandons Johnny at an early age after his father passes away. Johnny ends up in the foster system raised by strangers. She comes back into his life when he becomes a man and their main source of contact is through letters while she resides at the institute.

As Pelafina writes to Johnny on a constant basis, his letters to her are not as constant. She gets irritated by this and starts to write disturbing letters to him demanding to know why he hasn't written. She also starts to become suspicious that someone within the institute is trying to spy on her and Johnny and their letters. Her letters become more disturbing and at times, she uses code and tells him to decipher them by using the first letter of every word.

Johnny gets a letter from the institute saying that her health is declining in January of 1989. They adjust her medication, but tell him to prepare for the worst. He later gets a letter in May of 1989 that she has passed away. She died quietly in her room. The only thing left to him is the locket she wore around her neck.





# Objects/Places

## The House

The house is located in Virginia. It was purchased by Karen and Will Navidson. They and their two children, Daisy and Chad, move into the house and upon the return of their first vacation away from the house, notice strange things start to happen. The first thing is a door that appears in the children's room that wasn't there before. They open the door to find a closet without any rods. It's just a bare, dark room.

As the days pass, the house changes even more. A hallway appears in the living room and when Navidson opens the door, he notices it's pretty long. He enters the hallway and follows it for a while, but returns when he fears getting lost amongst the twists and turns. The following day the hallway gets even longer and Navidson enters it again. This time he does get lost and only the sound of Daisy's voice leads him back to the safety of his living room.

No one can figure out why the hallway keeps changing and growing like it does. Only the house seems to know the inner secrets. In the end, the house accomplishes scaring the wits out of the Navidson family and they flee for their lives.

## The Five and a Half Minute Hallway

This hallway suddenly appears in the living room of the house. It's an object of obsession to Navidson, but Karen is afraid of it. Each day it tends to grow within. First, it's just a long hallway, but as time goes by doors suddenly appear within the hallway leading to other hallways.

Eventually there are steep, winding stairs within the hallway and a grand room that is huge. Navidson and a team of experts perform experiments within the hallway trying to figure out if it actually has an end. At one point, the animals enter the hallway and exit to the backyard. Navidson gets lost within the hallway and from that point on, Karen forbids him to enter it again. He does enter it again when the exploration team doesn't return after days, but Karen cannot keep him from trying to save their lives. They never do find an end to the hallway.

## The Biblical Story About the Twins: Esau and Jacob

"Esau's a hairy, dimwitted hunter. Jacob's a smooth-skinned, cunning intellectual." Their father is blind and tells Esau he has only one blessing and if he brings him meat, he will bless him. Jacob tricks his father by pasting hair onto his hands and gives his father a bowl of stew, so the father blesses Jacob thinking it is Esau. When Esau returns, his father tells him of the betrayal and that he has no second blessing.



Zampano and a woman named Denise Neiman worked on the story of Esau and Jacob for a while until it was to Zampano's satisfaction. One day Denise returns to Zampano to find that the pages are missing and his fingers are in bandages. He does not tell her what happened, just that it does not matter. She is baffled by this, but makes Zampano something to eat to ease his pain. She uses the bathroom and finds most of the pages crumpled up in the garbage pail. She folds them, puts them in her pocket and later puts them in the bottom of the trunk now owned by Johnny. Johnny finds them and there are splatters of blood on the pages. No one knows what happened to Zampano that made him shred some of the pages and put the rest in the trash.

## **Exploration Number Four in the Five and a Half Minute Hallwa**

This short film stars Holloway Roberts. He speaks into the camera and says things like, "I'm lost. Out of food. Low on water." It's unclear who's following him, but he says that he's being stalked by someone. The camera also captures several scenes, in which there is blood on the kitchen floor, trees in the winter and a crying child. It is clear that the second short film appears to be unfinished.

When Exploration number four gets under way, Navidson and Reston set up their equipment in the living room outside the hall's entrance. They will have radio contact with the men for the first 24 hours, but for the remaining four days, they will have no contact. As the men move toward the staircase from within the hallway they contact Reston to tell him everything is alright. They maintain contact every fifteen minutes until they finally lose radio contact.

