

# **J: A Novel Study Guide**

## **J: A Novel by Howard Jacobson**

(c)2016 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



# Contents

<a href="#">J: A Novel Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">Section 1: Pages 1- 69.....</a>	<a href="#">5</a>
<a href="#">Section 2: Pages 72 – 141.....</a>	<a href="#">10</a>
<a href="#">Section 3: Pages 142 – 222.....</a>	<a href="#">15</a>
<a href="#">Section 4: Pages 223– 306.....</a>	<a href="#">20</a>
<a href="#">Section 5: Pages 307– 342.....</a>	<a href="#">25</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">28</a>
<a href="#">Symbols and Symbolism.....</a>	<a href="#">31</a>
<a href="#">Settings.....</a>	<a href="#">34</a>
<a href="#">Themes and Motifs.....</a>	<a href="#">36</a>
<a href="#">Styles.....</a>	<a href="#">40</a>
<a href="#">Quotes.....</a>	<a href="#">42</a>



# Plot Summary

Note: Due to the structure of this novel, this study guide is divided into sections according to page numbers. This study guide specifically refers to the 2014 Hogarth/Random House First Paperback Edition.

“J” is a dystopian romance novel by Howard Jacobson. The story occurs decades in the future. Kevern lives in a cottage on the sea cliffs near a small village called Port Reuben, where he works with wood. He is introduced to the much younger, beautiful Ailinn one day. The two quickly fall for one another, begin a passionate romance, and move in together. As their romance unfolds, their pasts are also revealed to the reader.

Kevern knows only a little about his own past. He knows his mother and father were first cousins, that his father was much older than his mother, and that the two seemed to have moved to Port Reuben for no particular reason. He knows that his parents valued privacy, kept to themselves, and raised Kevern to be the same way. He suspects it has to do with something referred to as WHAT HAPPENED, IF IT HAPPENED. He also knows that his grandparents, especially his grandfather, were incredibly intelligent. Much of everything else largely remains a mystery.

Ailinn, on the other hand, has been raised by the nuns of Saint Brigid's Convent and Orphanage. Ailinn's mother was previously raised by the nuns there, after her grandmother went in search of her own parents. Her parents had gone missing during the early years just after WHAT HAPPENED, IF IT HAPPENED. Ailinn has been raised through her mid-teens by Esme, an elderly woman who has taken a special interest in Ailinn.

At the same time, Detective Inspector Gutkind has come to Port Reuben to investigate a triple murder. He and others suspect that the passions of people, long repressed by the government which strives for harmony, are resurfacing in violent ways as a result of being bottled up for so long. Nevertheless, he does his job as he can. Gutkind is also suspicious that WHAT HAPPENED, IF IT HAPPENED, never really happened at all. He has done quiet research into the affair. He has not been able to find mass graves or evidence to corroborate the official version of events that led to the radical reworking of society. Gutkind himself is ultimately murdered.

WHAT HAPPENED, IF IT HAPPENED, is vaguely spoken about in bits and pieces through the novel; but, it is Gutkind who figures things out shortly before his death. A minor crisis of some kind was exaggerated to turn the public against the Jews. The Jews were attacked and either driven out or driven into hiding. For decades, the people of the country were coached into always apologizing, never remembering the past, never being angry, emasculating men, and denying their passions.

The present generation of leaders, including Esme, seek to undo the sins of the past by helping the Jews to reemerge as a people. Esme hopes that Ailinn and Kevern will have a child to begin the process of reconstituting the Jewish people. Ailinn becomes



pregnant by Kevern, but Kevern wants nothing to do with it, because he has already lost too much and because he thinks he is already lost. He commits suicide, which worries Ailinn because it means her baby will come into the world in tragedy and anger. Esme contends this is just what humanity needs –passion.

## Section 1: Pages 1- 69

### Summary

Argument: The Wolf and the Tarantula – While the wolf enjoys stalking his prey, the tarantula enjoys waiting for the prey to come to him. They wager to see who is the more efficient hunter. A week later, the Wolf has eaten all of his prey and must now eat his wife and children to survive. When they are gone, he must eat himself. The moral of the story is explained as to always leave a little on one's plate.

Book One, Chapter 1, I – Nineteen year-old Ailinn Solomons is upset. Ailinn suffers from arrhythmia and ugly feet and worries she may never have love in life. She is very sensitive and upset over a failed romance with a much older man named Kevern. Meanwhile, Kevern “Coco” Cohen watches television and drinks his morning tea, still annoyed that all electronic communications except for local have been severed by the government after “WHAT HAPPENED, IF IT HAPPENED”. Kevern has lived his life in intentional ignorance, pretending always not to know even if he knows something, all for safety. He lives in Port Reuben and spends much time on the sea cliffs and the shore. Port Reuben, formerly Ludgvennok, had once been a stronghold of the old ways, but no longer. Densdell Kroplik, Kevern's neighbor, is a sometimes-barber and self-publishing writer of local news and history. Desnsdell sees Kevern as the reason for Port Reuben's ruin. Kevern is as happy as he can be where he lives, but he is not genuinely happy. He reflects on his failed romance with Ailinn, who came originally from a remote northern island with an older female companion.

Book One, Chapter 1, II – This chapter occurs twenty years in the past. Esme Nussbaum, a researcher at public mood-monitoring group Ofnow, writes a paper on how natural aggressiveness and independence are being stamped out but are rising again in the British people. Her supervisor, Luther Rabinowitz, warns her about being too personal with her subject or being less objective based on her personal beliefs. He reminds her that a repeat of “WHAT HAPPENED, IF IT HAPPENED” must be avoided at all costs. The next day, Esme is hit by a motorcyclist. It is called a coincidence. The report is suppressed.

Book One, Chapter 1, III – This chapter occurs in the recent past. Kevern finds Ailinn to be beautiful the first time he sees her while he is at the market, even with the bruise under her eye. They are introduced. Ailinn explains she is nervous settling into such a new place. They seem to instantly connect, but their potential romance seems doomed because Kevern makes a lighthearted comment about Ailinn's feet that she doesn't like.

Book One, Chapter 1, IV – Kevern goes to the inn to drink with friends and acquaintances. He returns to his cottage to find it a mess, just as he had left it. He notes that his utility phone is blinking red.



In an untitled passage, an unidentified man sees a boy shouting “Down with the enemies of \_\_\_\_\_,” but the man cannot make out who is being shouted down. The man finds the body of a mother, naked with a gash across her throat.

Book One, Chapter 2 – It is “Friday 27th.” Edward Everett Phineas Zermansky writes a journal entry about investigating Kevern, who has “Byzantine precautions” about all that he does. Edward notes that he has a feeling that “they” have a feeling about Kevern. His file folder color changes from gray to purple. Edward reveals that he himself is a painter of peaceful landscapes, including renditions of Saint Mordechai’s Mount which have been exhibited at the New National Gallery because portrait painting is now frowned upon. He is also an art critic and teacher. Art, Edward explains, was not the cause of the “great desensitization” or “WHAT HAPPENED, IF IT HAPPENED.” Edward also explains he sometimes calls that event “TWITTERNACHT.” He explains that no one behaved well, but there was provocation involved. He doesn’t write any more on the subject, as his wife Demelza tells him he talks too much. In the present, people are encouraged to forgive and forget, not remember. Forgetting is encouraged in and of itself.

Book One, Chapter 3, I – Ailinn speaks with the elderly woman Ez about her failed romance with Kevern. Ailinn serves as something of a daughter to Ez, while Ez is something of a mother to Ailinn. Ailinn is grateful that Ez worries about her happiness. Ailinn and Kevern speak by utility phone. He apologizes for speaking ill about her ankles, and they make up. He realizes he has his work cut out for him with Ailinn.

Book One, Chapter 3, II – Kevern wonders if he might find happiness with Ailinn. Kevern misses having his mother around to ask for her advice. Kevern sees Densdell coming for a visit, and curses. Kevern remembers how little his parents cursed. He thinks about how little he knows about some things such as his parents’ lives, until later. For example, he learned that they were first cousins through old documents. Kevern secretly worries that his parents may have been closer than cousins. He wishes his parents hadn’t left such things behind, because now he cannot forget them. He wishes he had never known.

Book One, Chapter 3, III – It is believed by Ez that Ailinn was abused as a child, otherwise she wouldn’t be so sad and so sensitive all the time. Ailinn herself cannot remember. Ailinn insists this is either because it didn’t happen or that people are simply meant to forget. As an artist, Ailinn’s work is unusual and sometimes disturbing, which leads Ez to believe this is more proof of abuse.

Book One, Chapter 3, IV – Kevern and Ailinn have sex frequently. It is always gentle rather than rough, which Ailinn likes because she says it doesn’t feel like Kevern is trying to hurt her. They declare their love for one another.

Book One, Chapter 3, V – Ailinn moves in with Kevern. She works in flowers while he works in wood. Kevern explains he worries about outsiders, invaders, coming into the home. He doesn’t want anything to happen to Ailinn, and he doesn’t want their life disturbed. He explains his parents were the same way.



Book One, Chapter 3, VI – Kevern remembers his mother telling him to never show disgust, advice passed on from Kevern’s grandmother. Disgust, it is explained, destroys someone. Kevern can’t understand why his mother would tell him this, thinking only of incest as the possible cause. Kevern considers that he should avoid being on the receiving end of disgust.

In an untitled section, a female narrator observes a trench full of bloodied bodies, all men. They number in the hundreds.

Book One, Chapter 4, I – Ailinn knows very little about her own family. She knows Kevern thinks Ez down in Paradise Valley is her aunt. Ailinn tells Kevern that her heart knew about Kevern before they met. She explains she knows almost nothing of her parents, and does not even have memories, photos, or documents about them. She explains she was raised by the local schoolteacher, Mairead, and her husband, Hendrie. They were caring but distant. She explains that the one place she felt she belonged was in Mernoc Orphanage. That was before Kevern.

