

# **Life After Death Study Guide**

## **Life After Death by Damien Echols**

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## Plot Summary

In his book "Life After Death," Damien Echols tells the story of the time he spent in prison after being arrested for the murders of three young boys who had lived in his neighborhood. The book also includes Damien's memories from his childhood and teen years leading up to the time of his arrest. Damien speaks of religious influences, police bias and his own oddities that he believes were used against him during his trial and conviction.

Damien's book is basically a biography, written from his earliest memories up to a short time after he is released from prison. Damien writes about growing up in poverty and his feelings about not fitting in with his classmates at school. Since he does not have many close friends, Damien reads to keep himself entertained. He also develops a personality very different from the other children around him. He listens to heavy metal music and often wears clothes with the bands' names, images or quotes on them. He shaves part of his hair and becomes a behavior problem in his classes. All of these unusual aspects of Damien's personality are used against him when he is on trial for the murders.

Also in his book, Damien describes the horror of being in prison on Death Row. He describes the inhumane way that the prisoners in this part of the jail are treated by the guards. He speaks of the way that the jail is filled with desperation and depression as the guards try to make the prisoners as miserable and hopeless as possible. Damien engages in a curriculum of prayer and Zen meditation to help keep himself from falling into the unhealthy life patterns that the other prisoners have.

Also in his book, Damien writes that he meets his wife, Lorri because of a documentary about his case filmed by HBO. The two are married while Damien is still in jail and Lorri takes over Damien's appeal. Although an appeal is never scheduled, Damien and the other two men who were found guilty of the murders are released from jail using an Alford plea. In the last chapters of his book, Damien writes of his struggle to rejoin life outside prison.

# Preface

## Preface Summary and Analysis

In his Preface, Damien Echols introduces Saint Raymond Nonnatus, the patron saint of those who have been falsely accused. Damien believes that he has a special place in Nonnatus' heart as he is one who has been falsely accused. He plans to leave chocolate and roses at the feet of all the statues of this saint that he can find if he holds up his end of the bargain and helps Damien get his record expunged. Damien adds his spark of humor to the story as he teases his reader for not knowing that saints like chocolate. Damien's other patron saints include Saint Dismass, who is the patron saint of prisoners, and Saint Jude, the patron saint of desperate situations. Since he is on Death Row for something he did not do, Damien considers his situation to be pretty desperate.

Damien next writes that he doesn't want people to read his book just out of curiosity. He wants to make them laugh, or remember something they've forgotten. He will be content if his book is read by a person who wants to see life from a perspective different from his own. He hopes his book will be a thing of beauty, not something that will be viewed as a freak show written by a former Death Row inmate.

He shares that writing down his story has been cathartic for him. He remembers his arrival at the Tucker Maximum Security Unit, the people in the cells next to him and a note sent to him from "Lisa" offering sexual favors in return for a cigarette. Lisa turns out to be a fifty-six year old man with one leg. He continues in his Preface with stories of the other prisoners he meets. Some are severely deranged while others seem to have adapted to deal with prison life. He describes prison as a freak show for which he was not prepared.

Perhaps what is most admirable and most surprising about Damien's writing is the tone in which he writes. Although he has spent nearly half his life in prison, on Death Row, for a crime he did not commit, Damien is still able to incorporate humor into his story. While some would have given up long ago, Damien still hangs onto his humanity in the form of his sense of humor. He also does not intend for his book to be classed in the same genre as exposes and tell-all freak stories. From the Preface, it is clear that he plans to provide a truly intelligent picture of what life was like for him while in prison.



# Chapters One and Two

## Chapters One and Two Summary and Analysis

In Chapter One, Damien begins his story as a biography, telling where and when he was born as well as his parents' names. Although he was born in West Memphis, Arkansas, he was always jealous of his sister who was born in Memphis, Tennessee. He is born in December and his mother is fascinated with the idea that the hospital employees put him in a stocking for her to bring him home. Although Damien writes that since that time he has learned this was nothing unusual but his mother still clings to the idea it was unique. He points to this as proof of her habit of denial. This stocking, along with a pillow his grandmother gave him, are lost when the family makes a badly planned move when Damien is 17. Because Damien was born in the wintertime, he states that he is a child of winter. The winter has always been his favorite time of the year.

After Damien's sister was born, his mother felt unable to take care of two children so Damien remembers living with his grandmother, whom he calls Nanny. One of his earliest memories is watching his grandmother shoot a poisonous snake with a pistol. He remembers his grandmother leaving him at a daycare center where he cried and created a riot because he didn't have his favorite pillow. He also remembers the fear he had of bedbugs because his grandmother would warn him each night not to let the bedbugs bite.

Damien talks about becoming someone else on solitary confinement through the use of Zen. He credits its meditation and rituals as being the only things that keep him from giving in to the anger and hatred that was eating him alive. He explains that when he was in jail, it was not the other prisoners, but the guards that he had to watch out for as these guards would go out of their way to make the prisoners' lives miserable. Damien strikes up a continuing friendship with a Zen monk by the name of Kobutsu. Kobutsu performs a refugee ceremony on Damien, the Zen equivalent of baptism. Damien is also allowed to take vows for lay ordination while he is in jail. Damien describes these Zen priests and monks who visited the prison as being more personable and more like human beings than Protestant ministers.

In Chapter Two, Damien writes that when he was five he moved with his family into an apartment complex called Mayfair in West Memphis. It is at this point that he begins going to school. His kindergarten teacher is hateful, especially to boys. Damien is punished twice by this teacher — once because he didn't close his eyes during nap and the second time for something that he can't even remember.

Also during this chapter, Damien writes of a man shot in the apartment complex. After the man is shot, he runs into their apartment door, smearing blood on the door and on their car. Damien realizes that had he been older when this happened, he would not have recovered from his shock as easily as a young child. Damien shares with his reader that he isn't sure when he lost his emotional flexibility and his ability to bounce

back from emotionally stressful circumstances, but he knows that it is gone. This loss of his emotional flexibility seems to make prison even more difficult for Damien. Damien changes from his memory back to his time in prison. He is seeing himself grow older and older as he waits in jail for his release. He believes that his circumstances are making him old.



# Chapters Three and Four

## Chapters Three and Four Summary and Analysis

In Chapter Three, Damien writes that when he was in the second grade, his family lived in a brick building that they had rented from one of his grandmother's friends. There was not even any heat in the building. Damien remembers that year as being one of the poorest that the family had ever lived through. He remembers the excitement when different religious groups brought the family Christmas boxes and baskets. His mother was grateful while his father was embarrassed that he was not able to support his own family. At the time, Damien had thought it was probably the stress of being so poor that caused his mother and father's marriage to break up. Although Damien had at one time also been embarrassed to be poor, he realizes that the people who looked down on him for being poor probably would not have survived what he had to go through in jail.

Also in this chapter, Damien shares memories of his step-grandfather, Ivan Haynes. Although he says that there was love between the two of them, some of the things that Damien describes Haynes doing to him appear to be purely mean. He has Damien pick up a board infested with fire ants, and even has him try to swim with a pair of non-pliant swim flippers. Haynes also tells Damien during a flea market sale that black people die if their feet get cold. He also convinces Damien not to wear socks to bed by telling Damien that his feet would explode if he wore socks to bed. Also some might have thought Damien would dislike Haynes because of his tricks and pranks, Damien remembers crying at Haynes' funeral. Years later, the story of people dying if their feet got cold became a running joke between Damien and one of the other inmates.

It is also during this time that Damien and his family were living with his grandparents that his parents begin to fight. Damien believes their fights are because the family is so poor. His father eventually moves out to a motel. A short time later, Damien parents split up completely. Although his father continues to visit for a while, he soon disappears entirely.

It is in Chapter Four that Damien gets a stepfather, Jack Echols, and a name change. Damien describes his stepfather as being hateful. He remembers no one who had anything good to say about the man. When Damien cries and says that he wants to stay with his father, his mother seems to take pleasure in telling him that his father doesn't want him.

After introducing his stepfather, Damien switches both tone and perspective. He writes of his childhood, looking back at it from a distance. He wants to go home, back to the places that mattered to him. Damien uses imagery of haunted houses, ghosts and ghouls, and hell to describe the feeling of being in jail. He feels that if he shows any signs of life, that the administration will try to kill it, believing they are doing what it right. Although Damien doesn't want to admit it and doesn't want to stop fighting for his own





life, he feels as if he is dying a little bit each day. His desperation and despair is evident in his word choice and tone.

In the next section, Damien switches back to his story of his mother and her relationship with Jack Echols. His mother is hungry for attention and Jack will give it to her. But he makes the family start attending church at the Church of God, which Damien describes as a "freak show." He remembers the healing services where his sister went forward for help with her bad hearing, but she was never healed. Although Jack went to church three times a week, Damien remembers him as being the opposite of a Christian. It is perhaps from his stepfather that the roots of Damien's dislike for the Protestant religions began.

Living arrangements for the family were questionable during their time with Jack. They first live in the back rooms of the church. Damien remembers twice his stepfather punishing him. Both times, Damien was not sure what he had done wrong. Both times, Damien's mother does not protect her son against the older man. As a result, Damien's dislike for Jack becomes hatred.

Damien allows Jack to adopt him because his mother tells him that his real father won't get into trouble for not paying child support this way. She also forces him to call Jack "Dad." Later, his mother denies that she and Jack ever treated Damien this way. Music is the only thing that can soothe Damien during this emotionally stressful point in his life. Damien finds himself using music like a drug to get away from himself and his thoughts.

The family next moves into the worst house they have ever lived in. Damien describes the house as a shack built on an Indian burial mound. There is no running water or electricity and half the front porch is caved in. Crop dusters fly overhead during the summer dumping mosquito spray over the area. Despite Damien's obvious hatred of the house, he still manages a bit of sarcastic humor in describing the circumstances of the family being forced to move out.

Before the house is torn down, Damien and his family happened to visit a bank where some high school art was displayed. Among the presentations was a painting of their house. Damien often wishes he still had that painting so that he could remind himself where he came from. Of all the things that were wrong with the house, Damien says that the loneliness was the worst.