The exploration is supposed to last only five days, but by day seven, there is still no word from the men. On day eight, Navidson and Reston hear faint knocking. They realize it's coming from the other side of the living room wall. Navidson knows he needs to rescue the men, because it is day eight and they only brought enough food and water for five days. Karen is livid, but Navidson tells her there is no other way. Navidson calls this segment SOS.

## **The Locket**

Johnny's mother leaves him a locket when she passes away. This locket he remembers seeing on her neck all the time. She never took it off. It is the only thing left to him upon her departure of this world. Johnny kept it hidden away in one of his lockers. Inside the locket is the first letter he had ever written to his mother (he was 11-years old at the time). She had saved it inside the locket. He said he would never part with it. He comments, "I will sell body parts first."



## The Thirteen Minute Film

While left behind Karen works on the film for Navidson (the film referred to is The Navidson Report, which Karen shortens initially). She shortens it to thirteen minutes and sends it to everyone she knows and some Navidson knows. Their comments are presented to her through interviews and some are written and mailed to her. Most of the opinions came from architects, scientists and professors. Their opinions vary, but mostly contain questions regarding the soil specifications under the house, the crumbling of substance and how many metric tons of substance it would take to create the hallway, wall structure, wind pressure earthquakes and variance of motion within the structure. They are skeptical and want to piece together how they manipulated the film. Quite different than if they actually believed it was possible.

## Johnny's Hallucination

Johnny wakes up in a cold sweat. He gets up, finds some candles to light (because his electric has been cut off for a while), rinses his face with water, then talks about his dream. He's in some sort of vessel. He feels as if he's being hunted or followed by something. He runs around corners and down corridors finding only a frat boy holding an axe and a garbage can lid. As Johnny inspects himself in his dream, he is deformed. His fingers are melting and hair and lumps are growing out of his body. The frat boy wants to chop him up into little pieces, and sometimes in the dream this actually takes place. Johnny always wakes in a cold sweat from the horror of it all. He sleeps with guns at his side, but they do nothing for him while he dreams.

## Will's Last Exploration

The films found by Karen reveal Navidson's exploration when he goes into the house by himself after leaving Reston. He carries an abundance of items behind a mountain bike. He takes with him a 1962 hand crank camera, lenses, tripod, microcassette recorder, extra batteries, extra LCD tapes, 10 rolls of black and white film, sleeping bag, gallons of water, flashlights, matches, toilet paper, socks, medical kit, neon markers, food and one book. He carries these items on a two-wheel trailer behind his bike.

The bike has a mileage calculator and the first night he manages to ride 163 miles. He sets up camp for the night and begins again the next morning. For five days, he travels hundreds of miles each day. No matter which direction he turns, he's heading downhill. He turns around several times after traveling downhill to find that even in the opposite direction he's still traveling downhill.

## House of Leaves

Johnny goes to a bar after arriving in Flagstaff. With only three dollars left to his name, he sits at the bar. The beers are only a buck each, so he orders three for the band and



water for himself. The band plays a song with the lyrics, "I live at the end of a five and a half minute hallway," to which Johnny must inquire about.

He approaches them afterwards and they tell him the song is inspired by a book called *House of Leaves* by Zampano. The guitar player pulls the book out of a duffel bag and hands it to Johnny. He can't believe his eyes. Johnny held in his hands a book he had actually written and cannot remember it. The band tells him they wonder if Johnny Truant ever makes it to Virginia to see the house and whether or not he met the girl of his dreams. He toys with the idea of telling the band that he is Johnny Truant from the book, but decides against it. He gives the book back to the band and thanks them.

## Seattle and the Doctors

Johnny's journals reveal that in September he visits friends in Seattle. They are both doctors and they nurse him back to health. They take him out with them and feed him health food and he exercises twice every day. He starts counseling at the local hospital and they put him on medication. He feels better than ever and is back on track. He's thinking clearly and doesn't hallucinate about his mother or the monster any longer. He decides it's time for him to leave and make it on his own, so he bids his friends (both doctors) goodbye and heads back home.