## Analysis

“J” is a dystopian romance novel by Howard Jacobson which occurs decades in the future. The theme of dystopianism is present through the early chapters of the novel in a menacing, circumstantial sort of way. As the reader will discover, the past which led to the present is only ever divulged in bits and pieces, and from this, a rough idea of what occurred decades before can be established. The trigger event, and succeeding events which led to the present are routinely referred to in the novel as WHAT HAPPENED. Some, such as Edward, express doubts about WHAT HAPPENED, so they relate it as WHAT HAPPENED, IF IT HAPPENED.

While there is disagreement about WHAT HAPPENED, the present is the present. People have largely been desensitized, socially pressured to constantly apologize and to forgive, as well as to forget the past. Forgetting is considered a virtue. People – especially adults – have been infantilized, made to behave as if they are all on a school playground. (Note that Ailinn is overly sensitive about the look of her feet, like a five year-old might be. Also note that Kevern is being monitored by Edward, a man with unknown motives.) Esme Nussbaum contends that this goes against human nature in an official report, and so she is hit by a motorcycle. This underscores the theme of dystopianism, and reinforces the idea of a dangerous government. The government seems to rule by soft tyranny, denying and withholding while only overtly punishing (such as in Esme’s case) when necessary. Escaping the reach of the government seems impossible, no matter where one lives.

This is certainly true of Kevern and Ailinn, the latter of whom has only recently come to live in Port Reuben. Another strange side effect of the dystopian system in which they live is the effort of the government to rename everything, including the people, in order to cut ties with the past however possible. The reader should note that the change of names in both people and place is a denial of identity, and a denial of human nature.



Identity in and of itself becomes an important theme through the novel, both in lack of identity and striving for identity.

The reader should note that Ailinn and her guardian, Ez, arrive in Port Reuben unexpectedly and without clear reason. They have come from up north, but never truly explain why they have arrived. As the reader will learn later in the novel, only Ez is aware of this, with Ailinn receiving knowledge of the truth belatedly. Knowledge itself will become a critical theme in the novel, as Ailinn is driven by a quest to know the truth about everything surrounding WHAT HAPPENED, and her own identity.

The beautiful and much younger Ailinn is in many ways the opposite of Kevern. While Kevern is fine with living a private, quiet life, and letting some things remain a mystery, Ailinn must always know the truth. Such a mystery Kevern wishes he had never solved about his parents was that they were first cousins. It is knowledge that he would rather live without. It is clear that knowledge can be a powerful and dangerous thing, both in knowing and unknowing. Whereas Kevern doesn't want to know, and whereas Ailinn wants to know, the powers that be refuse to let people know the truth behind everything going on.

Ailinn's aggressive nature in such situations should be noted. The dystopian society in which people live has not only infantilized them, but has led to a dramatic gender reversal. Historically, men have been dominant in society. In the present time, gender roles are much more equal. In the future, it is women who have taken charge. This can be seen everywhere, from the image of hundreds of bodies of only men, bloodied and in a trench, to Kevern's mother being the strong and dominant force in the family and in his life until she died. Without her around, Kevern seems lost and foundering, finding himself only with another woman, Ailinn.

## **Discussion Question 1**

In what ways is a dystopian society revealed in this section of the novel? How does the government seem to keep power without always resorting to violence?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Despite their age difference and barely knowing one another, why do Kevern and Ailinn seem to fall in love so quickly? What do Kevern and Ailinn think about falling in love so quickly? Explain their reasoning.

## **Discussion Question 3**

In what ways are the people of society –especially Kevern and Ailinn – made to act as children? Why do you believe this is?





## Vocabulary

Sustenance, skulkingly, ecclesiastical, itinerant, tuberous, befuddled, pertinacious, conurbation, impervious, lugubriously, querulous, ophthalmically, recidivism, impertinently, cognitive, solicitous, morose



## Section 2: Pages 72 – 141

### Summary

Book One, Chapter 4, II – Ailinn has difficulty adjusting to waking beside Kevern each morning, especially because of her bad dreams about leaving the orphanage. Kevern does his best to make Ailinn happy during the days. Ailinn explains that her favorite book is Herman Melville's "Moby Dick" because she identifies with the whale being hunted by men. It reminds Kevern of the social experiment undertaken by society to restore stability called "OPERATION ISHMAEL." Ailinn explains she feels most comfortable with Kevern, but it is dangerous because it takes her off guard. Since childhood, she has always felt as if something was coming for her, she further explains.

Book One, Chapter 4, III – Kevern wonders how the village will react to him dating a much younger girl, but no one cares. The murders of Lowenna Morgenstern and Ythel Weinstock have taken the village's attention because they had been having sex when they were murdered. All believe that Lowenna's husband, Ade, is to blame, but he is missing. The case is taken up by Detective Inspector Gutkind. Locals, including Hedra Deitch and her husband, Pascoe, explain Lowenna had beautiful breasts. She was the dream of all men in the village, which in turn caused extreme jealousy in her husband. However, Pascoe believes this did not necessarily mean murder.

Book One, Chapter 4, IV – Gutkind meets with Desndell Kroplik. Desndell contends the area is full of warrior spirit, a rugged independence which owes to the past. He references Wagner. Gutkind, who is a fan of Wagner, tells Densdell to focus on the murder. Desndell contends that ruggedness means a sense of passion and justice. He contends there is no telling what any person might do when their nature rebels against repression.

Book One, Chapter 4, V – Kevern explains to Ailinn that he knew Lowenna well enough to say hello, but he had never known Ythel. Ailinn worries about being hunted. Kevern reminds her that they are different. They are happy.

Book One, Chapter 5, Call Me Ishmael – It is Friday the 3rd. Edward writes in his diary about everyone taking an interest in Kevern now. Edward realizes that this is either because his superiors do not think he is up to the task, or Kevern is in very deep trouble. Edward finds it ironic that Kevern's paranoia is going to be confirmed. Kevern's intentions are cause for worry. Edward explains in his diary that people are free to travel so long as they do not leave the country for any reason. If Kevern has inherited the "honorable gene," then Kevern is already in a different kind of country, Edward explains. Their own country has slowly excised its past not through brutality and violence, but through soft tyranny by way of OPERATION ISHMAEL. For example, requests for historical records are always taken, but the return is always the same. No one is ever able to find the records.



Likewise, all people and places have had their names changed. The people who have instituted it all are not even native to the country, having come in to implement OPERATION ISHMAEL due to supposed past riots and mass violence. To investigate further, Edward invites Kevern and Ailinn to dinner. Before Ailinn leaves, she admits it feels like that part of the country has eyes everywhere, waiting for someone to give themselves away. This causes Edward to think Ailinn might be hiding something. He also finds it interesting that neither one wants children.

Book One, Chapter 6, I – Gutkind questions Kevern, who kissed Lowenna during a bonfire some years before when they were both drunk. Gutkind is surprised that Kevern is not bothered by kissing a married woman. Gutkind also wonders about Kevern being so private. Kevern dislikes the way society has emasculated men. Gutkind is curious about the shirt Kevern was wearing the night of the bonfire because it has blood on it. Kevern explains that while kissing, Lowenna got rough and bit him. Kevern reveals that it is not Lowenna's blood all over the crime scene, but her husband's. This means that her husband has been murdered as well.

Book One, Chapter 6, II – Kevern fills Ailinn in on the past. She thanks him for being honest with her. They decide to drive up the coast for a few days. Ailinn drives, going very fast, saying Ahab is always after them.

In an untitled section, the narrator wonders if the citizens of K sleep with crowbars by their beds. The scene before the narrator is a destroyed bedroom, with feathers floating all over the place.

Book One, Chapter 7, I – Detective Inspector Eugene Gutkind lives inland at Saint Eber. He lives alone with a cat. Gutkind's wife left him years ago due to the strain of his work and his paranoia. He greatly admires his long-dead great-grandfather for his culture and his intelligence. His great-grandfather, Clarence Worthing, wrote essays on society and culture, including during the time of WHAT HAPPENED. This makes Gutkind wonder if WHAT HAPPENED had actually killed anyone at all.

Book One, Chapter 7, II – Gutkind reads through more of his great-grandfather's articles. As he reads, he considers love and hate. He begins to consider Kevern.

Book One, Chapter 8, I – As Kevern and Ailinn drive, Kevern wonders why she is not blaming him for the kiss the way that society and women in general blame men for everything. They drive to the cathedral city of Ashbrittle. Kevern thinks about how the church denied it had much to do with WHAT HAPPENED. It has since apologized and excused itself from public life.

Book One, Chapter 8, II – Kevern and Ailinn visit the Ashbrittle Cathedral, which has been thoroughly made-over to make it less offensive. The gargoyles, for example, have been polished down and made to look unrecognizable. Ailinn says that it can take a long time for God to answer prayers, which leads Kevern to wonder how God chooses which prayers to answer. Kevern and Ailinn pray that God helps everybody. They read the plaque dedicated to Saint Alured of Ashbrittle. They learn that whoever killed Alured has



been scratched out. The cathedral and its town seem dead, leading Kevern to say that the place needs some belief, even though belief can lead to intolerance. He says that one cannot have God without the Devil. Ailinn says she is for neither, which causes Kevern to explain that Ashbrittle is what she'll get then.

In an untitled section, a young woman and some stowaways on a train hear mobs shattering glass. The mobs wear uniforms and answer to a higher authority than God.