Reading was one of Damien's favorite past times during this point in his life. During his reading, he learns about The Inquisition, which he describes as the ultimate horror. He is terrified by the images of people burned at the stake. This terror is multiplied by the horrors of hell that have already been drilled into him by church people. In a way, though, Damien looks back on this book as a foretelling of his future. He views the way that he was singled out without evidence as being a sort of modern day witch-hunt. Adding to Damien's misery is the beginning of puberty and his discovery of masturbation. He believes that his urges will also send him to hell, a belief that no one explains to him or gives any different opinion. It is also during this time period that



Damien discovers the writer Aleister Crowley. He describes his style as being sinful but adds that his words have been mistaken and misconstrued, often on purpose to scare those who don't know any better. Damien adds that the prosecutor did this to him in his trial.

Damien returns to his description of his mother and stepfather, admitting that he was probably harsh on both of them. He says that Jack was, after all, just a man, but he did believe that he did care for Damien and his sister in some ways. He is tolerant of Damien's forms of self-expression, telling his mother that Damien was "trying to find himself." His mother also had her ways of showing that she cared. She made sure there was plenty of food in the house and that she always met with teachers at the school on parent night. He also remembers her taking care of him when he was sick. He admits that looking back on his childhood, he has mixed feelings about the pair.



# Chapters Five and Six

## Chapters Five and Six Summary and Analysis

In Chapter Five, Damien writes about the people that he has met because of his time in prison and the attempt to appeal his case. He gets letters from those who want to tell him their story as well as from those who hate him. He's realized that those writing these hate filled letters are generally those who don't know the details of his case and don't bother to become educated. He says that he has gotten far more supportive letters than hate mail through his time in prison. Occasionally Damien will receive a letter that he calls a "drive-by preaching." This is usually an envelope filled with religious tracts which he believes has been sent in a totally different spirit than the one intended by Jesus.

Damien also describes visits made by Baptist preachers to Death Row as they try to convince the convicts that death is preferable to life. He thinks that if the situation were reversed, the preachers would not be so quick to give up their own lives. Damien also uses his own knowledge of the Bible to see the folly in these claims. He wonders if death is so great, why Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead.

Through his time in the negative, dark atmosphere of prison, Damien has learned that when some one comes through that is truly of God, they shine that much brighter in those circumstances. Anna is one such person. She had helped put together "Christmas sacks" for the inmates before these gifts were not allowed. Damien writes that the lady would often spend her time going from cell to cell talking to the prisoners. The guards hated her because of the way the prisoners loved to see Anna coming. Similarly, Father Charles was a Roman Catholic priest that the guards also disliked but couldn't keep from coming to the jail. Although Damien points out these examples of people as Christianity in action, he writes that he largely blames Christians as being much of the reason that he was forced to stay in jail for so long for a crime that he did not commit. He seems to believe it was because of the narrow-minded thinking of the Christians in his area and their determination that because he was not like them that he was evil that led to much of the bias in his case.

Next, Damien discusses the idea that he believes that Death Row would be the proper place for ghosts to reside, as it is here that so many people spent their last days. He mentions this in conjunction with the outline of the man who has long since been executed that is on the wall of his prison cell. Pets are not uncommon on death row with inmates sneaking in rats, spiders, snakes and birds. Even a kitten spent some time in Damien's cell.

The silence on Death Row is something that seems to bother some guards, especially those who are accustomed to the noise of other prison wings. Damien notes that he never even notices the silence except when he wakes up at night to watch horror



movies. He is a fan of these movies because they remind him of home, and of his growing up years. These movies fill Damien with nostalgia.

In Chapter Six, Damien turns his attention back to his past. This time, he is in junior high school. It is during this period of his life that Damien meets Jason Baldwin, another of the boys convicted of the same crime as Damien. During this time, Kevin, a mildly retarded boy is one of Damien's best friends. Damien believes he did not try to make friends with others because he felt he and his family were so poor that he could not compete. Kevin, however, has no expectations. However, during this time, Damien has also decided that life is hopeless. Because he didn't care and didn't do his homework, Damien failed his first year of junior high school. He is also deeply disturbed when a classmate tries to commit suicide. He wonders what the boy was thinking and that if it would have made a difference if he had said anything to him.

During Damien's second year in the seventh grade, he begins skateboarding. With this activity, he finally finds something at which he is good. He notices people stop to watch him do tricks. In the eighth grade, Damien has a group of friends drawn together by their interest in skateboarding. Unfortunately because of Damien's odd fashion sense and his hairstyle, he is not drawing positive attention. Damien also becomes disruptive in class and is thrown out at least once a week. It is during this time in Damien's life that he meets Jason. Jason is Damien's opposite. During their first months as friends, they communicate in study hall through gestures but Jason shares Damien's love of hair bands and heavy metal music.

Things change for Damien when he and his family go to live with his Nanny in her trailer in Lakeshore Estates when she has to have a leg amputated after a heart attack and blood clot. As they clean out their shack to leave, Damien finds a trench coat in the attic which he adopts as his new look even though it is tattered and old.



# Chapters Seven and Eight

## Chapters Seven and Eight Summary and Analysis

In Chapter Seven, Damien has a room of his own in his grandmother's trailer. Although he hears jokes about the poor living in trailer parks, Damien considers himself in the lap of luxury in his grandmother's trailer compared to the other places in which he has lived.

After a description of Lakeshore Estates, Damien moves on to explain why he decided to join the Roman Catholic Church. He found a book on the Catholic Church when searching for information that would balance out what he had been taught in the years past about the hate and vengefulness of God. For him the Catholic religion seems to be about respect and the dignity of the spirit. Damien manages to convince Jack that he has had a "calling" to attend different churches so that Jack will agree to allow him to visit a Catholic Church. After attending his first service, Damien decides to convert to Catholicism. It is from the Catholic Church that he decides to name himself after St. Damien for his confirmation. Until his arrest, Damien continues to attend the Catholic Church. Since that time, he has developed an animosity toward Christians in general as a result of the way they have treated him with respect to the beliefs they claim they hold.

Near the middle of this chapter, Damien switches back to the present tense, during his time in jail. His focus, however, remains on religion. It is on a Good Friday that Damien begins performing the Holy Guardian Angel ritual while he is in jail. In the paragraphs following, Damien describes the ritual and the way that he feels after performing it. He has also begun running in place in his cell, running until his feet blister and the blisters break. He has also fasted for two weeks. His feverish feeling after the fast reminded of him being a child and his mother putting him in a tub of ice water to bring his fever down. He has learned that it is only through pushing himself to his limits that he will achieve anything worth having.

In Chapter Eight, Damien switches his focus back to his teenage years. Jason begins visiting Damien every day after school. They listen to music and laugh without even realizing what has made them laugh so hard. They sneak out one night while staying at Jason's house, but don't really find the experience fulfilling since there is nothing to do once they are outside. He says the closest thing he'd ever witnessed to a "satanic orgy," as the police say that he has been involved in, was watching and making fun of cheap horror movies. One of the most endearing qualities of Damien's writing is that even for all that he has been through, he continues to keep his sense of humor. This humor shines through in sarcastic jabs such as the one suggesting that the police had gotten their opinion of him from watching too many cheap horror movies.

Damien says that he never intended to meet Jessie Misskelley, another of the boys arrested in connection with the murders of the three children, he just happened to go to his house looking for Jason. Damien learns later that Jason doesn't go to Jessie's trailer often, as Jessie usually tries to get him to help with some job he's been assigned.

Damien's overall view of Jessie was that he wasn't the brightest guy, but that he was harmless.



# Chapters Nine and Ten

## Chapters Nine and Ten Summary and Analysis

In Chapter Nine, Damien's first year of high school is another bad experience for him. Other students begin to regard him as a freak. He does strike up a friendship with a boy named Brian who invites him to a Baptist youth gathering. Damien is surprised to find that he enjoys the group and goes back often. Damien is only chided once because the youth pastor believes that the way that he dresses makes him look satanic. Damien agrees to take off his trench coat but is told to put it back on when they see he is wearing an Iron Maiden shirt. Damien indicates that this experience caused much negative attention. The incident apparently also came up at the trial as Damien notes that he believes that it was this outfit that was "one of the nails hammered into my coffin." Damien can still remember that particular youth minister talking about Damien making pacts with the devil and such just because he had worn a certain t-shirt.

Damien also begins keeping a journal during this time period. Filled with his own teen angst, this journal also becomes evidence against him. Looking back at it as an adult, Damien is ashamed of his feelings during that period of time and the things that he wrote. To his surprise, however, Damien writes that he often got requests in jail for more excerpts from his journal. He explains that the notebook fell into the hands of the prosecution because of a girl whom he liked who had kept it. But the notebook is considered evidence even though Damien believes it is just embarrassing. Here again, Damien's sarcastic sense of humor comes out in describing the damning evidence against him as being a bad hairdo, black clothes, teenaged poetry and a liking of hair bands.

That summer, Brian and Damien spend their days with Laura and Ashley, their girlfriends. A fifth girl, Carrie rounds out the group and by the end of the summer, Damien is dating Carrie. It is also during this summer that Damien decided to get his first job. He works at a seafood restaurant at which the working and cooking conditions are unsanitary to say the least and unbearable. He works there only three weeks before he can stand it no longer.

In Damien's next year in school, he has to repeat the ninth grade again. He makes a new friend, named Andy, and finds himself joining in with a group of kids that in modern society might be termed "goth." He also spends more time with Jason and less with Brian.

In Chapter Ten, Damien meets Deanna while attending one of his sister's choir concerts. The two sit in the lobby of the auditorium and talk. They begin to have lunch together. He is often invited to Deanna's house. He describes her family as a quiet southern family who allowed him to be part of their routine. At the time he had believed Deanna's parents were too strict with her but now realizes they were doing what they thought was best to protect her from the dangers of the world.



Although her family is Christian, she secretly tells Damien that she is a pagan and a practicing Wiccan. She keeps a green diary filled with Wicca information. Because Damien is an intellectual despite his bad school performance, he studies and learns what he can about the religion. He later discovers that this curiosity is also used against him in court.

Deanna's parents try to get the two to put an end to the relationship when they discover that the two have been having sex. They had been skipping school to spend time together and one day Deanna doesn't get back in time to catch the bus home. From this her parents learn what has been going on all of the while. Deanna's parents try to force her to break up with Damien and although the two try to keep up their relationship for awhile, Deanna finally breaks it off for good. Damien is heartbroken. To make Damien's life more miserable, Jack had quit his job and was always at home. Damien drifts through his life until he meets Domini.