The next few entries in his journal depict that he's been lying about the two friends who are doctors. He's never been to see a counselor and has no medication. It's confusing, but Johnny says that was all made up nonsense.



## Social Sensitivity

The power that Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* exercises over the reader's imagination can perhaps be attributed to the disturbing simplicity of the novel's pivotal event: the sudden and impossible appearance of a cold, black hallway in an outside wall of Will Navidson's family home. Yet the unsettling nature of this extravagant spatial anomaly is immeasurably increased by its location, for the hallway is not found in the back of a cupboard or previously unexplored basement but in the family's living room. By juxtaposing the dark hallway with the actual and metaphorical light of the living room, the novel suggests that some unspeakable horror lies at the heart of this particular American family and, by implication, at the heart of all families.

It is important to emphasize that the novel never accounts for the existence of Navidson's hallway and the infinite corridors and rooms to which it leads. Indeed, shortly after the hallway's discovery it is made clear that "Unlike *The Twilight Zone*, however, or some other like cousin where understanding comes neat and fast (i.e. This is clearly a door to another dimension! or This is a passage to another world—with directions!) the hallway offers no answers."

Thus the darkness that encroaches upon the domestic life of Navidson, his partner Karen Green and their children Chad and Daisy does not symbolize any one parental failing or childhood transgression. Rather, it is the absence of meaning itself that Navidson and Karen must confront before their domestic life is consumed by its emptiness. The fear they experience is that primal fear of the unknown and the unknowable, and the only possible response they can make is to turn inward, to strive to know themselves more fully and understand each other more effectively. In a sense, then, this is a novel that charts the couple's journey from ignorance to self-knowledge and describes the consequent effect that that journey has upon their relationship and their children.

The story of the Navidson family begins with their move to a new house on Ash Tree Lane in the Virginia countryside. An international photojournalist, Navidson has spent a significant amount of time away from his partner and children, and their move is indicative of far more than a simple desire to live in rural surroundings: "After nearly eleven years of constant departures and brief returns, Karen has made it clear that Navidson must either give up his professional habits or lose his family." For reasons never made entirely clear, Karen is also afraid of commitment, and we learn that she has a history of being unfaithful to her partner. Although it presents the reader with a familiar conflict, the novel's originality lies in the way that that conflict is physically manifested through the appearance of the hallway. Thus the novel is able to avoid the clichés of domestic melodrama whilst remaining concerned with the way in which the couple address the emotional emptiness that has suddenly become all too real.

For the hallway is not only a symbol of the couple's differences; it also puts those differences into action. For instance, Navidson's initial reaction is to explore it, while Karen's is to flirt with the men who investigate it after she makes her partner promise



never to cross its threshold. Ultimately, in a gesture which recalls the methodology of psychoanalysis and related procedures, Navidson and Karen only come to commit to each other by confronting the void that their house contains and, by implication, the void that is contained within themselves. In the depths of the house, with "no sense of anything other than myself," Navidson realizes that Karen is the most important thing in his life. Similarly Karen, at this point separated from Navidson and living in New York, spends her time making two short films, one of which, entitled "A Brief History of Who I Love," is devoted entirely to her partner. Karen's final realization that Navidson is the most important thing in her life enables her to overcome severe claustrophobia and enter the void to rescue him, an act that paves the way for the couple's long-delayed marriage.