Book One, Chapter 9, I – Kevern and Ailinn drive to the capital, which his father had nicknamed “Necropolis.” The capital is where most of WHAT HAPPENED, IF IT HAPPENED occurred. While the rest of the country has returned to frugality and living small, half the capital pretends it still lives in luxury. The other half is impoverished, crime-ridden, and disgusting. While in the city, Ailinn hopes to get her phone fixed, explaining that sometimes when she answers, no one is on the line. Also, when she is speaking to Kevern on the phone, she sometimes hears a clicking. This disturbs Kevern, who believes their conversations are being tapped by someone.

Book One, Chapter 9, II – Kevern and Ailinn take a hotel in the Luxor district of the capital. Luxor is one of the few areas of the city that most closely resembles the past due to the number of the very rich who decided to remain where they were. A large number are Muslims. Even here, nothing is the way that it was in the past.

## Analysis

A dystopian society remains strong as a theme in this section. Detective Inspector Eugene Gutkind, sent in to investigate a double homicide (which is later revealed to be a triple homicide) has his own doubts about the government system for which he works. Like Edward, Gutkind seriously doubts whether WHAT HAPPENED actually happened. The reader should note that the government's mantra on forgetting is not merely a play for a harmonious society, but for a docile people who will not rise up or ask too many questions. Even when historical records are sought, for example, people are told simply that such records do not exist or cannot be found.

The denial of knowledge –the act of forgetting, or making people forget –is soft tyranny at its finest. This comes through OPERATION ISHMAEL. Violence isn't always necessary, but controlling public knowledge and public behavior is a priority. This is partly why Gutkind considers that WHAT HAPPENED didn't actually happen –otherwise the government should be reminding people about the very thing which they do not want to relive or repeat. Knowledge itself continues to be an important theme as the novel progresses. Gutkind himself is preoccupied with seeking knowledge about the murders in Port Reuben, but he wants to get to the deeper truth of WHAT HAPPENED. He is chasing after Ahab's white whale, a direct reference to Herman Melville's “Moby Dick.” Gutkind presents an odd, lonely, but very moral character.

Ailinn considers herself constantly being watched like a whale, with eyes everywhere. Here is another throw to the soft tyranny of the government –employing agents and



spies, such as Edward the artist and arts professor- to keep an eye on suspected individuals. It is not clear why Ailinn and Kevern are under suspicion. It can be surmised that their pursuit of knowledge and their refusal to wholly blend into society make them targets for surveillance. Kevern's privacy in an age of very public living and Ailinn's insistence on remembering in an age of forgetting contribute to their being seen as "odd."

What will come of this is currently unknown. Ailinn's paranoia –a paranoia shared by Kevern and Gutkind –is wholly founded. They all feel they are being watched because it's the truth. Gutkind's paranoia that there is a greater truth behind everything is also well-founded, as the reader will learn in future chapters. They truly do resemble children on a playground, being told to play nice, stay where they are supposed to, and to not do anything outrageous or unusual. Infantilism thus remains strong thematically.

Gender roles continue to be important in the novel as well. Kevern takes a back seat to Ailinn, who seems to be the one always leading the way. Kevern notes unhappily, however, that society always blames men for everything and men have been emasculated. It is a sentiment that Ailinn shares. The assignation of blame to men stems from the time of WHAT HAPPENED, as the reader surmises. In the present, men especially are relegated socially in order to deny their true natures and their identity. Kevern sits around and complains about inequality, but he does nothing about it. However, this will not always be the case for everyone. Sooner or later, identifying natures come through and rebel against repression, as Densdell notes.

Religion also emerges as a theme here. Previously, references to God were made. Here, He emerges front and center through the cathedral visit. Religion itself cannot be denied to the public, but it has been whitewashed and anesthetized for mass consumption. Likewise, it is noted that the churches had very little to do with WHAT HAPPENED (a very important point which will surface again toward the end of the novel). Interestingly, Kevern notes that Ashbrittle needs some life in it by way of belief, even if that leads to intolerance and disagreement –things which the government frowns upon. Without belief, Kevern contends, society is lifeless.

## Discussion Question 1

Why are Kevern and Ailinn not paranoid about being watched? Why do you believe they are being watched?

## Discussion Question 2

Why does Gutkind begin to wonder if WHAT HAPPENED actually happened? What evidence is there to suggest such a thing?



## Discussion Question 3

Why does Kevern contend that men have been emasculated? Why do you believe Ailinn shares his views that men are often unfairly treated?

## Vocabulary

Calamitous, colossal, beneficent, asperity, frenetically, superseded, fathom, countenanced, acrimonious, vehemence, apoplectic, patronized, rumination, annihilation



## Section 3: Pages 142 – 222

### Summary

Book One, Chapter 9, III – Over breakfast, Ferdinand Moskowitz, hotel resident doctor, meets Kavern and Ailinn. He explains he is employed by the hotel to make sure long-term guests are doing well. Moskowitz explains that wherever people live, they await the judgment of history. He reveals that even the rich who escaped WHAT HAPPENED –the bombs and the banks crashing –now live an unhappy, sterile life. They are most happy with the knowledge that history will more than likely harshly judge them, Moskowitz reveals. He contends that the dead are not forgotten.

Book One, Chapter 9, IV – Kavern and Ailinn head into the northern part of the city to get her phone fixed. Ailinn comes down with a bad headache, so Kavern hails a cab. Another man rushes to take it, but Kavern confronts him. They begin shouting at one another, leading to a fight which Kavern wins. The next morning, Ailinn explains she is frightened for Kavern because it is unknown what may happen as a result of the fight. She doesn't like to see him upset.

Book One, Chapter 9, V – Kavern and Ailinn call a taxi to take them to a place where Ailinn can get her phone fixed. The driver, Ranajay Margolis, is thrilled to meet a Cohen in Kavern, for a large group of Cohens lived about an hour north. These were real Cohens, Margolis explains. Kavern decides to get out and look around. The place feels strange to Kavern. He suddenly thinks he hears his mother's voice calling him. It causes him to nearly faint, but Ailinn catches him as he falls. When he and Ailinn return home to their cottage in Port Reuben, he discovers that his silk runner carpet is straight. This means someone has been in the house.

Book Two, Chapter 1, I – Kavern wonders why someone would break into his house and what they were trying to find. He suspects it might be Gutkind. It causes Kavern to reflect on how private he is and how private his parents had always been. His grandmother went crazy. This led to his mother, Sibella, going to live with her cousin, the man who would become her husband.

Book Two, Chapter 1, II – This chapter occurs in the past. At the age of forty-five, Sibella has a romantic affair with Madron Shmukler, the village butcher. She wonders if anyone treats Madron differently because he deals in dead animals and has blood on his hands. He explains no one treats him differently. Sibella felt treated differently by her crazy mother.

Book Two, Chapter 2, I – This chapter returns events to the present. Kavern believes it was a mistake to go away since someone has broken into the house. Everything in the cottage appears too neat, making Kavern believe that whoever has broken in has been everywhere. He compares the intruders to Ahab, but does not mention that whoever broke in slept in the bed.



Book Two, Chapter 2, II – Kevern believes it is all his fault for having kissed Lowenna Morgenstern at the bonfire. Kevern asks Ailinn to leave for the night. She worries she may never see him again after he mentions something about leaving the country.

Book Two, Chapter 2, III – Ailinn spends the night with Ez, explaining what has happened and that so far as they could tell, nothing was taken. Ez thinks the two of them are merely tired after a long drive. Ez reveals she herself used to be an administrator, keeping an eye on other people who kept their eyes open. Ailinn asks questions about her and Kevern seemingly being thrown together and Ez making sure they stayed together. She wants to know more about the house being broken into and why there was a move to the South in the first place. Ez says no one threw Ailinn and Kevern together. She has no answers for the other questions either. When Ailinn mentions her concerns about Kevern and leaving the country, Ez says they need to talk.

Book Two, Chapter 3, I – It is Monday, the 25th. Edward relates to having to have Gutkind taken off of Kevern's trail because Gutkind has gotten too involved and too close to Kevern. Edward briefly taught Gutkind in the arts, giving him more sway over Gutkind. Edward has much work to do to ensure WHAT HAPPENED never happens again, noting that all countries now run themselves differently than before. Edward has told his wife the truth in order to keep her in line, whereas Gutkind has long suspected the truth, yet has also suspected something grander than what actually happened. The occurrence of WHAT HAPPENED was the realization of an idea, a "good intention ineffectively carried out." Edward reflects on Gutkind saying that Kevern isn't right, that he has violated heirlooms laws, that he keeps things he shouldn't be keeping, and is very suspicious. Gutkind is told to keep away from Kevern, that "they" don't want him running away.

Book Two, Chapter 4, I – Kevern sleeps horribly without Ailinn beside him. He is also positive that it was Gutkind who broke into his home.

Book Two, Chapter 4, II – Kevern walks about his house, asking himself what it is that he fears he has done to warrant such suspicion. He remembers how just before his father died, his father reflected on Mr. Bo Jangles missing. Mr. Bo Jangles was his dog for twenty years, though his father says he has grieved longer. He makes a point of crossing the J in "Jangles" when he speaks it by putting two fingers across his mouth. He remembers his father going on and on about forgiveness and a dog, but Kevern has no idea what his father could possibly want to be forgiven for.

Book Two, Chapter 4, III – Densdell pays Kevern a visit. He asks Densdell if Densdell has heard anything about the break-in on the grapevine. He also asks Densdell if he knows anything about his father's past. Densdell does say he knows of rumors about why Kevern's mother got free meat. He also says he knows of a painting of Kevern's grandmother. It's behind a bar somewhere. She was radiantly beautiful, while her husband was an ugly hunchback from upcountry with no reason to ever come to Port Reuben. Densdell contends Kevern is lucky to be here.