Domini comes to Damien's trailer one evening after he and Jason had visited the apartment complex where Domini lived. She stays only about fifteen minutes, but Damien kisses her before she leaves. They start sleeping together shortly thereafter. Although Damien calls Domini a friend, he says that he was never in love with her, but credits her with saving his life at the time. Damien continues to be hung up on Deanna as he starts a fight with a boy whom he learns had been given sexual favors by Deanna when she was still dating Damien. He writes that this fight is the only act of violence that he remembers committing. He is suspended from school because of the fight, but it also turns up as evidence in his trial in the form of a rumor that Damien tried to pull the other boy's eye out.

It is right after he describes this incident that Damien directly addresses his reader referring to him as an old friend to whom he is telling his life story. He tells his reader he cannot dwell on the negative, in this case the sorrow that he feels for attacking the boy, as he cannot afford to become depressed. He does, however, seem to be truly sorry that the incident ever occurred.

He turns his attention back to school where he reports that he had one of the best teachers in the person of Steve Baca. Damien said this teacher made his students think. He made his students want to go to school. It was also in one of Baca's classes that Damien and Deanna got back together. She approaches him one day and asks him if he still wants to be with her. The next day she asks him if he will take her back. Looking back on the experience now, Damien realizes that she should have run from her. Instead, being a teenager in love, he agrees. Although he knows that he is breaking Domini's heart, he dumps her and takes up with Deanna again, trying to pretend as if nothing has happened.





# Chapters Eleven and Twelve

## Chapters Eleven and Twelve Summary and Analysis

In Chapter Eleven, Damien switches the focus of his writing from his biography back to his time in jail. In this section he talks about the sleep deprivation that is caused because the lights are always on in the prison with the exception of about four hours a day. He writes that even during these four hours there is constant noise from the guards' activity in the hallways, talking and dropping keys. On the subject of light, Damien writes of the ways that prisoners learned to cook using the heat of a 100-watt light bulb.

The inmates also learn to pass things back and forth to one another through a form of fishing using string and weights. They have found this form of fishing also works to send something to someone in a cell far away through the toilets as all the plumbing in the building is connected. Two inmates flush a piece of string down the toilets and these pieces of string get tangled up allowing one man to send the other a plastic wrapped package through the toilet. Damien goes on to describe the physical appearance of his jail cell and what it contains.

Damien then writes of a woman photographer who was burned badly as a child. She keeps a photo journal of her surgeries and the recovery process. She notes that she was stronger as a child than as an adult. Damien notes that he is beginning to realize what she means by this comment. He, too, feels as if he has lost much of his mental and emotional flexibility as he has aged.

In Chapter Twelve, Damien returns to writing his memories from his teens. Three days before the end of the school year, Deanna suggests to Damien that they run away together. They agree to leave on the last day of school. From the way that Damien presents this information, it is clear that this decision has a profound affect on the rest of his life. He wishes that he had never agreed to go out with Deanna again, much less run away with her. When the day arrives that they are to run away, the couple is able to slip away from school unnoticed because all of the other students are so excited by the end of the school year. They walk the back ways and Jason goes with them to keep them company. They walk in the heat for two and one half hours before arriving at an abandoned trailer. Since the door is unlocked, they go inside to rest. Damien gives Jason money and sends him for drinks.

When Jason returns from the store he tells them that all the kids in the neighborhood were looking for Damien because Deanna's parents have already realized she was missing. Damien decides that Deanna and he will sleep in the trailer that night, then leave the following morning. That evening, a storm brews and Damien expects a tornado at any moment. At one point in the storm, there is silence, then the shattering of glass as the police break a window. Damien writes that the cop later claims that Damien and Deanna busted the window. The two are put in the car together and Damien promises that he will come and find Deanna.



Damien is taken to the Crittenden County Jail. He waits in a cell and wonders what has happened to Deanna. He is taken to an office where Jerry Driver, a county juvenile officer, questions him. The questions first pertain to Damien and Deanna's attempt to run away then turn to questions about satanic activity. He shows Damien Deanna's diary and asks what he knows about it. When Damien asks about Deanna he is told she is being held in a women's detention center and that she'd had psychiatric problems before. Damien spends a week in the Craighead County Jail. During this week, Damien is given a Rorschach test and is admitted to a psychiatric hospital.

When Damien calls home during his week at Craighead, he is in for a shock concerning activity at home. His sister has accused his stepfather, Jack, of molesting her. After Jack is ordered to leave by children's service workers, his sister starts looking for her father. Now, Damien's mother and father are back together. They come to see Damien the next day.

Looking back at his experience from the present, Damien realizes how unjust his first encounter with the criminal justice system was. His punishment for just walking into a trailer didn't seem to fit the crime. He is sent to a mental institution to wait for his trial date nine months away. Driver takes him to the institution. Damien notices the man studying him in the rearview mirror during several different times in the trip. He learns later that the man had talked to his mother and confiscated items from his room, including a skull collection, which are later used as evidence against him.

Although Damien describes the psychiatric unit as being full of bizarre people, he doesn't seem to be terribly disturbed by being there. He indicates the food is good and conversation interesting. Setting a goal for each day was perhaps the hardest thing that Damien indicates that he was faced with while in the ward. He visits the psychiatrist and is diagnosed with depression. He is prescribed antidepressants, which he describes as a horrible invention.

One day Damien gets a 24-hour pass and spends the day with his family. He learns that his mother and sister are planning to move to Oregon with his father once Damien gets out of the hospital. Although Damien realizes this should have been what he wanted, he is in misery because he doesn't know what has happened to Deanna.



# Chapters Thirteen and Fourteen

## Chapters Thirteen and Fourteen Summary and Analysis

In Chapter Thirteen, the trip to Oregon with his dad reminds Damien of the way that life used to be when he was a young boy. Once they arrive in Oregon, however, Damien is unhappy. He is upset because his mother left much of his stuff at the old trailer in Lakeshore without even attempting to sell it. Damien works for a while in a garage with an old Vietnam War Veteran with whom he gets along well. His parents don't enroll him in school, so Damien understands this means he has dropped out. He is resentful of the decision but says nothing. He tries to call Deanna's house but she tells him that she is uncertain if she wants to go with him. Damien learns that Driver has been talking to her about his alleged satanic activity. Deanna's parents notify Driver that Damien had tried to call Deanna. Driver calls the Oregon police and tries to get them to arrest Damien. An officer visits Damien but finds no reason to arrest him.

One night while Damien sneaks into the kitchen to prepare himself a glass of milk and Kahlua to help him sleep, his sister tells his mother that he is being sneaky without even asking what he is doing. He later overhears his mother calling someone and reporting that he is depressed and suicidal. He credits this call to his mother's need to create drama. A few hours later, a police officer is standing at their door. After a conversation between the police officer, Damien and his mother, Damien agrees to go back to the psychiatric hospital. He believes that his mother's decision to call the police about him when she did not even know what he was doing or why he was doing it, was one of the most stupid things that she had ever done.

Damien indicates that his relationship with his father also changed that night as his father threatened him to make him straighten up. Damien realizes that his father has not been a good role model and would not have been able to survive the life to which he abandoned Damien. Damien tells his father that he could "eat him alive." This statement, through which Damien tries to voice his own superiority over his father, is later used against Damien as an admission of cannibalism.

The second psychiatric hospital to which Damien is sent is more like an asylum than the first one he attended. The next day, Damien tells his parents and the doctor that he wants to go home to West Memphis. Driver is alerted and it is arranged that Damien will take a bus back to Arkansas. The bus ride is an experience that Damien describes as being magical even though he also seems disturbed by it.

In Chapter Fourteen, Damien is stopped by a cop as he is walking to Domini's house from the bus stop. The cop questions him, but gets another call so he is forced to leave him alone. Domini is looking out a window when he walks up. She runs to the door to greet him. She helps him get his suitcase inside, then they go to visit Jason. As they walk to Jason's trailer, the two are stopped by another cop. Damien interrupts his story



to explain that the only thing he realizes he is free to do when questioned by the cops is to comply or go to jail. He wonders why this isn't taught in school.

At Lakeshore, Damien wakes Jason up by slapping on his window. Jason is excited to see him and Damien tells the whole story. Jason tells of going to Damien's old trailer only to find a different family living there. After they catch up, the three of them go to Brian's where Damien hopes he can stay until he finds a job. Brian agrees to let Damien stay there. He doesn't tell his mother, reasoning that if she doesn't know, she can't object.

The following Monday, Damien attempts to re-enroll in school, but he is not allowed to do so without a parent because he is not yet 18. Brian decides to see if his mother will sign Damien up, but they never get a chance to try the plan as Damien is back in jail the next day. Driver comes to Brian's apartment and announces he is there to arrest Damien. Damien asks for an official charge and Driver says something about not living with his parents. Although Damien doesn't believe this is a criminal offense, he doesn't know enough to dispute the charge. He is taken back to the Crittenden County Jail. Driver chains him to a chair and questions him about Latin texts and odd objects that Damien had never seen before. Damien is forced to spend several more days in jail, wondering why Driver has picked up on him as a target of his obsession. When he is released from jail, Damien is sent back to the institution. Again Damien's sense of humor, even in his most dire situations, comes out as he describes the reactions of the other patients in the ward to him coming in chained and shackled. They get the feeling that he is a mad man. He indicates that it is bad when even the crazy question your sanity.

The psychiatrist can see no reason why Damien has been brought back to them and he does not go into Driver's obsession with him. He is discharged after two weeks. To his horror, Jack Echols has been contacted to pick him up. Since he is the adoptive father, the court has placed Damien into Jack's custody.



# Chapters Fifteen and Sixteen

## Chapters Fifteen and Sixteen Summary and Analysis

In Chapter Fifteen, Damien switches back to his memories of his time in jail. He tells of a tour of kids being brought through in an attempt to scare them. Damien debates whether or not the worst offenders are really on Death Row. He believes the punishment is based on the amount of publicity that a crime gets with many of the worst offenders sentenced to lighter jail times just because their crimes didn't make the paper. Damien hates the tours because of the way people stand around and stare at him as if he is on display. He has learned to retreat to other places in his mind to avoid the disgust that he feels during these visits. He describes himself as sometimes being a ghost in his own body.