Many of the problems of Will Navidson and Karen Green are mirrored by the life of Johnny Truant, who comes into possession of a manuscript that tells their story. In the course of annotating it, Truant relates his drug and alcohol fuelled tales of sexual abandon; however we soon learn that these adventures are little more than attempts to fill the void in his own life principally created by his mother's mental illness and her eventual suicide. The more Truant reads about the house, the closer he is brought to the memory of his mother, and his own mental health soon begins to suffer. Since the explorer Holloway Roberts succumbs to madness in the depths of the house and Karen also suffers from severe claustrophobia, it becomes clear that one of the meanings that the reader can attach to the domestic void is that of mental illness, and its capacity to impair an individual's ability to interact with others. The novel relates the mental problems of each of these characters to traumatic experiences in their youth, and the cycle appears to be repeating itself through the neglect that Chad and Daisy experience. Yet mental illness is only one of a number of "meanings" that are ultimately consumed by the house's capacity to elude interpretation, a power based in the fact that its darkness is also nothingness, or absence. Irrespective of whether that absence can be attributed to a lack of selfknowledge, an unsatisfactory relationship, mental health problems or even the increasingly secular nature of society, *House of Leaves* unarguably presents the reader with a powerful evocation of the feeling that in contemporary society, there is, obscurely, something missing.

# Techniques

House of Leaves uses a variety of narrative and typographical techniques in order to convey its themes of dysfunction, isolation and disorientation. The novel constantly foregrounds its status as a mode of representation through its technique of analyzing the supposed documentary made about the house on Ash Tree Lane by Will Navidson.

Yet whilst this filtering of the central narrative might be said to present the reader with a more objective view of those events, the technique also paradoxically heightens our involvement with them, since it ensures that the story is told in the present tense. Indeed, the same paradoxical effect is achieved in Danielewski's use of the characters of Zampano and Truant. Rather than hindering the reader's involvement with Navidson and his house, their interruptions add to its effectiveness by creating suspense, emphasizing the full implications of events, and suggesting that the horror contained in the film is also present in their realities, and by extension, in the reader's.

The two commentators differ only in the interpretative strategies that they choose to apply to the story: Zampano structures his scholarly explication according to a thorough knowledge of the secondary literature, whilst Truant takes the more unusual step of using the text as a means of structuring his own life. In this way, Truant functions as Zampano's first and ideal reader, and he also mimics the actual reader's responses to the text's disturbing events. The novel's self-reflexivity reaches its height at the conclusion of Navidson's final journey into the dark regions that his house contains. Poised on the edge of a floating precipice, Navidson can do nothing but read the book he has brought with him, a novel called House of Leaves. Indeed, the novel's very title draws attention to the delight it takes in its own fictional status: the house is the book, and the leaves its pages. By including these self-reflexive methods of interpretation within the text itself, Danielewski signals his novel's inclusion into the everwidening category of postmodern fiction, and he also preempts both reader and critic.

Consequently, this is a novel that can be said to read itself.

The ingenuity of House of Leaves is confirmed by its groundbreaking use of typography. The text is initially rendered unusual by the use of two different typefaces to distinguish Zampano's text from Truant's, yet the experimentation goes much further than this. In an extension of the principle that sees Truant's life mimic the events of "The Navidson Record," and in an attempt to appropriate some of the techniques employed by modern cinema, the novel's text itself behaves according to the action that takes place within the mysterious house.

The most stunning example of this occurs when "The Navidson Record" charts the plight of Holloway, Jed and Wax as they struggle to find their way out of an immense labyrinth. Rather than merely describing the labyrinth, the text becomes a labyrinth itself, as each page is split into two unequal columns of text, one of which is printed upside down, and which are both interrupted by a further square of text in the upper right-or left-hand corner of the page.



Notes also intermittently appear in a smaller column placed at a right angle to the main text and stretch for several pages, or do not occur at all. Similarly, when Navidson has to move through a series of rooms that systematically decrease in size, the text shrinks until only five or six words appear at the center of each page. Alongside this, its use of textual ellipses, struck passages, acronyms, interviews, musical notation, colored text, photographs, poetry, an appendix of literary quotations and an index mark out *House of Leaves* as a vastly experimental novel whose innovations actively contribute to the reader's involvement with the text.





# Themes

## The Ever-Changing Hallway

The key element within the story is the hallway that constantly changes. Navidson notices that the walls start changing around him. Sometimes they are closing in on him (the ceiling too) and other times they are more spread out and the ceiling seems much higher. Sometimes both ceiling and walls seem to be so far away that he's not sure he's traveling in a straight direction. He moves at 30 miles per hour on his bike and fears he will fall off the edge if he comes to the end of this hallway.