Book Two, Chapter 4, IV – Kevern visits with Rozenwyn Feigenblat, the academy librarian. They speak of Edward Everett Phineas Zermansky's latest piece, "Beauty and Morality," which discusses ethics and art. They speak of the arts, written and painted, and how artists have freedom to do good or evil. This includes the freedom to resist evil. She references an old photo of ice cream vans taken over by the government with signs painted on them by the university artists telling certain people to go home or face arrest. Kevern wants information, which causes Rozenwyn to explain that Kevern isn't liked because he holds "different views" and is unapproachable. She tells him that he could be worse, that he could be like "them," reading books that have missing pages and believing the truth has been learned without them. She tries to kiss him, but he refuses. She writes in her report the next morning that he is more naïve and fragile than previously thought and that "they" should get moving.

In an untitled section, two parents considers the ice cream vans that drive around. They consider that others say the vans are just the start of things.

Book Two, Chapter 5, I – Ez shows Ailinn a number of letters, but she will not say where they come from. In a letter dated July 8 in the 2010s (the precise year has been scratched out), Rebecca writes her mother and father a letter in which she says she is merely following her heart taking a position as a secretariat appointment to the Congregational Federation of the Islands. She insists what she is doing is keeping with the open-minded tradition in which her parents have brought her up. In a letter dated November 12, Rebecca says Fridleif had tried to warn her against disappointment, but Rebecca is disappointed that her parents have not attended her wedding. She is also upset her parents can't accept she has married the Reverend Fridleif Macshuibhne. She urges them to hate the church a little less for her sake despite history.

In a letter dated March 24, Rebecca is still waiting for a letter from her parents. She wants to know what she has done that is so terrible that they have not written to her. She says that they are no longer being exploited, even though she remembers her parents warning her against false senses of security with the Allegory of the Frog. She refuses to live her life in fear. She explains she is pregnant. In a letter in September, Rebecca reveals she has given birth and has decided to convert. She believes there is no longer any need to fear what may come. There is a chance to build a better future and forget the past. Rebecca is going to take it. The final letter from Rebecca to her parents, dated sometime from the 2020s, expresses fear for where her parents now live. She asks for some word as to their safety. The letter is returned with the envelope marked "RECIPIENT UNKNOWN AT THIS ADDRESS. RETURN TO SENDER."

THE ALLEGORY OF THE FROG – A frog is boiled to death unaware as the temperature of the water in which he is placed because it is increased one step at a time.

## Analysis

The time in the capital city is disturbing for Kevern and Ailinn. The capital seems worse off than the rest of the country, apart from the very wealthy and government quarters.



Even then, there is a sense of hanging on rather than luxurious living. As it is learned later, WHAT HAPPENED primarily occurred in the cities and large towns, not rural and coastal areas. At the epicenter of WHAT HAPPENED, city residents are so infantile that they have reverted to earlier stages of mental competence than their counterparts across the country. The man who tries to steal Kevern's taxi whines and complains like a petulant toddler who didn't get his way. He resorts to violent antics like a toddler rather than a child. Dystopianism is on full display through the theme of infantilism.

The return home for Kevern also proves highly disturbing, as he discovers his house has been broken into. It traumatizes Kevern, who values his privacy above all else. Indeed, Kevern is so unable to cope with the break-in that he actually asks Ailinn to leave. The reader may ostensibly draw one of two conclusions from this. First, Kevern is asserting his dominance as a man by having Ailinn leave. Second, Kevern has been traumatized like a child from the break-in, and he is unable to handle it. So, he turns on the one closest to him by making her leave. It is even possible that both possibilities might well apply. Regardless, this ends up being detrimental to Kevern, who is unable to relax and sleep well without Ailinn beside him.

The break-in, however, confirms some important things to Kevern and to Ailinn. First, they both realize that their paranoia is justified. Someone is watching them. This becomes apparent in a menacing way in that nothing from the cottage was stolen, meaning that they are being watched. Second, it demonstrates that whoever is watching them is not afraid to take dangerous risks. Third, it demonstrates that in a dystopian society, there are no rights to be had by anyone. As it is suspected and later revealed, Gutkind is responsible for the break-in. As an agent of the government, Gutkind has no legal resistance in his investigation; so, breaking into Kevern's house is a foregone conclusion.

Kevern's discussion with librarian Rozenwyn Feigenblat also proves unnerving in a dystopian way. Rozenwyn more or less admits that Kevern is indeed being watched, and that his colleagues dislike him for his "different" views on things. This means that Kevern has been identified as someone with an unusual identity. What this means for Kevern in the long run is still not known. However, Rozenwyn goes one step further to explain that Kevern could be worse—that he could be like the others who accept the truth as presented to them by the government. They think they know the truth, but they do not.

What becomes known, however, is more information through Rebecca's letters and through the old photograph of ice cream trucks at the library about WHAT HAPPENED. Both speak to an unfolding crisis without identifying the cause of the crisis. The letters talk about how Rebecca worries for her parents living where they do and living their lives in fear of what may come. Ultimately, Rebecca's letters are returned. The ice cream trucks speak to an institutionalized, government-sanctioned bigotry against a particular group of people clearly being held responsible for WHAT HAPPENED.



## Discussion Question 1

Do you believe Kevern is overreacting about the break-in by sending Ailinn away? Why or why not? Is he right to have sent Ailinn away? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 2

What information has been presented in these chapters relating to WHAT HAPPENED? What does this information reveal?

## Discussion Question 3

What proof is provided for Kevern that he is indeed being watched? How does he handle this knowledge? Why?

## Vocabulary

Corroborative, inflammable, defiled, facetious, fastidiousness, officious, imperceptibly, compunction, enigmatic, extenuate, vicarious, bewildered, noncommittal, pusillanimous, fatalistic, sacrosanct



## Section 4: Pages 223– 306

### Summary

Book 2, Chapter 6, I – Gutkind and Densdell meet for tea. Densdell is amazed by the personal items Gutkind keeps, but Gutkind says there is only a problem with people keeping personal items when they are of a large number. Gutkind says the investigation into Lowenna is continuing. Both Gutkind and Densdell hate saying sorry, that they resent having to pay for a crime no one committed, and the two begin drinking. It is then that Gutkind reveals important things which Densdell appears to be too drunk to comprehend. Gutkind explains he believes there has been no WHAT HAPPENED, no “Gotterdammerung.” Having studied the subject, the numbers, and done the math and research, Gutkind cannot find the graves of the thousands upon thousands who supposedly died. WHAT HAPPENED was exaggerated to pin blame on one group that go to Heaven to read books. He contemplates how Clarence Worthing helped the persecuted to escape. Gutkind, a moral man, wonders if he could have done the same.

Book 2, Chapter 6, II – Densdell awakens, badly hungover but recognizing what Gutkind has figured out. He shuts the curtains, determined to cut Gutkind’s throat now that Gutkind is passed out, drunk.

Book 2, Chapter 7, I – This chapter occurs in the past. Esme Nussbaum was in a coma for two months after being hit by the motorcycle. Upon waking, she can’t imagine why she would be targeted for producing a report aimed at keeping the peace. Her report included uncomfortable things, which “they” would rather be left out. Harmony could only come, she believes, by including all information. “They” believe in leaving certain things out.

Book 2, Chapter 7, II – This chapter occurs in the past. Esme’s father believes she was not paying attention when she was walking, leading to her being hit by the motorcycle. Her mother believes it was intentional. Still, they both care for her as she recovers. Esme considers there must be restitution made to the descendants of those who remained long after WHAT HAPPENED occurred. What has been lost is antagonism, a cultural antagonism which makes clear who people are and what they are all about.

Book 2, Chapter 7, III – This chapter occurs in the past. Esme’s mother, Rhoda, marvels at how similar she and her daughter are to each other. Yet, so much else Esme’s mother has forgotten.

Book 2, Chapter 8, I – This chapter occurs in Rhoda’s past. When Rhoda is sixteen, she has a love affair with a man three times her age, her teacher. She gets him to speak about OPERATION ISHMAEL, which began when she was about ten. It began with smartphones and computers being banned at school. News and information were tightly censored and monitored. Names were changed. Rhoda’s teacher explains that he had a hand in the death of the daughter of the older woman he was dating years before, He



explains he disliked going to family events and functions because he never felt he fit in among “her people”. He allowed the gallery to be burned one night while his girlfriend’s daughter was in it without doing anything to help. He explains that things changed overnight, with peaceful streets one day and mobs in the streets the next. Rhoda stops seeing him as a result.

Book 2, Chapter 8, II – This chapter occurs in the past. Rhoda goes on to marry Compton, The two have Esme. Rhoda believes her daughter will make someone pay for the murderous teacher’s actions.

Book 2, Chapter 9, I – This chapter occurs in the past. Five years after the accident, Esme is put in charge of a team tasked with giving back what had been taken away. But, the descendants have all melted into the culture, hoping to go by unnoticed. She knows that in small towns and rural areas –where God was still very much prayed to and where social customs were much different than cities and large towns – descendants would have been sheltered, protected, hidden, or taken in.

Book 2, Chapter 9, II – This chapter occurs in the past. Esme sets up an operation to find the descendants through a network of agents who are told what they are looking for, but not why. Such an agent’s tip leads Esme, called “Ez,” to meet Ailinn Solomons.

Book 2, Chapter 10, I – In the present, Ailinn calls Kevern and tells him they must speak, but it is nothing terrible.

Book 2, Chapter 10, II – This chapter occurs in the past. Rebecca Macshuibhne has been told by Fridleif to think ill of Catholics, but she cannot think of them this way because of the stellar reputation of Saint Brigid’s Roman Catholic Convent and Orphanage. Rebecca worries about the safety of her parents. She wants to leave and find out if they are all right. Fridleif refuses to let her go with their daughter Coira. Rebecca knows she cannot leave her daughter with a man who has turned out to be cruel, so she leaves Coira at Saint Brigid’s. The nuns warmly welcome her in.