In Chapter Sixteen, after he has been released from the second psychiatric hospital, Jack and Damien move into a tiny trailer in Lakeshore. Damien can tell his adoptive father doesn't want him, but feels like he has no choice in the matter. Driver has told Jack that Damien has to check in at his office once weekly. Driver uses these meetings to question Damien about satanic activity. Damien notes during this time there was one good thing that Jack did for him. While he had a stretch of no work roofing, Jack went with Damien to Driver's office. With Jack there, Driver wouldn't question Damien. After a month of this, Driver appears to give up and tells Damien he doesn't need to come back.

Meanwhile, Damien gets his GED. He passes the test with flying colors. He thinks his life is dull but finds out that Driver is still pressing his issue as he learns from one of the neighborhood boys that Driver is at the Lakeshore store asking questions about Damien. Driver has asked where Damien lived and told the other boys to stay away from him. The last time they see Driver before they are arrested Jason and Damien are walking home from a high school football game. He stops the teens and asks where they are going and what they are doing. When he lets them go, to head for Jason's place to watch movies. Driver uses this against them during their trial. In his version of the story, Jessie Misskelley is with them and they are dressed in satanic garb.

Damien's life with Jack becomes even worse when Jack gets Damien a job with the same roofing company with which he works. In order to get away from Jack, Damien goes to the Social Security office and has himself declared disabled on the grounds of mental instability. For this reason, he is not allowed to work. Meanwhile, Damien's paternal grandparents move to West Memphis and Damien spends much time keeping them company. While visiting there, he gets calls from his mother and father. Damien describes the calls as not unpleasant, but he remains wary of them.

Domini skips school sometimes to spend time with Damien. They restart their sexual relationship. One day, Domini calls Damien and tells him to come over. Even before he gets there, Damien knows what has happened. Domini is pregnant.



# Chapters Seventeen and Eighteen

## Chapters Seventeen and Eighteen Summary and Analysis

In Chapter Seventeen, Damien again writes from jail. His tone in these entries is nostalgic and longing for the life he knew as a young boy. At the same time, he notes that the people of West Memphis are terribly cruel to people who stand out. He indicates he has learned it is best to shuffle along with the others and do nothing to stand out. He describes the south as a place where morality and dreams are drowned out by greed and hatred.

In Chapter Eighteen, Damien turns eighteen. Domini and her mother have moved to a trailer in Lakeshore. Jack has continued to get angrier and angrier with Damien. During the middle of a tirade one night, Damien gets up and leaves. He goes to Domini's trailer to spend the night. He moves his things there the following day. They manage to pay the rent and buy a few things for the baby. Because they have no car, Damien is unable to get a decent job. They have agreed they need to get married, but make no solid plans. Damien learns that his parents are moving back to Arkansas.

After his parents settle in, Damien begins spending time with them. He has realized that he feels sorry for them because they do not realize there is a different, better kind of life than the one they are living. Although he does not plan to abandon Domini, Damien finds out where Deanna is attending church and goes there just to see her. She looks at him, then looks away only once during the service. He watches as her family gets into their car and drives away. As he walks away the preacher yells at him. He asks if the cross pin on his jacket is a satanic emblem. It isn't, but Damien is told not to come there and make people uncomfortable.



# Chapters Nineteen and Twenty

## Chapters Nineteen and Twenty Summary and Analysis

In Chapter Nineteen, Damien is spending more time at his parents' house as he and Domini have been arguing. He is eating a bowl of Fruit Loops when he sees the news account of three eight-year-old boys murdered near Lakeshore in West Memphis. Rumors abound that the murders are connected with Satanism. Soon, two cops come to question Damien privately at his house. Damien recalls that instead of questioning him about the murders they ask him about the Bible, the sorts of book that he reads and whether or not he's heard plans to sacrifice children. They take a picture of Damien, which he believes that they use to plant ideas in the minds of the people whom they question. They continue to come to Domini's house, Damien's parents' house and Jason's house daily even though they lie in the trial and say they did not.

Damien adds that he believes the police fed an already scared public lies and stories which they believed because they were too ignorant to know the truth. People begin making up evidence to share with the police. The police begin taking Damien to the department and questioning him there. This continues for a month. Even though Damien's grandmother sells her wedding rings to hire a lawyer for Damien, the police later claim Damien never ask for the lawyer. Damien says that in reality, the police would not let the man in. Although Damien tries to cooperate with the cops, they become more belligerent and hateful. During his last interview at the police station before he was officially arrested, the police keep him there for eight hours with no food and no water in an attempt to force a confession out of him. They let him go only when he demands they charge him or let him go.

On June 3, Damien, Jason, Michelle and Domini have settled in for an evening of movies when the police beat on the door. When Damien opens the door, all three cops are pointing guns at him. He is arrested and taken to a car before he realizes Jason is being arrested as well. Damien tells his reader that at this point he still didn't believe that he could be convicted for a crime that he didn't commit. Once at the station, the cops tell Damien that his friend, whom Damien believes is Jason, has already confessed and that he needed to tell his story to keep from taking all of the blame. As Damien has no idea what the man is talking about, he feels lost. When Damien won't talk, they put him in a cell but continue to check in with him every so often to make sure he hasn't decided to confess.

Damien is told to change into a ragged police uniform that is too big for him and taken to court to be arraigned the next day. Damien is so scared he doesn't hear the three murder charges against him, but he does plead not guilty as his lawyer has advised him. He asks the judge to read the confession, but the judge will not read it out loud. He instead asks for a recess to allow Damien to read it to himself. He learns that it was Jessie Misskelley who made the confession. He can tell from reading the confession





that Jessie had just agreed to what the cops had asked him as many of the statements contradicted one another.

Damien is angered by the entire experience that he and his friends were put through. He has not doubt that Jessie would have confessed after the treatment he had received. He loses respect for the law and the justice system as they are revered by the public, yet they torment the handicapped and kids. He has learned that corrupt cops are the rule, not the exception. He believes that he and his friends were used to benefit the jobs and political ambitions of those in the justice system.

In the next section of the story, Damien argues that he believes no one stepped forward to expose the charges, confession and trial as being false because all those in the police and justice system were all covering for one another. It turns out that the West Memphis drug task force was in charge of the investigations. This force was already in trouble with the FBI and didn't need any more attention drawn to them. Damien believes they arrest the teens because they see them as an easy conviction.

After their arraignment, the three teens are chained and shackled and led through a mob of angry public and members of the press. Damien remembers feeling as if the crowd wanted to crucify them on the spot. The cops put him in a car and tell him to stay down. He dry heaves in the back of the car. He is taken to the Monroe County Jail to await trial.

In Chapter Twenty, Damien is alone in his cell for about a week until he is joined by Chad, also on trial for murder. Chad appears to be retarded. He is worried about his family. In an attempt to keep from being sacrificed by the members of the justice system Damien saves up his antidepressants until he has more than enough to kill himself. He takes the pills and writes a note to Domini. He makes the mistake of not hiding from Chad what he is doing and Chad warns the guards. He is taken to the hospital where his stomach is pumped.

The next day at the hospital Damien's court appointed lawyer comes to introduce himself. Damien sees him only three more times before the trial, which he believes is pitifully little considering the charges he was facing. Damien had trusted the lawyer to have Damien's best interests in mind. Looking back now, Damien realizes the lawyer was paid by the court system, not an ideal pick of someone who would point out the massive mistakes the court and police had already made. He describes the court system as a snake that will eventually strangle itself to death.

When Damien is returned to prison from the hospital, he is put in a padded cell. He is allowed no clothes but his underwear. It is cold and boring. Meanwhile, he is visited by Ron Lax and Glori Shettles who work as private investigators. They have requested to be the court appointed investigators on his case. Damien admits that he didn't understand at the time how this couple could help with his case.

After a week in a padded cell, Damien is returned to his old cell with Chad. They have been joined by two other cellmates. The men spend their time playing games and





sharing snacks. The guards are polite and treat the inmates as real people, which fools Damien into thinking that all guards will be that way. Damien's family and Domini comes to visit him once a week. Damien is not allowed to go to the hospital for his son's birth. He is only informed by a guard that he is a father of a son. She brings the baby for him to see weekly but Damien doesn't get to hold his son until the day of the trial, as a stunt for the press. Ron and Gloria tell Damien they feel certain that he will be convicted of murder but hope to win an appeal down the road. Although Ron does find all the problems with Damien's case, his lawyers choose not to follow up on the information. His court appointed lawyers never even try to prove Damien's alibi.

Although he had felt at the time that Ron and Gloria had really cared about his case, he later learns that they, too, were paid by the court system and were part of the scheme. Their job was to make the accused feel hopeful, which is what Damien writes that the two did for him.

In Jessie's trial, Jessie's confession is the only evidence that the prosecution has. The presence of a confession, even though it was a bad one, had already made the court believe the three were guilty. Jessie is sentenced to life plus two twenty-two year sentences.

Damien learns that an HBO documentary is being made about the case, conviction and trial. Although they had hoped for an expose on Satanism, they found a different story entirely. The two filmmakers realize quickly that the three teens did not commit the crimes of which they were accused. A few weeks before his trial Damien is transferred to the Craighead County Jail where he is put in a cellblock by himself. He wishes that he could be in the cell with Jason so they could talk things over. As Damien waits for his trial, his despair gets deeper and deeper.



# Chapters Twenty-one and Twenty-two

## Chapters Twenty-one and Twenty-two Summary and Analysis

In Chapter Twenty-one, the hatred for Damien and Jason is so strong that on the first day of their trials, they wear bulletproof vests on their trip to court. As the days pass, though, Damien notices supporters begin to appear in the crowd. Damien writes that of all the people at the trial, the reporters were the worst because of the way they distorted the events and sometimes even told complete lies about what had taken place in the trial. For instance, the media had made a big deal reporting on the teeth marks found on the bodies of the dead boys, but never mentioned the finding that the teeth marks did not match Damien's teeth.

The HBO production crew is allowed to film the trials. They have also talked to Damien, Jason and Jessie extensively before the trials. Damien finds the HBO people and their crew comforting and familiar in the courtroom full of angry people. He refers to the trial not necessarily as a trial, but as a formality to get out of the way before he could be pronounced guilty.

Jason and Damien are found guilty after nearly a month long trial. When the guilty verdict is read, Domini begins to cry and is escorted from the courtroom. The following day, Damien is sentenced to death.