Originally, the hallway consists of a single narrow stretch of space. As the days and weeks pass, the hallway changes. Doors, rooms and staircases appear out of nowhere. It is ultimately what intrigues Navidson to the point of madness to research the hallway and find an end. He feels it must have an end somewhere and will stop at nothing to find it.

Navidson calls several friends and his brother Tom to help with the investigation of the hallway. Some of the friends include engineers and scientists. They all research the hallway and spend days doing explorations, but come up empty handed just as Navidson does.

## The Monster Inside

The monster inside refers to Johnny's mind. Johnny hallucinates constantly and one day while he's getting supplies from the closet to give to his boss he has a very strong hallucination about a monster. He needs bottles of ink, so when he enters the closet he starts hallucinating. He feels the presence of something else in the closet with him. He starts to taste blood in his mouth. As he starts to lose control feeling as though the monster is closing in on him he finds himself simply walking out of the closet holding the ink bottles. He trips on the stairs and the ink gets all over him. His boss runs over to him to ask if he's alright, to which he replies, "Known some call is air am." Johnny's interpretation of this is, "I am not what I used to be." He's referring to the monster in the closet. He feels that the monster has somehow taken a part of his actual being.

This monster continuously pokes its head into Johnny's head throughout the story and he cannot seem to focus on anything else. His hallucinations come and go. They sometimes come at night and other times during the day right in the middle of something he's doing. It becomes harder and harder for him to function at work and finally he misses three consecutive weeks, so he is replaced.



## The Significance of Echoes

The echoes are significant throughout the five and a half minute hallway. The echoes start out being short echoes, but as the hallway grows and turns with the additional doorways, rooms and staircases, the echoes grow significantly. The stories that appear throughout the chapters tend to be interrupted with tales about echoes, like the following:

A beautiful mountain nymph named Echo helps Zeus with a sexual endeavor and is punished by Hera by leaving her to say only the last word spoken to her. These fragments of writing are on bits of brown leaf-like paper found in Zampano's trunk. Johnny is reading them when he suddenly feels like he's going to throw up. He coughs instead, and is fine afterward.

Johnny keeps reading passages, such as:

"Thus Echo suddenly assumes the role of god's messenger, a female Mercury or perhaps even Prometheus, decked in talaria, with lamp in hand, descending on fortunate humanity."

"Look to the sky, look to yourself and remember: we are only god's echoes and god is Narcissus."

"The apparent echoing of solitary words reminds us that acoustical echoing in empty places can be a very common auditory emblem, redolent of gothic novels as it may be, of isolation and often unwilling solitude."

## Significant Topics

Whilst the central narrative of *House of Leaves* is concerned with the unknowable and its effect upon contemporary society, the complex construction of the novel as a whole calls into question the possibility of ever fully knowing anything at all. To consider this theme, Danielewski uses several narrative layers through which the story of the Navidson family is filtered, and which ensure that the reader is never able to achieve even the illusion of direct access to the events on Ash Tree Lane. The novel itself is divided into nine distinct sections that include a list of exhibits, three Appendices, and a main body of text entitled "The Navidson Record." As its contents imply, the novel at first purports to be a factual account of an actual event, with evidence to support its claims. However, the reader soon discovers that "The Navidson Record" itself is a documentary film of what occurred in Navidson's house, and that the main text of the novel is a critical analysis of that film. Thus the reader is immediately twice removed from the narrated events: *House of Leaves* provides only a textual representation ("The Navidson Record") of a visual representation (the film of the same name) of those events themselves. It might perhaps take little effort to come to terms with this distancing of supposed reality were it not for the fact that the novel never makes clear whether it considers the story of Will Navidson and his family to be factual or fictional.