Book 2, Chapter 10, III – In the present, Kevern goes through his parents’ papers once more. He finds old drawings made by his mother, beautifully done in crayon. He decides to ask Edward about the drawings.

Book 2, Chapter 10, IV – Edward is impressed with the quality of the art, but he is made uncomfortable by the use of passionate colors and the rawness of the work. He says they are simply not harmonious. Edward warns Kevern to keep the drawings between himself and his mother.

Book 2, Chapter 10, V – This chapter occurs in the past. Coira grows up at Saint Brigid’s without any knowledge of her past. She feels at home with the nuns and wonders whether she might also become a nun. When she turns sixteen, she is given the opportunity to read the letters left with her by her mother. As a result, she becomes angry and depressed, blaming everything on her father. After she leaves the convent, she becomes pregnant and leaves the baby for the nuns to raise. The child is Ailinn.



Book 2, Chapter 10, VI – This chapter returns to the present. Kevern and Ailinn hold one another. She explains her history to him. Kevern hopes that Ez has meant well by everything, but Ailinn says it is more complicated.

Book 2, Chapter 11, I – Ez recalls first meeting Ailinn at a book group and recognizing in their meeting a need for mothering and a need for having a mother. Ez also recognized the peculiar facial features of Ailinn, leading Ez to recognize Ailinn as a descendant.

Book 2, Chapter 11, II – Edward writes about Kevern’s mother’s artwork in his journal, noting he did not want to write her off as a deviant. Edward notes that the artwork should have been destroyed because Kevern has as good as turned himself in. He also notes that Gutkind and his cat have both been found dead.

Book 2, Chapter 11, III – Ailinn is angry with Ez for withholding the truth for so long from her. Ez insists she is only trying to help. She explains she wants Ailinn and Kevern to renew the future of their people.

Book 2, Chapter 11, IV – Ailinn asks Kevern how he would feel about the idea that they were set up by something of a matchmaker in Ez. Kevern says they chose one another, that simply being brought together didn’t necessarily mean anything. He further contends that while he does not always know the whole truth about his whole family, some mysteries are better left unsolved.

In a letter written to Rebecca from her grandfather, Wolfie Lestchinsky, she is reminded to never underestimate zealotry. No matter how educated or enlightened the person may seem, zealotry can infect anyone.

## Analysis

In this section of the novel, the theme of dystopianism is quite apparent. The perceived crisis –WHAT HAPPENED –never seems to have actually happened, at least as it has been presented. As Gutkind relates, his research into the matter has yielded nothing – including the mass graves of the thousands upon thousands that were supposedly killed. Whatever catastrophe occurred therefore must have happened on a much smaller level. The event was exaggerated by people hungry for power. They wanted to remake society.

This is, perhaps, the most frightening kind of dystopian society at all –essentially inventing a crisis in order to control people. Even more frightening is when Densdell slashes Gutkind’s throat. Whether this is because Gutkind has figured out the truth or because Densdell is actually a homicidal maniac is not known. Regardless, Gutkind will take the knowledge that he has uncovered to his grave. Knowledge can be dangerous.

Knowledge itself becomes central at this point in the novel, as Ailinn comes to learn more about her past through Ez. Ailinn’s insistence on knowing the truth is contrasted with Kevern’s refusal to want to know the entire truth. Edward’s warnings to Kevern about digging too far into the truth of his past –not as a result of who Kevern is, but what



his mother was like, and the artwork his mother kept –are heeded by Kevern. Ailinn herself does everything she can to learn more about her past. Knowledge will set Ailinn free, while knowledge will cripple Kevern. The reader is reminded of “The Argument: The Wolf and the Tarantula” which preceded the novel. Sometimes not knowing is better than knowing. There must be a little left on the plate still to be consumed, still to be discovered.

Ailinn learns that her grandmother, Rebecca, and her own mother, Coira, had a difficult time dealing with knowledge of who they were and their past. Identity is a critical feature here. By now, the reader has surmised the group scapegoated for WHAT HAPPENED was the Jews. The bigotry leveled against the Jews was not religious, as Ez notes the most religious people –including Catholics –harbored, protected, and took in Jews. Religion here returns as an important theme in that Christians –in rural and coastal areas, especially –risked their own lives and safety to ensure there would be no second Holocaust.

Ez tells Ailinn that she has set up a network of eyes, administrators, and agents who are tracking down descendants of the Jews. Ez wants to atone for the past. It now makes sense why the current generation has been conditioned to forgive and forget –so that the cruelties of the past cannot be wielded as a weapon in the present. Ez wants to reconstitute the Jewish people. She also wants Ailinn and Kevern to have children. Kevern and Ailinn have been watched because they are different, but not to hold them to account for any perceived crime. They have been watched to ensure they will be the start of something new. There will still be vestiges of bigotry to overcome. The soft tyranny of the government remains. However, at least for the moment, the Jews have a chance.

## Discussion Question 1

Why has Ez been tracking down the descendants of Jews? What does she hope will happen with Kevern and Ailinn? Why?

## Discussion Question 2

What is the truth behind WHAT HAPPENED? Why do you believe that Gutkind –the person to put all the puzzle pieces together –is killed?

## Discussion Question 3

Why does Ailinn refuse to rest until she knows the entire truth? Why does Kevern stop looking for the truth when told to do so?

## Vocabulary

Unpropitious, expostulating, infraction, anagram, palindrome, cavorted, inflammatory, equipoise, obduracy, sociologically, ritualistically, apostasy, odious, antecedent





## Section 5: Pages 307– 342

### Summary

Book 3, Chapter 1, I – Ailinn and Kevern talk about their situation. Kevern admits to having always suspected on some level that he was Jewish. He wonders what people think of them now, in the present day and age. Ailinn asks what they'll do next since nothing has really changed. Kevern asserts that everything has changed. Ailinn believes they must be proud of who they are and must restore respect. Kevern considers himself a disgrace.

Book 3, Chapter 1, II – Ez continues to make reports to Ofnow, noting that things are proceeding. The public must be prepared for knowledge of the fact that WHAT HAPPENED, IF IT HAPPENED and ISHMAEL were only partial solutions that must be rolled back. Societal antagonism must be restored. Ailinn and Kevern are not Ez's only options, but they are her first choice.

Book 3, Chapter 1, III – Edward's wife leaves him after reading through his diary and learning of his sexual exploits, especially with his female students. He is not sorry for this. He notes how the cultural attitude toward apologizing and forgetting is a way to do away with the guilt of the past, making a return to previous conditions easier.

Book 3, Chapter 1, IV – Ailinn had dinner with Ez. Ez explains that identity matters because it distinguishes people from others and gives them something to strive against. Ez contends that what the identity is doesn't actually matter. People must fight for the fight itself, Ez argues. Ailinn disagrees completely, noting that who someone is matters very much. She says she won't continue without Kevern, with the idea that he is who she is.

Book 3, Chapter 2, I – Ailinn convinces Kevern to get out more often and get down to the village to sell his woodcrafts. While there, he learns Ailinn is pregnant.

Book 3, Chapter 2, II – Kevern is unhappy to have learned from villagers that Ailinn is pregnant before Ailinn herself told him. He is confused because they agreed they didn't want to have children. Kevern does not want to be a father. He refuses to open the only box his father told him never to open, except in the event of fatherhood. Kevern is convinced it contain the word "Don't."

Book 3, Chapter 2, III – The next morning, Ailinn returns to Paradise Valley to have her child and live with Ez. Kevern commits suicide by jumping from the cliff. Ailinn can feel his death. She says it is not a good way to start with such anger. Ez says it is the perfect way to start.



## Analysis

As the novel comes to a close, the themes of identity and knowledge become critically important. Here, the characters of Ailinn and Kevern irrevocably part ways. Kevern insists that knowing everything is dangerous and that he would rather live in peace in ignorance than in knowledge and agony (such as information about the incestuous nature of his parents' marriage). Ailinn, meanwhile, contends that people –especially her and Kevern –must be proud of who they are. Kevern, given his ineffective life, believes he is already a failure.

Ailinn contends her identity is utterly important –not just in that she is Jewish, but in who she is as an individual. Ez claims that identity doesn't matter so much as the idea of identity. Ailinn being Jewish in and of itself would have been enough, she argues; but, Ailinn knows otherwise. Ailinn knows who a person is individually, apart from identifying labels, is what one's true identity is about. It distinguishes them from all others who might be labeled similarly. It is why Ez is so invested in her rather than in any other candidates who might have better situations and better chances in resurrecting the Jewish race.

As the novel ends, Ailinn looks forward to being a mother. She wants a chance at restoring her people, restoring pride, and restoring faith. Kevern, however, has already learned too much and has been disturbed from his life as it had been to ever return to something normal. He simply cannot deal with the changes, with the truths, with the knowledge that he has learned. Becoming a father would be too much for him to bear, so he commits suicide. The anguish and passions brought about by the event are perfect for a new life, Ez argues.

However, Kevern's suicide also serves as a criticism of men (both in the novel and in the present day). Kevern, who has long complained about the ill-treatment of men but has never done anything about it, has a chance to step up and be a real man through fatherhood. It is the single unalterable, biologically fundamental role which cannot be denied to men. Rather than embracing this responsibility of fatherhood and parenting, Kevern chooses to avoid it like a childish coward. Rather than manning up to deal with the situation, he simply opts out. This leaves the woman as the responsible party.

### Discussion Question 1

How do Ailinn and Ez feel about identity? Why does Ailinn believe her view on the matter is correct? Do you agree or disagree with her? Justify your answer.