In Chapter Twenty-two, it takes three hours for Damien to be transferred to Tucker. Damien says that he is saved from being put to death on May 5 only by a hair because his own attorney were too incompetent to realize that they needed to file a motion to be granted a stay of execution.

When he arrives at the prison, Damien learns that the man who takes charge of him actually had very little authority. Despite this, the man screams at Damien reminding him of a baby Hitler. The first morning, Damien gets a care package from a guy upstairs named Frankie Parker, a Zen Buddhist. In this section, Damien also describes the men in the cells next to him. He says that the first few weeks of prison are made doubly miserable because he is withdrawing from the antidepressants that he had been receiving. Although his attorneys told him they would file an appeal, he writes that the men did nothing to really help him understand or participate in his own defense.

Damien admits that he granted interviews to a few members of the media who twisted his words and cut and spliced interview information to get what they wanted out of the interviews. He believes he was also punished by the guards because he was trying to get his story out through the media sources. They destroy everything in his cell and also plant a knife in his bunk. One day he is taken to the warden's office and choked as the warden lectures him about how "sick" he is. He is sent to solitary confinement for no reason. At other times, five guards team up to beat him. The misery does not end until



word gets to a deacon in the Catholic Church who demands that Damien's abuse end or that he would tell publicly what was happening.

He remembers a horrible incident where two guards had been abusing a inmate who finally cracked. He stabbed the guards with a knife made from a piece of chain link fence. The memory of the two guards lying in their own blood was a picture that Damien writes that he will never forget. He adds that the inmate, Kurt, looked even worse after twenty guards finished beating him.



# Chapters Twenty-three and Twenty-four

## Chapters Twenty-three and Twenty-four Summary and Analysis

In Chapter Twenty-three, people begin to send Damien cards and letters indicating how sorry they are for what the police have done to him after the HBO film *Paradise Lost* begins to circulate. It is also because of this documentary that Damien meets Lorri Davis, the woman who becomes his wife. When Lorri first reaches out to him, she apologizes for invading his privacy, something that others did not feel they needed to do because he was in prison. They begin to write to one another nearly on a daily basis. Six months after they begin writing, Lorri and Damien see one another for the first time. He explains his feelings for Lorri and tells his reader how he knew that he was in love with Lorri.

Damien also describes the way that Lorri has changed his life. She is very different from him in that she is well schooled and well traveled. She teaches him the art of subtlety, which he strives to perfect. The two are not allowed to touch one another until the day of their wedding. They are married in a Buddhist ceremony at the jail. After this they are allowed one three-hour visit on a weekly basis, but even then, these visits are chaperoned. After their marriage, Lorri takes charge of Damien's case and fights to get an appeal of his charges.

Lorri's parents accept Damien and visit him often even though he is a death row inmate. In return, Damien's son loves Lorri and she often enjoys spending time with him and bringing him to visit Damien. Although it may seem hard to believe, Damien believes that all of his struggles as well as the punishment of prison has been worthwhile to him because it brought Lorri to him.

Next, Damien describes the people whom he sees in the visitation area. He speaks of the way that some people are uncomfortable when they visit their loved ones and don't seem to know what to talk about. Others seem happy to leave while others are not as eager. Family members are separated, often not allowed to touch or hug one another. Damien's father stopped visiting after his first year in jail. His mother visits infrequently. He remembers his and Lorri's horror when she visited once and told him of amputating her pet cat's leg. Even with the care his mother seemed to have for the cat, Damien describes his mother as being a person who is not able to feel things very deeply. He describes her attitude as being flippant.

In Chapter Twenty-four, Damien writes of his astrological sign being Sagittarius, the fire sign. He says that because of this, he has a need to be fed with a constant supply of new experiences and learning. He writes of the way he created his own routine in order to keep from being sucked in by the despair and loneliness prevalent in prison because of the vacuum that becomes of time in prison. To pass the time in a constructive



manner, Damien exercises and practices meditation. He will not allow himself to fall into the pattern of watching television from the time he gets up until he goes to bed.

He and Mike, another inmate, discuss the book "A Course in Miracles." After Mike is transferred to another prison, Damien continues his study alone learning about "The Golden Dawn." He takes college courses. He first is enthralled with psychology, then moves on to history, which he realizes is his real love, especially Italian history. He wishes that there was someone in the jail that he could carry on a conversation with but most are not only lack intelligence but are also barely capable of functioning normally. Many of the men don't take baths and smell too bad to get very close. Damien notes that insane and mentally retarded inmates are common on Death Row even though it is illegal for both of these types of people to be put to death for crimes. He describes how the insane people were often given drugs to make them understand they were going to be killed so that they could legally be put to death. Damien wonders about the morality of this practice.

In order to help himself through his time in jail, Damien often retreats into his own mind, a place that he refers to as the Land of Nod. He explains that he calls the world inside his mind by this title because this was the place that Cain was banished to in the Biblical story. Damien relates with Cain because he feels that he has been banished and exiled as well. It is through his writing and memories that Damien enters the Land of Nod.

In this chapter Damien also tells about his transfer from Tucker to Varner Super Maximum Security Unit in Grady. He has had two appeals, both of which have been turned down. Also during this time, Eddie Vedder of Pearl Jam begins supporting Damien. In 2004, he catches a glimpse of Jason through a window. Jason raises his hand to wave at Jason, then he is gone.



# Chapters Twenty-five and Twenty-six

## Chapters Twenty-five and Twenty-six Summary and Analysis

Chapter Twenty-five is a collection of loosely connected thoughts from Damien's time in jail. Damien reports the progress that he is trying to make by performing the HGA prayer ritual. He speaks of the work he puts into the ritual without having yet seen any payoff in the form of the angel for which he searches. Through this time he gives up on faith and magick. He is dreaming of being free, dream from which he does not want to wake up. He writes of being exhausted to the bone but still not willing to stop looking for the beauty in life which he describes as magick. Summer brings with it heat and mosquitoes. It is this time of the year that Damien hates. One day, a bird lights on Damien's windowsill. He believes that the bird is a sign. Damien's next entry is from the hand written page of Damien's journal dated November 11, 2005. Also included in a handwritten journal entry from February 19, 2006.

In Chapter 26, Damien admits that his twelfth year in jail was his worst. His health is deteriorating and the strain of his marriage is causing him stress. He says that baseball, a sport that reminds him of the magick that he enjoyed with his grandmother watching the games, was the thing that saved his life during that hard time. Also during this year, Lorri calls Damien with the news that evidence against Damien was being reviewed. It had been verified that the majority of the wounds on the boys' bodies were made after their deaths by animals. Damien indicates that it was because of the testing made possible by Jackson and Walsh, that paved the way to his actual release.

In a journal entry about the verification of the evidence, Damien writes that he is hesitant in believing that the news could help his case until he sees these rumors actually take material form.

In the next section of his book, Damien writes that he had always felt that he would eventually be released from jail. He admits that he never really had any real part in his own defense. That every time that he started to research his own case, he feels too empty and prefers to avoid it. He writes that it is Lorri who sees to it that his case moves forward. She finds Damien a new attorney whom she feels can keep Damien from getting killed. She begs and borrows money to pay the attorney.

The attorney, however, lied to Damien and Lorri, and suggested they go to talk to a mitigator. They believed this mitigator would help lessen Damien's sentence but instead, the mitigator creates a mental health report that becomes the most damning piece of evidence against Damien. He describes that a new law that was passed in 2001 about DNA testing was the key that would help prove Damien's innocence.

In the next section of this chapter, Damien writes about Henry Rollins, a man who is working to see that Damien is released from jail based on DNA evidence. Even with the

new interest being shown in his case, Damien admits that he is still scared sometimes that it will all fall through.

Meanwhile, as a result of the documentary *Paradise Lost*, Damien has been adopted by Cally, a psychologist also known as Mama Mouse. This lady first contacts Damien by mail after she watched the documentary. She often acts as a therapist for Damien during their visits and phone calls. In addition, she has also donated much money to Damien's defense account.

Damien changes subject abruptly and notes that he and Jason had corresponded through letters during their first few years in jail. From his writing it appears that Jason is treated in a much more cruel manner than Damien. For instance, Jason had to be hospitalized for a skull fracture after a man attacked him from behind. Damien writes that he, like Jason, was still a child when he first entered Death Row. As he has turned into a suspicious adult in jail, he has learned that the world is not his friend. He has also learned that once a person is in jail, the rest of the world often forgets them and goes on with their lives. Damien describes those in jail as the true living dead.

Also in this section Damien speaks of the negative morphic field that he experiences in prison. He writes that he and Lorri are becoming frustrated and worn down by their attempts to get him out of jail. Damien's tone as he writes this section of the novel is similarly downcast. It appears that his lack of spirit and spark is transferred even through his writing as he struggles to keep from being overwhelmed by all of the negative that is around him.

One of the entries that Damien has included in his book is written about his memories of Christmas Eve and Christmas Day with his family. He remembers the family coming for Christmas Eve parties and he and his sister opening their gifts at midnight. It has been 14 years since he has been able to celebrate Christmas though he remembers all of the special tastes, smells and feelings of the season. As he did with Halloween, Damien shares with his reader a group of songs that he associates with Christmas.

In February, Damien is awoken at 2 a.m. by a prison guard beating on his door to give him his breakfast tray. It is 20 degrees outside. Cold is a feeling that brings on nostalgia for Damien because he was cold so much growing up. He admits that he likes the cold. Other topics that Damien discusses in this chapter of his book include his idea of spirituality, the vision and health problems with which he is suffering as a result of being in jail, and the ways the prisoners are forced to do what he calls slave labor. He also speaks of the many things he is not allowed in prison, such as salt, because it is considered a security risk.

Also in this section of the novel, in May, Damien learns that his case will be heard in September. He asks people to come to the hearing. In June, Damien is tickled to learn that Axl Rose has been seen wearing a WM3 t-shirt. On Sept. 30, Damien hears that his hearing went well even though he does not know all of the details yet.



# Chapters Twenty-seven and Twenty-eight

## Chapters Twenty-seven and Twenty-eight Summary and Analysis

Damien's love of music becomes important in Chapter Twenty-seven as he writes about his choices for a Halloween soundtrack from his jail cell. Note that many of these entries are the original journal entries that Damien wrote while in jail. These original entries can be identified because they are printed in italics. They also have date headings indicating on which day they were written. In his next entry, Damien describes the different seasons in jail. They have the rat season and the cricket season. On October 12, the inmates are preparing for rat season.