The analysis of Navidson's film is written by a man known only as Zampano, and doubt is immediately cast upon the text's authenticity when we learn that Zampano is blind and could therefore have never seen the film he discusses, assuming that it does exist. Nevertheless, Zampano repeatedly refers to the film as though he has seen it and as though it were real; he cites interviews with the protagonists, parodies on Home Improvement, and a wealth of secondary academic criticism from fields as varied as psychology, architecture, film studies and geology to support his argument. Indeed, the text differs from an authentic critical exegesis only in the way that it regularly describes the action of the film rather than analyzing it. Johnny Truant comments upon this problem in one of the many notes he makes on the text, and manages to contact one of Zampano's assistants, a Ph.D. candidate in Comparative Literature, who also noticed the discrepancy: "I told him all those passages were inappropriate for a critical work, and if he were in my class I'd mark him down for it. But he'd just chuckle and continue." With the playful double meaning of "passages," Danielewski makes it clear that Zampano knowingly creates a fictional text that poses as an authentic one, and that he also ensures its falsity is capable of being detected by the reader.

The task of distinguishing what the novel presents as reality from what is clearly fictional becomes even more problematic when the relationship between Johnny Truant and Zampano is considered. In one sense Truant is an editor: he discovers and reassembles Zampano's manuscript as well as translating foreign language quotations, elucidating obscure references and generally commenting on the text. Yet he is also far more, for the events that occur in "The Navidson Record" have an uncanny habit of repeating themselves in his own life. These repeated coincidences cast doubt upon the reality that is initially invested in the Truant narrative, especially when we learn that Zampano had all the necessary information to construct a convincing lifestyle for the young man, as another of his assistants relates: "Sometimes though he just wanted to hear about the LA scene, what was happening, what wasn't, the gloss, the names of clubs and bars." In the end, Truant seems to attain an awareness of his own status as a fictional character, glimpsing the reality of the narrative from the reader's perspective: "all of this has just been made up and what's worse, not made up by me or even for that matter Zampano. Though by whom I have no idea." Only the reader is in a position to supply an answer to the question, and that answer is Mark Z. Danielewski.

During the course of the novel it becomes clear that any attempt at establishing the relative reality of one narrative or another is not only impossible, but also unimportant. In one sense, then, the novel takes itself as a theme: it constantly refers to itself, to its creation and to the connections between its various sections. Yet beyond this self-referentiality lies an important point.

The novel argues that it is not the truth or falsity of a story that is important, but rather what a reader can learn from that story that matters. In the novel's own terms, it could be said that it is irrelevant whether "The Navidson Record" is true or not because the terror that the story provokes remains verifiably tangible. As Truant remarks, "the irony is it makes no difference that the documentary at the heart of this book is fiction. Zampano knew from the get go that what's real or isn't real doesn't matter here."

The consequences are the same." Similarly, in a postmodern age inaugurated by the collapse of "grand narratives" such as religion, democracy, the family and morality, *House of Leaves* suggests that it is not the truth of these discourses that is important but what, as stories, they have to tell us about ourselves.



# Style

## Point of View

This story is told in parallel. One view is from Johnny Truant, the narrator and from Will Navidson's point of view as the owner of the home and as his account of what happened to his family within the walls of the house. Johnny speaks in first person using "I" throughout the novel, but Navidson's story is told differently.

The characters and development of the people in the story are true to their stories and vibrant with detail. One knows that these men are encountering the same story. One encounters it first hand, while the other only reads it through notes and scraps of paper.

This story is fiction, a work in which one timeframe is interrupted with another. Throughout each chapter, the Navidson's will have a continuation of their ordeals within the house. After a few paragraphs, Johnny will come in with a story of his life. Sometimes it's something from his childhood and other times it will be present time and something he's experiencing. This happens throughout the entire novel.

The story begins in the 1990's and ends around 1997. The last two chapters are the aftermath of the Navidson family after escaping the house with their lives. Tom, Will's brother, does not survive the ordeal.

## Setting

The novel opens in the 1990's and continues until 1998. It starts with the narrator, Johnny telling the reader his story of how he came about the Navidson Record and warns the reader to beware of its contents. He fears for his own life, because he has read the document. The story is broken in two parts. Johnny tells his story of reading the document and the Navidson family story is told of how they move into the house in Virginia and encounter a strange presence within the walls of the house.