### Discussion Question 2

Why does Ailinn so readily embrace truth and motherhood, while Kevern does not?



## Discussion Question 3

Why does Kevern commit suicide? Do you believe this is a cowardly act? Why or why not?

## Vocabulary

Consanguinity, reconfiguring, futility, progeny, arbitrary, tumultuous, immutable



# Characters

## Kevern

Kevern “Coco” Cohen is a very private, lonely woodworker who appears to be in his thirties when the novel begins. A resident of Port Reuben, he meets and is instantly attracted to Ailinn Solomons after meeting her in the market. The two fall in love. Kevern is something of a lost soul, an overgrown child who complains about having it tough as a man while doing little to change the situation. He prefers to live his life in ignorance, for the truth –such as the fact that his parents were first cousins –only hurts him. Kevern, upon discovering he is Jewish and will be a father, cannot handle any more responsibilities than the knowledge he has unwittingly gained. He commits suicide.

## Ailinn

Ailinn Solomons is a stunningly beautiful but overly sensitive girl of nineteen who meets and falls in love with Kevern. She moved to Port Reuben with her surrogate mother, Ez. Raised in an orphanage, Ailinn knows precious little about her past, but she is determined to find out everything. Ez aids her in this endeavor, which in turn allows Ailinn to grow stronger and more courageous. When Ailinn learns she is Jewish, she is proud of the fact and seeks to help Ez in her plan to restore the Jewish race. She does not want to do it without Kevern. However, when she becomes pregnant by him, Kevern commits suicide. Ailinn must go on to raise the baby with Ez instead.

## Ez

Esme “Ez” Nussbaum is an important member of Ofnow, the governmental organization tasked with implementing OPERATION ISHMAEL and monitoring and making the public docile. Ez contends that to deny human nature and to deny knowledge will prove less, as opposed to more, harmonious. For this, the government tries to kill her but fails. Still, she bravely continues to work for Ofnow. Years later, she is able to get the government to at least atone for the past by seeking to return the Jewish race. She meets and befriends Ailinn at a book club. Upon discerning that Ailinn is Jewish, Ez makes her the primary candidate to birth a new Jewish race.

## Edward

Edward Everett Phineas Zermansky is an artist and professor of the arts at the academy in Port Reuben. He is also a secret administrator for Ofnow, tasked with seeking out descendants of Jews. Edward is vain and very much tows the government line, despite knowing the truth behind WHAT HAPPENED. He warns Kevern about digging too much into his own past and about keeping his family heirlooms to himself.



## Gutkind

Detective Inspector Eugene Gutkind is an odd, lonely, and very moral man who seeks to solve a triple murder in Port Reuben. Gutkind's wife has left him due to his paranoia and pursuit of the truth relating to WHAT HAPPENED. Gutkind has privately researched WHAT HAPPENED, only to learn that it never actually happened. He knows his grandfather, Clarence Worthing, helped Jews to escape during the deadliest days after the exaggerated event. Gutkind believes he would have also done the same. Gutkind himself is ultimately murdered by Densdell after revealing the truth about WHAT HAPPENED.

## Densdell

Densdell Kroplik is a barber and historian in Port Reuben. He is acquainted with Kevern and befriends Gutkind over their mutual consideration that there is more to WHAT HAPPENED than meets the eye. Densdell brutally murders Gutkind after Gutkind reveals his theory. It is plausible that Densdell is a government agent tasked with keeping the truth under wraps, and it is possible that Densdell is also the murderer in Port Reuben. However, the truth behind Densdell's killings is never revealed.

## Lowenna Morgenstern

Lowenna Morgenstern is a gorgeous, young woman who has always caught the attention of men. She is sexually promiscuous, sleeping with all the men she can even though she is married. She is murdered, along with her lover and her husband, early in the novel. Her murder essentially becomes a red herring to the rest of the novel, as it serves to get Gutkind involved and as it seems to signify that tensions are at a breaking point. Long repressed natural tendencies are coming out in violent ways, such as murder.

## Rebecca

Rebecca is the Jewish grandmother of Ailinn. Alive during the time of WHAT HAPPENED, Rebecca marries a Christian, Reverend Fridleif. He seems to want to take care of her. She ends up converting and does her best to keep in touch with her parents who are angry about her marriage. Her parents stop replying, leaving Rebecca to worry they have been killed. Her decision to go look for them causes Fridleif to turn angry with her. In turn, this causes Rebecca to leave their daughter, Coira, with the nuns of Saint Brigid's, who warmly take Coira under their care. What ultimately becomes of Rebecca is unknown.



## Coira

Coira is the daughter of Rebecca and the mother of Ailinn. Lovingly raised by the nuns of Saint Brigid's Roman Catholic Convent and Orphanage, Coira is happy until she is sixteen when she learns the truth of her past and her lineage. Coira goes out into the world, becomes pregnant with Ailinn, and returns Ailinn to the nuns to be raised. Coira is never heard from again.

## Clarence Worthing

Clarence Worthing is the grandfather of Gutkind. A fiercely intelligent writer and essayist, Clarence is also unhesitatingly moral and deeply Christian. During WHAT HAPPENED, Clarence worked to save the lives of countless Jews, helping them to escape. He is remembered fondly by many people as a result.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## J

J is the tenth letter in the modern English alphabet. It forms an important symbol in the novel wherein anytime a word beginning with a J is spoken, Kevern's father holds two fingers across his lips. While the exact explanation of the two fingers is not given, the motion is obviously the code for "Jew." As such, J with two fingers either symbolizes efforts to hide, distance, or pretend to condemn Jews and anything even associated with them, such as the letter J. This demonstrates the severe danger that Jews are facing.

## OPERATION ISHAMEL

OPERATION ISHMAEL is the government's power-seizing programmatic response to WHAT HAPPENED, IF IT HAPPENED. OPERATION ISHMAEL involved the rooting out of Jews, their arrest, deportation, and/or killing. OPERATION ISHMAEL also involved the infantilizing of all adults to make them docile –especially men. Stamping out all traces of passion and the past in everything from art and entertainment to music and human nature is a virtue. OPERATION ISHMAEL also called for soft tyranny, which included lying to the public, withholding and destroying the historic record, forbidding people to accumulate any great numbers of historical items or family heirlooms, and becoming violent when needed.

## WHAT HAPPENED, IF IT HAPPENED

WHAT HAPPENED, IF IT HAPPENED is an unidentified event of some sort which occurred decades before the novel that was exaggerated in order for the government to gain more power and implement OPERATION ISHMAEL. WHAT HAPPENED was apparently some sort of minor violent episode that coincided with financial instability. In turn, this was exaggerated in order for power to be seized and the Jews to be scapegoats.

## Ofnow

Ofnow is the governmental agency responsible for the maintenance of OPERATION ISHMAEL through the monitoring and policing of the public. The organization is deadly when it needs to be, but prefers to rely on soft power to achieve its ends in order to keep the public pacified rather than to force their passionate natures to surface through too much violence. Ez is a member of Ofnow, almost killed for her own insistence that a person's nature needs to be allowed to thrive, or it will eventually explode in bad ways after being too long repressed. Ultimately, Ez is given the go-ahead by Ofnow to atone for the past by resuscitating the Jewish race.



## Flowers

Flowers are grown and arranged by Ailinn for a living. The flowers are symbolic of youth, beauty, and innocence –things which describe Ailinn. She works with flowers heavily early in the novel, but throughout works with them less and less as she learns more and more of the truth of her past and WHAT HAPPENED. This symbolizes a Biblical loss of innocence as knowledge is gained. The flowers are reminiscent of the innocence of the Garden of Eden, to which Ailinn, knowing what she knows, now may never return.

## Honorable Gene

The honorable gene is something which Edward contends Kevern has early in the novel. It is never explained or defined. However, the reader surmises that the honorable gene has something to do with futuristic science determining race and ethnicity, for the gene denotes to Edward that Kevern must be Jewish.

## Eyes

Eyes are an important symbol in the novel which allude to watching, paranoia, monitoring, and an all-powerful government. In the novel, Ailinn explains that she feels as if the southern part of the country has eyes, as if eyes are on her all the time. She feels she is constantly being watched, and with good reason. She is being watched.

## Moby Dick

“Moby Dick” is a novel by Herman Melville which recounts the efforts of Captain Ahab to hunt down and kill a massive white whale. The pursuit of the whale is symbolic of the quest for truth. “Moby Dick” is Ailinn’s favorite novel. As such, it is reflective of her own search for truth no matter what the cost might be.

## Apologies and Forgetfulness

Apologies and forgetfulness are virtues encouraged by the government of its people. Socially requiring people to apologize and forget not only causes adults to behave like children, but keeps them docile, removes their passions, and keeps them in check. It also forces them to refuse to acknowledge the past, thereby making the government guiltless for WHAT HAPPENED. If the government is held accountable, it means that the government must be forgiven.





## Argument: The Wolf and the Tarantula

“Argument: The Wolf and the Tarantula” is a fable which explains the importance of not eating, or knowing, everything. In the fable, the wolf enjoys stalking his prey while the tarantula enjoys waiting for the prey to come to him. The wolf and the tarantula wager to see who is the more efficient hunter. A week later, the Wolf has eaten all of his prey. He must now eat his wife and children to survive. When they are gone, he must eat himself. The moral of the story is explained as to always leave a little on one’s plate. The fable is extrapolated to explain knowledge and knowing: Sometimes not knowing is better than knowing. There must be a little left on the plate still to be consumed, still to be discovered. The truth can be harmful and deadly. In the case of Gutkind and Kevern, it is.