The cold that is beginning reminds Damien of home. He notes that one of the things that he misses most about normal life is the snow. He writes that he wants to see a Mannheim Steamroller and Trans-Siberian Orchestra concert. Damien also comments in the same entry that he has watched a debate in which McDaniel appears to be giving out political double talk. He claims that he is not scared by the new evidence that has surfaced in Damien's trial yet a representative from his office has said argued that the new evidence should not be included in the trial. Damien decides not to become angry, but instead begs those reading his journals not to vote for McDaniel.

In the entry that he writes on Halloween, Damien discusses the meaning of Halloween. He writes not only about the common understandings of the background of the holiday, but also includes the way the Chinese and Mexicans celebrate this day. This shows Damien's intelligence and his ability and willingness to learn about and research things.

In a November entry, Damien indicates that he, Jason and Jessie will be going back to court for a new trial. In December, Damien writes that his birthday is approaching. He will have spent half of his life in jail. In a February entry, Damien writes that he has a brief moment when he remembers what the sunset looks like. As he writes, Damien knows that it is Super Bowl Sunday. He describes it in his cockeyed sense of humor as being the "not-so-bright child that would result from the mating of Thanksgiving and the Fourth of July."

Also in February, Damien receives a letter from John Kerry asking for a donation to keep the Republicans from violating his civil rights. He is amazed by the irony of the request since his civil rights have already been so badly violated. In March Damien learns that the hearing has been pushed back to December. Damien doesn't write again until July when he admits his anger at those that are dragging his case out so long. In August Damien writes that if he is still in prison in December, he will celebrate his nineteenth birthday in prison.





In Chapter Twenty-eight, Damien learns from Lorri that McDaniel and Ellington have agreed to release him, Jason and Jessie from prison if they all plead guilty. Braga counteroffers that the men be allowed to use an Alford plea to plead guilty. In this way, they can maintain their innocence while still pleading guilty. This plea is sometimes referred to as a best interest plea. It is in the person's best interest to plead guilty even though they maintain that they are innocent. Damien describes the week after he learned of this option as "pure hell." He believes that the prosecutors desperately wanted to avoid the hearing, which would probably result in a new trial.

At the attorney general's office, however, it is learned that Jason's lawyer has not spoken to him about the offer yet. Jason's lawyer seems to want to put the deal off. Damien and the others know that if any word gets out to the press, McDaniel and the others will drop the plea agreement. Because Jason is actually in a good position in jail, with a job and in prison school, he does not want to plead because he believes that he will be exonerated. But in order for the deal to go through, all three men must plead guilty. Damien, however, and his supporters are afraid that Damien will not last that long. Lorri has Eddie Vedder call Holly, who is Jason's girlfriend, to get her to try to encourage Jason to take the plea. Eleven days after Damien first heard the possibility of a plea deal, Jason finally agrees to take the deal. The following day Damien is shackled and led to a van. He does not know where he is going. Jessie is sitting in the van. They drive to Tucker and pick up Jason. The guards driving the van stop at a store and buy the three Mountain Dews and candy bars. They are taken to a jail in Jonesboro where they are put into separate cells to wait for the hearing the following day. The next morning, the men dress in street clothes and are shackled the last time to go to their hearing.

Damien writes that he remembers little of the hearing. That the noise, people and emotional frenzy were too much for him. The men are called to give their own guilty pleas. They are allowed to walk, unshackled, into the courtroom. After they are declared free, Damien writes that Judge Laser makes the comment that he believes is the first sign that the entire court system is not corrupt. He indicates the plea deal is a tragedy not only because it will not bring the dead children back, but also because it won't make up for the time the three men spent in prison.



# Chapters Twenty-nine and Epilogue

## Chapters Twenty-nine and Epilogue Summary and Analysis

In Chapter Twenty-nine, Damien writes that he has been out of jail for six months. He is still struggling to adjust to the world outside prison. He writes of the sensory overload that he felt when being in the courtroom for his guilty plea. He details what happens to himself and to Jason as soon as they are out of the courtroom. They are given ID's and taken to a hotel suite at Madison Hotel in Memphis where a buffet has been set up for them. While he and Jason are involved in this huge party, Jessie Misskelley goes back to his father's trailer in West Memphis. Damien is finally able to rest, and to spend time with his wife.

Once he is in New York, Damien indicates that he was disoriented because he had spent so much time in jail. He has difficulty just walking because he had spent so long in a tiny cell, only let out with chains and shackles on his arms and legs. He writes that it was Lorri who helped him survive this period in his life as he struggled to return to life in the world outside of prison. Even though he tries to rekindle his friendship with Jason, Damien indicates that Jason's doubt of his innocence, indicated at the end of the documentary made by HBO, has affected their relationship.

Damien writes of going to the Sundance film festival to see the premiere of the film *West of Memphis*. Members of two of the victims' families are at the festival and Damien describes his feelings as he is able to sit down to dinner with these people. Seth also comes to Sundance. The two are trying to create a bond. Damien describes his reaction, his severe pain attacks when he returns to the south to promote his film in Nashville.

In the final section of the last chapter, Damien describes his struggle to move forward and leave the title and feelings of being one of the West Memphis Three behind him. Even with his desire to move ahead, Damien knows that he will not be able to fully move ahead until he and the others are exonerated for the murders. Work continues to progress on his case, but more than this, Damien indicates that he hopes to be able to share with people the magick that he learned while he was in prison. He indicates that he will use whatever media that he needs, from tarot cards to photography to share what he has learned in jail.

In Damien's Epilogue, he refers to the two things that he believes are unstoppable: love and intelligence. He writes again of the isolation that one is subjected to in prison. He describes moon water, a way that he and Lorri stayed close to one another even though forces tried to keep them apart.



# Characters

## Damien Echols aka Michael Hutchison

Damien Echols is the main character, writer, and narrator of this novel. While Michael Hutchison is the name on Damien's birth certificate, he allows his stepfather, Jack Echols to formally adopt him. He changes his first name to Damien, after his patron saint, when he becomes Catholic. Damien and two other teenaged boys are convicted and found guilty of murdering three boys in West Memphis, Arkansas in the early 1990s. Damien is thought by the police to be the ringleader of the murders of the boys. For this reason, he is sentenced to death in a 1993 trial. He spends 18 years on Death Row before he is released from jail on time served following an Alford plea or best interest plea.

In his story, Damien shares his memories from childhood as well as the background leading up to his arrest for murder. He explains the circumstances behind much of the evidence used against him in the trial. This includes the way he got negative attention from people in his neighborhood because of the way that he chose to dress and wear his hair, and the type of music to which he listened.

Damien also explains the way that the religious hypocrisy of the time in addition to the press coverage of his arrest and trial affected the outcome. He talks of his experiences in jail as well as his conversion to Buddhism. Damien also writes of the things that help him keep his sanity during his years in jail. One of these things is his wife, Lorri, who writes to him after she watches the HBO documentary *Paradise Lost*. The two are married while Damien is still in jail. Lorri fights to have Damien released from jail.

Also in his book, Damien includes his feelings about being released from jail and the struggle that he faces as he tries to become part of society again. As he writes his book, Damien indicates that he does not want people to read what he has written because they are looking to see a freak but because they want to learn about a different way of life. He hopes that people will be inspired by his story.

## Jerry Driver

Jerry Driver is the juvenile officer for Crittenden County. Damien first meets Driver when he and Deanna are arrested after they spend the night in an abandoned trailer. During his first questioning session, Driver asks Damien what he knows about Satanists and Satanic activity in his town. Driver argues that Damien should be kept in jail after his first offense instead of being allowed to go home. He also suggests that Damien be put in a mental institution during this time.

While Damien is in the institution, Driver leads Deana and her family to believe that Damien is the leader of a satanic group that has committed sacrifices and even burned down churches. When Damien tries to call Deanna from Oregon, Driver tries to



convince the Oregon cops that they need to arrest Damien but the Oregon officers see no grounds on which to arrest him.

When Damien returns to Arkansas from Oregon, Driver arrests him the second day that he is there. Damien asks on what grounds he is being arrested and Driver says something about him not living with a parent, which Damien does not believe is a legitimate charge, but goes with Driver anyway. Driver again gets a court order for Damien's institutionalization. Youths who live in the area of Lakeshore, such as Bo, tell Damien that Driver is continually out questioning the neighbors and youth about him. Damien believes that it was because of the influence that Driver had with the West Memphis Police Department that these officers came after Damien and his friends instead of looking for the real killer.

## **Grandmother Francis Gosa (Nanny)**

Damien's earliest memories are of being with his grandmother, whom he called "Nanny." Francis Gosa is not Damien's biological grandmother. Her husband had an affair with a Native American woman who was Damien's mother's mother. Because Nanny was not able to have children of her own, however, she raised the child, Damien's mother, as her own.

After Damien's sister was born, Damien is sent to live with his grandmother because his mother cannot handle having two children. Nanny would unintentionally scare Damien by warning him not to let bedbugs bite after he went to bed. She also gave him the memories that he associates with home and magick and a time that he was loved and secure. He writes that some of his favorite memories come from watching baseball games with his grandmother.

When Nanny marries a second time, Damien and his family go to live with Nanny and her new husband in his house. Later she moves to a trailer in Lakeshore Estates. Damien's family again moves in with his Nanny again after she has a heart attack then has to have a leg amputated because of a blood clot. Although they are living in a trailer park, Damien considers himself to be in the lap of luxury while living in his grandmother's trailer. It is Nanny who buys Damien his first rosary. She also teaches him how to play church hymns on the organ.

## **Lorri Davis**

After Damien had been on Death Row for nearly two years, he received a letter from Lorri Davis. She was a woman from New York who had seen the documentary about Damien's case. She impresses Damien because she apologizes to him for invading his privacy by writing to him. About six months after the first letter, Lorri comes to visit Damien in person. Their first visits are through a sheet of glass. They are not allowed to have a visit where they touch one another until December of 1999 at their wedding ceremony in the jail. In 1997, Lorri had moved from New York to Little Rock to be closer to Damien.