The surroundings are the "house" with its ever-changing interior. Doors appear out of nowhere and a hallway appears in the living room that was never there before. Most of the novel takes place in either the Navidson home or in Johnny's mind. If the chapter starts with Johnny, the setting is his apartment, the tattoo parlor or some bar he's sitting at. When the chapter starts with the Navidson's, the setting is inside the house.

## Language and Meaning

This story was written in the 1990's. There is a distinct knowledge the author portrays when writing about the engineering aspects of the house and the structure itself. There are parts in Johnny's narration that contain sexual encounters and drug use, so there



are frequent slang terms used. For the most part, the language is simple and easy to read and the story is told in the same manner.

The story is filled with references, fable stories, bible stories and letters. The descriptions are rich and fully explanatory. Occasionally, Johnny will break in with profanities about a situation or a girl he has met, but the language is understandable and due to the surroundings, it seems appropriate.

## Structure

The story is told in 23 chapters followed by pictures of the actual scraps of papers and letters from Johnny's mother. There are 707 pages in the novel, and each chapter either starts with Johnny or the Navidsons. Each chapter has several pieces of Johnny's story (whether it's something from his past or something from the present) and several pieces of the Navidson story. These are tales of what they are experiencing within the walls of their house. As the chapters progress, the structure seems very unstable. Bits of words are sometimes written backwards, while other times you have to hold the text up to a mirror to decipher it.

The novel starts with a prologue and ends with references. The progress of the story is linear, but parallel (between Johnny's story and the Navidson's story). It starts in the 1990's and ends in 1998.



## Quotes

"Thus Echo suddenly assumes the role of god's messenger, a female Mercury or perhaps even Prometheus, decked in talaria, with lamp in hand, descending on fortunate humanity." Chapter 5, pg. 44

"Look to the sky, look to yourself and remember: we are only god's echoes and god is Narcissus." Chapter 5, pg. 45

"The apparent echoing of solitary words reminds us that acoustical echoing in empty places can be a very common auditory emblem, redolent of gothic novels as it may be, of isolation and often unwilling solitude." Chapter 5, pg. 46

"the house, the halls, and the rooms all become the self-collapsing, expanding, tilting, closing, but always in perfect relation to the mental state of the individual." Chapter 10, pg. 165

"Esau's a hairy, dimwitted hunter. Jacob's a smooth-skinned, cunning intellectual." Chapter 11, pg. 247

"Okay Daisy girl, make it through here and you're home free." Chapter 13, pg. 345

"Tom tumbles into the blackness, not even a scream flung up behind him to mark his fall, Navidson's own scream ineffectually scratching after him, his twin stolen and finally mocked in silence, not even the sound of Tom hitting the bottom, which is how it might have remained had not some strange and unexpected intrusion, out of the blue, returned Tom's end in the shape of an awful gasp...." Chapter 13, pg. 346

"What we have here is a nice banquet of igneous, sedimentary and metamorphic samples, some granular, possibly gabbro and pyroxenite, some with much less grain, possible trachite or andesite." Chapter 16, pg. 372

"Navidson has one deeply acquired organizing perception: there is no hope of survival there. Life is impossible. And therein lies the lesson of the house, spoken in syllables of absolute silence, resounding within him like a faint and uncertain echo...If we desire to live, we can only do so in the margins of that place." Chapter 17, pg. 387

"With the eventual exception of Navidson, she was the only one who attempted to process the ramifications of that place. The labor she put into both film shorts resulted in more moderate mood swings, an increase in sleep and an end to that nettlesome cough." Chapter 17, pg. 397



## Key Questions

The late twentieth century was an age that saw the breakdown of many traditional systems of religious and secular belief and a consequent growth in personal freedom. However, this collapse merely shifted authority away from the discourses of religion and morality and placed the onus upon the individual to arrive at his or her own interpretation of contemporary socio-political events. It also coincided with an increase in reported cases of mental instability. *House of Leaves* links these issues through its central image of a dark, infinite, and ultimately unknowable house, and could be said to offer a solution to them which is based upon a knowledge of the self and complete trust in the other. However, the path to such knowledge is, as Navidson, Karen and Truant learn, a hazardous one.