# Settings

## Port Reuben

Port Reuben is a coastal village in the south of the country. It is an idyllic, rustic place which still adheres to a lot of traditions and old customs despite OPERATION ISHMAEL. Nevertheless, the place is beset with government spies. Port Reuben serves as the main setting for the novel, being isolated and peaceful until the murders. Port Reuben is the home of Kevern, who was born and raised there by his parents. They in turn sought out the safety and isolation of Port Reuben to avoid persecution. Due to the area's traditional values, the people of Port Reuben looked the other way and harbored the couple. Ailinn and Ez move to Port Reuben for unknown reasons to the reader, only later for it to be revealed that Ez hopes Ailinn and Kevern will marry and have children. Port Reuben, formerly known as Ludgvennok, was renamed during OPERATION ISHMAEL's early days.

## St. Eber

St. Eber is an inland town that is known for its clay production. St. Eber is located not too far from Port Reuben. It is the home of Gutkind. There, he lives alone with his cat. St. Eber is visited by Densdell later in the novel, where he learns that Gutkind has surmised about the truth behind WHAT HAPPENED. It is in St. Eber that Gutkind is brutally murdered, having his throat cut by Densdell.

## The capital

The capital is located at least several hours from Port Reuben. It is close enough to be driven to but far enough that it requires an overnight stay. Kevern and Ailinn go on a several-day trip to the capital, which has been nicknamed NECROPOLIS. There, only a handful of neighborhoods, including the government quarter, are in good shape. Formerly luxurious areas thrive on memories of what they used to be, while the rest of the city is crime-stricken and crumbling down.

## Ashbrittle

Ashbrittle is a cathedral city up the coast from Port Reuben. It features a massive, beautiful cathedral that has been anesthetized for public use by the government. References to violence or specific religious belief have been erased in keeping with OPERATION ISHMAEL. Ashbrittle is visited by Kevern and Ailinn during their trip to the capital. There, they reflect on God and human nature. Kevern notes that humankind needs religious belief, believing it does more good than harm. Without religious belief, life is empty.

## The country

The country in which the novel takes place is not named. Its former incarnation is never named. Based on clues (such as names like Ashbrittle or Ludgvennok), it can be presumed the country is either one in the United Kingdom or in Scandinavia. The country is ruled by an all-powerful government which prefers to keep people in a perpetual state of childish docility, using violence only when necessary. Men are emasculated, women tend to run things, and the center of power for the government rests in cities and large towns. The country is a shadow of its former self following WHAT HAPPENED and OPERATION ISHMAEL. Travel to and from the country is forbidden, though travel within the country is allowed.



# Themes and Motifs

## Dystopianism

Dystopianism is an important theme in the novel “J” by Howard Jacobson. Dystopianism involves a government, organization, association, or company, that exercises tremendous or total power and influence in the lives of everyday people, often denying their human and legal rights in the name of the greater good. Those in power will do whatever it takes to retain power, and they will do whatever is necessary to secure their own ends. On the surface, those with power have the stated goal of helping the people. In reality, they are more likely to harm people than help them.

Dystopianism is brought about through the government’s manipulation and exaggeration of a minor event which involved bloodshed and financial instability into WHAT HAPPENED –a catastrophic event that cost untold thousands of lives, wrecked the country, and required dramatic government response by way of OPERATION ISHMAEL. The government response scapegoated the Jews, leading to their systematic persecution, arrest, execution, and deportation. Survivors went into hiding, assimilated, or were sheltered by Christians living in rural and coastal areas.

The society in which Kevern and Ailinn live is one of a disgusting, dangerous soft power that has infantilized adults into a passive, docile state –though human nature and passion, suppressed, boil beneath the surface. The names of people and places have all been forcibly changed to erase connections with the past. Requests for historical records are usually denied or returned with the response that the records have been lost or destroyed during WHAT HAPPENED. Family heirlooms and the keeping of anything from the past is largely frowned upon. Books remain in print, but pages and sections are censored and classified as needed. Art is no longer abstract or about passion, but merely representation.

The society is kept in check by Ofnow, a governmental arm responsible for implementing OPERATION ISHMAEL and monitoring the public. Ofnow has a network of agents spread throughout the country who work regular jobs and raise families while secretly reporting on persons of interest for the government. People are largely kept in check by warnings and threats of violence where needed. Violence is only ever resorted to when absolutely necessary, such as in the case of Ez. The government now seeks to atone for persecution of the Jews, so it has authorized Ez to bring them back. This is done using the same network of spies utilized for monitoring. Public opinion, still against the Jews, can easily be turned back in favor of them due to the fact that apologies and forgetting rule the day, and due to the fact that no one has access to the past.



## Knowledge

Knowledge is an important theme in the novel “J” by Howard Jacobson. Knowledge – essentially knowing the truth about a particular subject, situation, or anything in general – can be empowering, dangerous, relieving, and harmful. In the novel, knowledge proves to be all of these things for different people. The novel begins with a parable about a wolf and a tarantula. The fable argues that it is best not to know everything.

Ailinn will stop at nothing to know the truth about her past. This includes learning the identities of her mother and grandmother and learning that she is indeed Jewish, for Judaism is passed down through mothers. Ailinn’s search for knowledge is one of family ancestry rather than one of national identity. In other words, her search for knowledge has to do with her ancestry rather than WHAT HAPPENED. When Ailinn learns that she is Jewish, she feels proud, inspired, and powerful.

Kevern, however, feels strange and unhinged. Kevern does not like to know the truth about everything. To Kevern, knowledge is damaging. For example, Kevern wishes he would never have learned that he is the product of incest – his parents being first cousins. This disturbs him greatly. Likewise, Kevern, who has gone through such lengths to keep to himself and remain private suddenly finds himself the center of attention of Ez’s efforts to resuscitate the Jewish race. Kevern believes he is a failure as a person, and is traumatized by so many changes in his life. Learning he is about to become a father, Kevern commits suicide rather than dealing with the knowledge he has been given. The truth is too much for him to handle.

Knowledge for Gutkind is deadly. Gutkind has long suspected that WHAT HAPPENED, IF IT HAPPENED, indeed never happened. Gutkind’s research uncovers evidence that WHAT HAPPENED never actually happened. He is convinced that WHAT HAPPENED was an exaggeration for nefarious purposes, such as the government seizing more power. When Gutkind relates this to Densdell, Densdell cuts open Gutkind’s throat.

## Religion

Religion is an important theme in the novel “J” by Howard Jacobson. Religion in the novel comprises Judaism, Christianity in general, and Catholicism in specific. Religion is overall a force for good in the novel, and has been scrubbed clean and anesthetized for public use by the government in the novel. In the novel, Kevern notes that their city of Ashbrittle needs some life in it by way of religious belief, even if that leads to intolerance and disagreement – things which the government frowns upon. Without belief, Kevern contends, society is lifeless.

The Jews are scapegoats for WHAT HAPPENED, IF IT HAPPENED. The Jews have been persecuted for thousands of years, and WHAT HAPPENED yields the same result. It isn’t Judaism in particular as a faith that is targeted so much as those who are Jewish descendants. Under OPERATION ISHMAEL, Jews are systematically persecuted, brutalized, imprisoned, executed, and deported.



The greatest violence occurs in cities, large towns, and the areas nearby. In rural and coastal areas, Christians (including Catholics) take their faith seriously and go through great lengths to protect, harbor, hide, and help Jews. The Christians in Port Reuben who know the truth about Kevern's parents, for example, merely pretend there is nothing unusual about Kevern's parents and cover for them. Ailinn's grandmother is deeply taken with Christianity, and so converts. She even goes so far as to marry a reverend, though the marriage does not work out.

Rebecca has a strong and positive opinion of Catholics. The nuns of Saint Brigid's Roman Catholic Convent and Orphanage take Rebecca's daughter, Coira, in despite the family's Jewish ancestry. The nuns are not troubled by this at all, but are moved by their love and their faith to care for Coira, whom they lovingly raise. Coira cannot stand the truth that she is Jewish, or the truth of her family history, so she heads out in the world but leaves her own baby, Ailinn, to be raised by the nuns. The nuns lovingly raise Ailinn, who later contends she only ever felt like she belonged at the orphanage before loving Kevern.

## Gender Roles

Gender roles form an important theme in the novel "J" by Howard Jacobson. Gender roles especially entail what roles, functions, and tasks men and women carry out in their societies. Traditionally, men have been dominant in the world in everything from politics to business to daily life, while women have been dominant in matters relating to family and the home. In contemporary times (the 2010s) gender roles are much more equal, with men and women often working as partners. In the future of the novel, men have been relegated and subordinated to women. Women now run everything.

Women have come to run everything for a number of reasons. Men are blamed for the past war, so they are no longer trusted the same way they were in the past. The denial of the passions of human nature most notably affects men, who are considered biologically more aggressive than women. The suppression of male nature has emasculated men, making most of them weak and ineffectual. This is certainly the case with Kevern, who complains about men being blamed for everything, but in which Kevern does nothing to try to change things. Ailinn agrees that it is wrong that men have been put into such a position, but must still often take the lead in her relationship because Kevern will not.

In rural and coast areas, men have much more power and are relatively equal with women. Traditional roles tend to be more commonplace, with men working outside the home and women working inside the home. Indeed, Kevern even takes on a very traditional male role for a while when he explains he wants Ailinn to feel safe in their cottage, making sure to check that everything is locked up and sound. Ailinn herself ultimately comes to seeing having a baby as her defining purpose in life –not merely as a question of restoring the Jewish race, but in simply becoming a mother.



Kevern's suicide after learning he is to be a father serves as a criticism of men (both in the novel and in the present day). Kevern, who has long complained about the ill-treatment of men but has never done anything about it, has a chance to step up and be a real man through fatherhood. It is the single unalterable, biologically fundamental role which cannot be denied to men by society. But rather than embracing this responsibility of fatherhood and parenting, Kevern chooses to avoid it like a childish coward. Rather than manning up to deal with the situation, he simply opts out. This leaves the women as the responsible party to raise Ailinn's baby.