Lorri takes charge of Damien's case. She represents him in all aspects of his life, even after he has been released from prison, he trusts her to take care of business out in public. Lorri would often meet Seth, who had been sent on a plane to see Damien, and spend time with him in addition to taking him to see his father. Lorri works on the outside to help get Damien released from jail. She believes that he is not guilty of the crimes of which he has been accused. Lorri educates herself about law and finds a lawyer whom she believes will be capable of defending Damien properly. Damien credits much of the success of being released from prison to Lorri.

## Joe Hutchison

Joe Hutchison is Damien's father. Damien recalls his relationship with his father as being a loving relationship when he was a small child. Damien's parents split up and his father stays in touch with him for a short time but his father disappears from Damien's life until after he is arrested the first time. Damien's sister locates their father and reunites their parents. When Damien's father visits him at the jail, he has to ask to be sure it is Damien because it has been so long since he has seen him.

Damien's father has apparently fallen into money as he has a nice, new car and big apartment in Oregon. He arranges for Damien, his mother and sister to move back to Oregon with him. Damien tries to rekindle his relationship with his father but finds himself angry with his father when he tries to scold Damien for winding up in jail. Damien is angry with his father for abandoning him and his family for a better life. He knows that his father could not have survived the life that he has lived since his father abandoned him.

## Deanna

Damien formally meets Deanna at one of his sister's chorus concerts. Deanna's parents are strict with her and Deanna rebels by studying and participating in Wiccan activities. It is her diary of information about Wicca that is used against Damien when he is arrested after the two run away together. When Deanna's parents learn that she has been sleeping with Damien, they decide she should not see him anymore. Deanna breaks off the relationship for awhile, but then comes to Damien asking to be taken back. She suggests that they run away together and Damien agrees. The first day, they make it only to an abandoned trailer on the Lakeshore property. They learn through Jason that Deanna's parents have already notified the police that she is missing and that many people are out looking for the two of them. Damien and Deanna are arrested when police find them in the trailer together. Damien tries to call Deanna once after this incident and then visits at the church that she attends once, but is unable to get Deanna to talk to him.



## **Pam Hutchison Echols**

Pam Hutchison Echols is Damien's mother. Damien describes her as being the best mother that she knew how to be. He remembers her taking care of him when he was sick and also that she was very involved in his school activities. Damien, however, does indicate that his mother was a sort of a drama queen and always seemed to need to draw attention to herself. He explains that she developed a relationship with Jack Echols because she needed someone to pay attention to her. Jack Echols fit this bill and even though he was cruel and unfriendly, she married him, almost in defiance to Damien. Although Damien tries to maintain a relationship with his mother after he is jailed, he writes that everything that they spoke of was soon public knowledge. He had to be very careful what he said to his mother when he talked with her.

## **Jack Echols**

Jack Echols is Damien's stepfather. When they get married, Damien's mother convinces Damien to allow his stepfather to legally adopt him so that Damien's real dad won't get in trouble for not paying child support. Although Jack attends church regularly, he is cruel and hateful. Damien does his best to avoid the man and his cruel attitude. After Damien is arrested the first time, his sister accuses Jack of molesting her. For this reason, the family is split up. Damien finds himself living with Jack again after he is released from the psychiatric unit the second time because Jack is one of Damien's legal guardians. Jack does his best to make Damien's life miserable. One day after Damien has turned 18, he walks out of Jack's trailer and returns only to collect his things.

## **Michelle Hutchison**

Michelle Hutchison is Damien's sister. The two seemed not to be terribly close. She is younger than Damien. Damien is jealous of her because she was born in Memphis instead of West Memphis as he was. After Damien is arrested the first time, Michelle accuses her stepfather of sexually molesting her, and then looks up her father. This prompts the breakup of Damien's mother and stepfather, and causes his mother and father to try to rekindle their relationship. While Damien is in jail and after he is released, he asks his sister not to speak to the press but she does so anyway. He writes that many of the things that she told the press about him were not true.

## **Jason Baldwin**

Damien meets Jason Baldwin in 1986. The two become best friends. They share a love of heavy metal music and skateboarding. Jason is with Damien and Deanna when they decide to run away on the last day of school. He walks with them to the abandoned trailer, then goes and gets drinks for them. He learns while he is out that the police are looking for the two of them. After leaving his suitcase at Domini's apartment, Damien's



next step is to go to tell Jason that he is back in town. On the night of June 3, Jason and Damien are together when they are arrested. Jason is sentenced to life without parole plus forty years for his alleged part in the murders.

## **Domini**

Domini is a student who transfers into Damien's school in the middle of the year. Damien and Domini meet up at another guy's apartment and Domini comes to see Damien at his home later that day. Domini and Damien become close friends. They have a sexual relationship that results in the birth of Damien's one son, Damian Seth. Although Damien admits that he never felt a burning love for Domini, he planned to do right by her and marry her but then he was arrested for the murders. When Damien first returns to Arkansas from Oregon, he walks to Domini's house to leave his suitcase while he looks for a place to live. Domini is with Damien on the night that he is arrested.

## **Scott Davidson and Val Price**

Scott Davidson and Val Price are the two lawyers who are assigned to Damien's case by the court. Damien reports that while they were preparing for the trial, the two did not follow up on any leads or information that they found or were given. They called no witnesses who could have testified about Damien's alibi the night of the murders.

Damien indicates that Davidson first comes to see him while he is in the hospital after his suicide attempt. He stays for 10 minutes during this first visit. Damien reports that he only sees his lawyer three more times before his trial, with no visit lasting longer than 30 minutes.

## **Jessie Misskelley**

Jessie Misskelley is a boy who lives in the Lakeshore trailer complex but is not even really a friend of Damien's. Damien spends time at Jessie's trailer once when he is looking for Jason. Damien's impression of Jessie is that he is not very intelligent. Damien describes him as being like a child. Jessie is the one from whom the detectives get the false confession. Damien holds no grudge against Jessie because he believes that the detectives took advantage of his retardation. For his part in the crimes, Jessie is convicted and sentenced to life plus two twenty-year sentences.

## **John Fogleman**

John Fogleman is the prosecutor for the case against Damien, Jessie and Jason. Fogleman uses Jessie's "confession" as his only piece of solid evidence. Later when Fogleman runs for public office, Damien writes in his journal begging for people to vote against the man. He also describes the way that Fogleman and the judge would tell jokes about him during breaks in the trial, describing him as a person with no empathy.





Damien indicates that he believes that the evil aura around Fogleman has gotten worse through the years.

## **Joe Berlinger and Bruce Sinofsky**

Joe Berlinger and Bruce Sinofsky are the two filmmakers with whom the HBO executive Shelia Nevins shares the story of the West Memphis Three hoping that it will be a great story of Satanism and murder. The two realize after interviewing the residents of West Memphis that the three teens had been put on trial for crimes that they did not commit. They produce an HBO documentary titled Paradise Lost based on the story they discover.

## **James Sudbury**

James Sudbury is a cop who accompanies Steve Jones when he visits Damien to question him about the murders at his home. Sudbury often acted as the "bad" cop when two cops would question Damien in tandem. Sudbury is one of the cops who comes to arrest Damien the night of June 3. He is the one who beats on the door and demands to be let in. He is the one who handcuffs Damien and loads him into a cop car.

## **Ron Lax and Glori Shettles**

Ron Lax and Glori Shettles are private investigators who are hired by the court to work on Damien's case. Lax and Shettles tell Damien that they believe that they will lose the original case, but that they have high hopes for an appeal later on down the road. Although he had originally believed that the two were really trying to help him, he later learns that they were hired to give him false hope.

## **Judge Laser**

Judge Laser is the judge who presides over the hearings in which Damien and the other men are released from jail on an Alford plea. It is his speech to the audience after the three men leave the courtroom that makes Damien decide that the entire court system was not entirely corrupt.

## **Peter Jackson and Fran Walsh**

Peter Jackson and Fran Walsh donate money to Damien's defense after watching Paradise Lost. The two also produce a film, West of Memphis, that tells the story of the West Memphis Three.



## **Dustin McDaniel**

Damien believes that Dustin McDaniel, the attorney general working on Damien's case, is at the heart of everything that has gone wrong with his case. In one of his journals, he begs the public to vote for McDaniel's opponent.

## **Steve Braga**

Steve Braga is one of Damien's lawyers who is able to arrange his release from prison on an Alford plea.



## Objects/Places

### Tucker Maximum Security Unit

Tucker Maximum Security Unit is a prison Tucker, Arkansas in which Damien was incarcerated for nine years beginning in 1994.

### Music

When Damien was a child and teenager, he kept his sanity by retreating into music.

### Christmas Sacks

These Christmas sacks are given to inmates by various charitable and religious organizations. They often include candy, fresh fruit and toiletries. After several years, the sacks are outlawed by the jail administration.

### Skateboarding

Skateboarding is one of the things at which Damien discovers that he is good.

### Nanny's Trailer in Lakeshore

Damien and his family move into his Nanny's trailer in Lakeshore when she has to have her leg amputated after having a heart attack and a blood clot.

### Trench Coat

Damien finds a moth eaten trench coat in his family's shack as they are moving out. He adopts the coat as his new look.

### Monroe County Jail

The Monroe County Jail is where Damien is held while he is waiting to go on trial for murder.

### Halloween

Halloween is Damien's favorite holiday.



## **Deanna's Little Green Diary**

Deanna's little green diary in which she keeps information about Wicca is used as evidence against Damien in his trial even though Damien was not involved in witchcraft.

## **Skull Collection**

Damien's skull collection is one of the things that Driver confiscates from his trailer in Lakeshore. Damien had collected the skulls during his walks around the fields near the trailer park because he thought they looked cool.

## **June 3, 1993**

It is on the evening of June 3, 1993 when Damien and Jason are arrested for the murders of three neighborhood boys.

## **1200 mg of His Antidepressant**

While in jail awaiting his trial, Damien tries to overdose on 1,200 mg of his antidepressant.

## **A Stick Covered in a Red Substance and Hair**

This stick is found in Damien's old trailer. He knows that it is a paint stick his mother used to punish her pet dogs but the press insists that it is evidence against Damien.

## **March 18, 1994**

March 18, 1994 is the day on which Jason and Damien are found guilty of murder.

## **SK931**

SK931 is Damien's prisoner identification number.