1. Does the novel's use of horror hinder the social comment it attempts to make?

Why do you think *House of Leaves* appropriates the conventions of the horror genre?

2. Can the reader profitably compare the characters of Will Navidson, Zampano and Johnny Truant, or do the different ways that they are represented in the novel make it impossible to do so?

3. "Danielewski's treatment of mental illness in *House of Leaves* is ill-informed and unconvincing." Discuss.

4. Would it be fair to say that the novel's treatment of women is redeemed by Karen Green's rescue of her husband, or is this too little, too late?

5. "Johnny Truant is one narrator too many, and his annotations are an irritating interruption to the main text."

Do you agree? Why or why not?

6. In conversation with Karen Green, the playwright Byron Baleworth remarks, "Just as a nasty virus resists the body's immune system so your symbol—the house—resists interpretation." Say why you agree or disagree with this statement. Considering the way that the novel includes fictional interpretations of its central narrative, is there any room left for the actual reader to comment?

7. What effect does the novel's idiosyncratic use of typography have on the narrative itself? Are these techniques merely an attempt to disguise the stereotypical nature of the rest of the novel?

8. Do you think that the novel's treatment of Will and Tom Navidson, Billy Reston and Holloway Roberts makes an important contribution to current debates on the nature of masculinity? Why or why not?





9. "House of Leaves goes to great lengths to confuse fact with fiction, and as such it is impossible to arrive at any form of truth within the narrative." If this is the case, what can be gained from a reading of the novel once the thrills associated with the horror genre have been set aside?

10. "Although the Navidson house can only be defined as an absence of meaning, House of Leaves is far from meaningless." Discuss.



## Topics for Discussion

Do ghosts or the presence of something beyond our world exist? If you believe they do, is that what was in the Navidson house?

Do you think the Navidsons should have remained in the house as long as they did?

Do you think there was something mentally wrong with Johnny, or do you think he truly had such real hallucinations?

Would Johnny have been a different person with a different upbringing? Would that have changed his outlook on The Navidson Record?

If Karen's childhood were different, would she have been a better wife to Will Navidson?

Do you think the novel would have been better if it were broken up into two separate stories (one about Johnny and the other about the Navidsons)?

How do you feel about the way Karen was toward her children while living in the house in Virginia?

Do you think some fraternal twins, like Tom and Will Navidson, are closer and possibly more alike in nature?

Would Johnny have remembered more and possibly been a different person at the end had Lude lived?

Do you think Johnny was trying to escape something by taking all of the drugs and having sex with so many different women?

## Literary Precedents

While it can perhaps be most simply defined as a postmodern horror novel, it is also useful to compare *House of Leaves* to a number of other works from different genres, since it sets out to do far more than scare its readers. Nevertheless, the novel is genuinely chilling, and as such bears comparison to the works of Edgar Allan Poe and Stephen King, whose *The Shining* (1977) is perhaps closest to Danielewski's work in its main subject matter and style. In its use of an editor who writes unusually expanded annotations, the novel also recalls Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire* (1962), and its typographical idiosyncrasies have their origin in Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* (1767). The interpretative conundrums posed by *House of Leaves*, as well as its inclusion of varying stylistic techniques, suggest comparison with that classic of high modernism, James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), although it cannot compete with the depth of that novel's literary allusions. Amongst more recently published fiction, the questioning of reality and the presence of a character that becomes aware of its fictional status links Danielewski's debut to *Sophie's World* (1994) by Jostein Gaarder, and its intersecting narratives and consideration of late twentieth-century society connects it with Don DeLillo's *Underworld* (1997), as well as David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* (1996), in which annotation and an elusive film also play an important role.

## Related Titles

Although *House of Leaves* is Danielewski's only novel to date, Pelafina Lievre's correspondence has also been published separately as *The Whalestoe Letters* (2000).

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