## Identity

Identity is an important theme in the novel "J" by Howard Jacobson. Identity essentially includes the characteristics, traits, attributes, beliefs, and aspects of a person's life that makes a person who he or she is. Identity is very important in the novel because it gives oneself a sense of purpose, and makes one more aware of oneself against thousands of other people who may be similar or completely different.

When Ailinn learns she is Jewish, she is thrilled. Her identity as a Jew has been established beyond a shadow of a doubt, and she revels in her identity. She is no longer merely an orphan or a traveling companion to Ez. She is a young woman with a purpose and reason which distinguishes her from countless other young women and orphans. This also distinguishes her from the millions of other people in the country, who have been programmed by the government to be exactly the same –childish adults devoid of passion, desire, or dreams.

Whereas Ailinn embraces her identity, Kevern runs from his. He is disgusted by the fact that he is the product of incest, and to learn that he is a member of the persecuted Jewish race gives him a strong sense of self-loathing. He has lived his life to try to fit in, to make his identity exactly the same as everyone else. His newfound identity distinguishes him, and taken together with knowledge he will become a father, Kevern simply cannot handle it. He chooses suicide over responsibility and manhood.

The reader should also recall the conversation that Ailinn and Ez have about identity. Ailinn contends her identity is utterly important –not just in that she is Jewish, but in who she is as an individual. Ez claims that identity doesn't matter as much as the idea of having an identity. Ailinn's being Jewish, in and of itself, would have been enough, argues Ez –but Ailinn knows otherwise. Ailinn knows who a person is individually distinguishes them from all others who then give that person something to struggle against. If Ez did not care about identity, Ez would not be so invested in Ailinn rather than other candidates who might have better situations and better chances at returning the Jews.

# Styles

## Point of View

Howard Jacobson tells his novel “J” in the third-person, reflective omniscient-withholding narrative mode. The narrator, never named, is obviously telling the story from a point in the future, for everything spoken of is spoken of as having already happened. In this way, the narrator is reflecting on the past. It also explains why the narrator knows everything about everything that occurs in the novel –from events of the very distant past and the events of the present (the present being the future for readers, but the past for the narrator). This allows the narrator to tell not only Kevern and Ailinn’s stories, but also the stories of Rebecca, Coira, Gutkind, and others who may have only limited direct contact with Kevern and Ailinn. This adds greater depth and dimension to the novel, rounding out characters and plotlines. In order to hook the reader, keep mystery alive, and to keep a sense of realism about the novel, the narrator only reveals things to the reader as necessary. This reflects the fact that the characters in the novel did not know everything as their lives were unfolding.

## Language and Meaning

Howard Jacobson tells his novel “J” in language that is educated and straightforward. The narrator who is recalling the events of the novel is obviously well-educated, for he uses words such as querulous, morose, and facetious when words like argumentative, sad, and silly would suffice. The strength of the language used in the novel strengthens and underscores the seriousness of the themes discussed in the novel, which range from identity and religion to dystopianism. Despite the use of larger words not in common usage among most readers, the majority of the writing is straightforward. There are no tricks or guesswork in the language itself, meaning the language is very serious. The seriousness and straightforwardness of the language allow Jacobson to make his points clearly and succinctly –arguments against totalitarian states, persecution, and arguments for identity and religion.

## Structure

Howard Jacobson divides his novel “J” into three primary sections, Books I, II, and III. Each book is further divided into chapters, and most chapters are divided into subsections that bear Roman numerals. The novel is preceded by a moral fable (The Argument: The Wolf and the Tarantula”), and the chapters are punctuated by untitled, unidentified sections relating to events surrounding WHAT HAPPENED, while various other inserts –such as letters and another parable –break up the text. The chapters, though themselves linear, are not chronological. The present (the future for the reader), the past, and the distant past are often presented concurrently with one another, with one section leaping back several decades and the next returning to the present. The



leapfrogging through time helps establish a sense not only of depth, but fullness in the story: the past helps provide clues and knowledge about not only who Ailinn and Kevern are, but about **WHAT HAPPENED**. The past is crucial to the present, which is why the government does not want the past remembered.

## Quotes

MORAL: Always leave a little on your plate.  
-- Narrator (Argument: The Wolf and the Tarantula)

**Importance:** The novel begins with a story about a wolf and a tarantula wagering to see which is the more efficient hunter. The wolf wins, but has consumed all of his prey and must now consume his family and himself to survive. The moral of the story is presented by the narrator. Rather than being a random story with a message, the idea that one must always leave a little on one's plate is essential to the novel itself as Kevern searches for the truth. Getting to the bottom of everything may prove more damaging than not –just as the wolf proving he is the better hunter proved more damaging than not.

The morning after the call he sat on his bench and wondered if he was about to experience happiness and, if so, whether he was up to it.  
-- Narrator (Book One, Chapter 3, II)

**Importance:** The dystopian society in which Kevern exists prides itself on happiness and forgetfulness. But Kevern is not happy, and remembers too much of the past. Kevern knows he has a chance to find happiness with Ailinn, Given the nature of society, where people are expected to be happy and where people are essentially told to forget is a virtue, Kevern isn't sure if he wants to be a part of it all. Essentially, he doesn't want to grow up and fit in with society.

You can know and not know. Kevern didn't know and knew.  
-- Narrator (Book One, Chapter 3, II)

**Importance:** Here, the narrator explains part of the paradox of the virtue of forgetting in modern society. People forget things –especially bad things –that happened in the past in order to focus on a better future. Kevern's own parents were very secretive. Kevern only later learned more about them, long after they had died. In society, Kevern remembers much, but pretends he doesn't. This allows him to know more, but to pretend to do what society tells him. He gets by pretending to be uncomprehending.

He couldn't rescue her from her dreams, but he could make waking better for her."  
-- Narrator (Book One, Chapter 4, II)

**Importance:** The bad memories that Ailinn has of childhood and of the orphanage give her nightmares. Kevern is powerless to help her while she is dreaming, but he does everything he can to make sure her days go as well as possible, beginning with her waking up. This is not a question of love, but a recognition of shared sentiments about the past and the desire to make the present better. It demonstrates the commitment and completion Kevern has with Ailinn.



I have a nasty feeling I'm being superseded, which could mean one of two things: either I'm not up to it, in their estimation, or Kevern Cohen's in trouble too deep for me to fathom.

-- Edward (Book One, Chapter 5, Call Me Ishmael)

**Importance:** Here, Edward relates in his diary how his ongoing investigation into Kevern has suddenly become much larger as his superiors and other people get involved. Edward, who has been tasked with keeping an eye on Kevern, realizes that Edward is far more problematic than previously considered.

This part of the country seems full of eyes.

-- Ailinn (Book One, Chapter 5, Call Me Ishmael)

**Importance:** While recording a dinner with Ailinn and Kevern in his diary, Edward notes something very unusual about Ailinn. She remarks that she feels as if there are always eyes upon her in this part of the country, waiting for her to show her true colors. This strikes Edward as fascinating, especially because he is spying on Ailinn and Kevern himself.

This is what you get.

-- Kevern (Book One, Chapter 8, II)

**Importance:** The cathedral town that Kevern and Ailinn visit seems lifeless, leading Kevern to say that the place needs some belief, even though belief can lead to intolerance. He explains that one cannot have God without the Devil. Ailinn says she is for neither, which causes Kevern to explain that Ashbrittle is what she'll get as a result. This comment can also be extrapolated to the ISHMAEL society in which Kevern and Ailinn live, which seeks to emasculate men and do away with strong passions. Forgetting the past and encouraging people to behave like happy children rather than independent-minded adults are tenets of the society's government.

Bloody Gutkind!

-- Edward (Book Two, Chapter 3)

**Importance:** In Edward's latest diary entry, he curses Gutkind for getting too messy investigating Kevern and for getting too close. Edward reveals that the powers above him have all taken an interest in Kevern. Kevern is somehow very important and is not to be startled. Gutkind has nearly ruined things, leading to Edward having to intervene to sharply warn Gutkind to keep away from Kevern.

He might only be too right.' But as soon as I said it, I realized I knew more than I knew I knew.

-- Edward (Book Two, Chapter 3)

**Importance:** Edward reveals a conversation he has had with Gutkind about Kevern. Gutkind thinks there is something not right about Kevern, while Edward contends it may be that something might be too right about Kevern. This startles Edward, who realizes



this must indeed be the truth. It would make sense then as to why so many administrators have taken an interest in Kevern.

What do I fear I have done?

-- Kevern (Book Two, Chapter 4, II)

**Importance:** After Kevern realizes his house has been broken into, he becomes even more paranoid. Kevern lives in a world where he fears an all-powerful government. He behaves like a helpless victim. However, it leads him to remembering J.

There had been no crime.

-- Narrator (Book Two, Chapter 6, I)

**Importance:** While drunk, Gutkind explains to Densdell that he believes that WHAT HAPPENED never actually happened. He has never been able to find the mass graves of the thousands supposedly killed. He believes that WHAT HAPPENED was minor and exaggerated to pin blame one group in particular that go to Heaven to read books –the Jews.

If there is no identifiable me then it doesn't matter whether I am it or not.

-- Ailinn (Book 3, Chapter 1, IV)

**Importance:** Ez explains to Ailinn that identity matters only because it distinguishes people from others and gives them something to strive against. She believes that what the identity is doesn't actually matter. Ailinn disagrees completely, noting that who someone is matters very much. That is what is worth fighting for and that is why Ez has fought so hard to find and make Ailinn happy, to rebirth a persecuted race.