## **Paradise Lost**

Paradise Lost is the name of the HBO documentary made about the case of the West Memphis Three.



## **December 1999**

December 1999 is when Lorri and Damien are married in a Buddhist wedding ceremony.

## **August 22, 2003**

It is on August 22, 2003 that Damien is transferred from Tucker to the Varner Super Maximum Security Unit in Grady.

## **Exhibit 500**

This exhibit was a mental health report put together by a mitigator accusing Damien as being schizophrenic, bipolar, suicidal and suffering from hallucinations.

## **Alford Plea**

It is through an Alford Plea that Jason, Damien and Jessie are released from jail as they await a new trial.

## **Moon Water**

It is through the use of Moon Water that Lorri and Damien feel connected and keep their marriage together even while Damien is in jail.



# Themes

## Religion

Religion figures strongly into Echols' story in both positive and negative ways. Once he is in jail, Damien uses Zen meditation to keep himself from giving into the anger and hatred that he feels immersed in while he is in jail. Damien and Lorri are married in a Buddhist wedding ceremony while he is in jail. Damien also writes of the way that it was very obvious in jail the people who were true Christians and those who were not. For instance, he refers to a lady named Anna who was a light in the darkness to all of the prisoners. The guards hated her because the inmates loved her so much. They would often not let Anna in but she would stay at the doors until she was allowed in.

Damien writes about the way that he and the other inmates are treated by people who claim to be Christians. He speaks of packages that he refers to as "drive by preachings." He believes that these envelopes full of religious paraphernalia are sent in an attitude of hatred and animosity that completely misses the mark of what Christianity is all about. Damien also writes that many of the Protestant preachers who visit the jail often won't even shake hands with the inmates, an indication to Echols that these men believe they are better than everyone else.

It is also the religious fervor of the people in West Memphis that seems to lead to Damien's arrest. The people are led to believe that Damien and his friends are satanic followers. Because of the boys' odd hairstyles, and their like of heavy metal music and black clothes they seem to fit the description of teens who might worship Satan. Damien believes that the religious people of the time lead their followers to blindly believe that Damien and his friends are guilty even though they have no concrete proof against them. In his book Damien states very clearly that he blames Christians for being held in jail as long as he was for a crime that he did not commit.

## Press

In his book, Damien also addresses the role of the press in his trial and conviction. He indicates that he believes that the press is responsible for determining the severity of a criminal's punishment. He indicates that if a trial makes the news simply because there is a slow news day, the people involved in the trial are more likely to get a harsher punishment. Damien also credits the press in his area with adding to the frenzy surrounding his trial. For instance, he writes that when the police found the bodies, they reported there were bite marks on the children. The press reported about these bite marks. When the police reported that the bite marks did not match the impressions that would have been made by Damien or the other boys' teeth, the press did not report that information.



While the press hurt Damien and his friends, they also helped their case in some ways. For instance, it was HBO's documentary *Paradise Lost* that drew much attention to the unfairness of the trial and the lack of evidence used to convict the boys. The film makers from HBO had visited West Memphis intending to bring back a story about Satan worship, sacrifices and murders. When they began investigating for their story, however, they found a completely different story. This story attracted many people who supported Damien and his friends both emotionally and financially. It because of this documentary that Damien's future wife reaches out to him.

## Life in Prison

Another theme that is important in Damien's book is his description of life in prison. In one of the earlier portions of his novel, Damien describes prison as a freak show. He says that most of the other prisoners, especially those on Death Row were either already crazy before they had been put in jail or became that way during their stay. Damien is also surprised by the way that the men often continue to perpetrate the same crimes that put them in prison to begin with. He cannot understand how these people do not learn from the consequences of their actions.

Damien also indicates that the worst part of jail is the way that the guards go out of their way to make the inmates feel as if there is no hope for them. He indicates that the feeling of despair and desolation is so strong in the jail that he must force himself to rise above the depression. While the other inmates fall into the habit of just watching television all day, Damien forces himself to exercise and to learn as much as he can. He also depends on Zen Buddhism and meditation to keep him from giving into his anger and depression. Even so, Damien's health becomes bad because of the unhealthy food and lack of exercise that he gets while in jail.

Although Damien doesn't dwell on the issue, he does mention the way that the guards abuse him while in jail. For some time, he was forced to stay in solitary confinement even though he had really done nothing wrong. Damien indicates that this was the guards' way of getting back at him because he had been trying to tell the media his real story. It is only when a Catholic deacon learns what is happening to Damien and threatens the guards with this knowledge that this form of abuse stops.



# Style

## Perspective

Damien writes his biography as well as the story of his conviction, time in prison, and release from jail from the first person point of view. He tells his story as if he is talking to a friend. In fact, at one point he addresses his reader directly and refers to his reader as a friend. His story, of course, is reliable in that it tells his view of his life and time in prison. Echols doesn't discuss the details of his trial or even a lot of the horrors that he must have experienced in jail, but instead focuses on the religious journey that he takes while in jail. He also spends a good deal of time writing about what he did and how hard he had to work to stay positive and relatively healthy while in jail.

Damien comes from a poor family. He has also stood out and been different from others because of his lack of money and trendy clothes, his odd black wardrobe, and unusual hairstyle. Because of his unusual habits, Damien has often experienced negative attention. He is especially perplexed, however, when the juvenile officer Jerry Driver seems to be obsessed with him. As a result of his experience with Driver, and his arrest for three murders that he did not commit, Damien is biased against both the justice system and the police.

Although he is poor and has not had many of the benefits that others have had, he is very intelligent. He is able to figure out why the justice system had honed in on him and his friends as suspects in the murder trial. He believes that because they are odd and eccentric, it is easy for the police, lawyers and judges to make them appear to be Satanic followers. Along with his intelligence, Damien also has a sharp sense of humor which may also have helped him to keep his sanity while in jail as well as during the early part of his life.

## Tone

Damien's story is told in very informal language. He writes his story as if he is talking with a friend. In fact, at one point in his book, Damien refers to a friend with whom he is chatting. This reference indicates that Damien intends his story to be very intimate and informal in tone.

One aspect of Damien's writing that the reader might notice is the way that his attitude seems to change through the course of his story. He characterizes himself in his teenage years as being a rebellious and almost reckless teenager. He has caught the negative attention of adults around him because of his unusual hairstyle and his habit of dressing in black with a trench coat. His writing about this period of his life seems agitated and is punctuated by a biting, sarcastic humor. As his time in jail begins, Damien seems to settle into a more thoughtful, centered personality. The reader can almost sense the way that Damien has grown and matured during his time in jail.



## Structure

The book includes the text of Damien's book as well as collection of photos of Damien and people who were important to him during the course of his time in prison and the fight to get him released. Also included in the book is an appendix of information about the case against Damien, Jason and Jessie. This information includes mistakes made in the trial, the investigation and the interrogation of all three teens.

The main text of Damien's story is divided into twenty-nine chapters and includes a prologue and an epilogue. The narrator tells his biography in a linear form from his earliest memories to his release from prison. This biography, however, is interspersed with information that Damien included in his journals while in prison. Some of these journals were taken by guards and Damien recreates them as he is best able to. Beginning in Chapter Twenty-five, Damien begins including journal entries in his book as they were written while he was in jail. These original entries are set apart from the rest of the novel because they are written in italics.





## Quotes

"I can't pinpoint exactly when I began to lose my flexibility, my ability to bounce back from an unsettling incident; I can only look back and see that it's gone. Going on trial for a crime I didn't commit screwed me up a bit, no doubt" (Chapter Two, p. 26).

"If I hadn't been sent to prison at such a young age there's no way I could ever have adapted to it. Prison is bad enough, but it's a million times worse when you know you did nothing to be here for" (Chapter Two, p. 27).

"My mother denied later that they treated me like this. She has a very convenient way of forgetting and rearranging the past to fit whatever view she currently wishes to promote, much like the history changers in George Orwell's 1984" (Chapter Four, p. 49).

"If I would have known then that in just a few short years I would be subjected to the same kind of witch hunt, that I would have some of the same accusations made against me, and that the same merciless zealots would imprison me and sentence me to death, then my heart probably would have burst of fright right on the spot. Who would have thought you could see the future by reading a book about the past" (Chapter Four, p. 56).

"Most people who spew hatred aren't very intelligent or motivated. They tend to be lazy, and if for some reason they are coaxed into picking up a pen, their messages are mostly incoherent and largely illiterate. Their spelling and sentence structure tends to be atrocious, so it's hard to take offense at anything they'd say even when they do write. After all, if they're not motivated or intelligent enough to research the simple spelling of a word in a dictionary, then you know they certainly aren't going to take the time to research the case" (Chapter Five, p. 62).

"Those with less curiosity or ambition just mumble that God works in mysterious ways. I intend to catch him in the act" (Chapter Six, p. 10).

"Somehow this was considered 'evidence.' A bad hairdo, a black wardrobe, teenage angst-ridden 'poetry,' and a taste for hair bands is enough to send you to prison. Death Row, no less" (Chapter Nine, p. 117).

"When I suggested it might help if he were slightly more articulate, he explained that all the neighborhood kids were looking for me like a pack of hounds, because the police had been looking for me, and they were now convinced they might receive some sort of reward for finding me. It seemed Deanna's parents had wasted no time in calling the authorities to report her missing once they realized skulduggery was afoot" (Chapter 12, p. 156).

"I look back now and find myself filled with a tremendous amount of anger at how unjust it all was. The punishment for a first-time breaking and entering charge and an



accusation of sexual misconduct didn't fit the crime by any stretch of the imagination" (Chapter 12, p. 163).

"My parents had been utterly convinced by strangers that their son was suicidal and mentally unstable, and their solution was to lock me up. My mother has made more than her fair share of stupid mistakes, but I believe this one was the most ridiculous. My relationship with my father also changed that night" (Chapter 13, p. 181).

"What made it even worse was that this time I knew I had done nothing wrong. I was being punished at the whim of an obsessive, delusional, power-hungry liar" (Chapter 14, p. 194).

"At least I was capable of knowing there was some other kind of life possible, even if I was having trouble achieving it" (Chapter 18, p. 215).

"Jerry Driver and his two cohorts, Jones and Murray, put a bug in the ear of the West Memphis police department, and they couldn't shake it. Instead of conducting a real murder investigation and checking the forensic evidence, the police started immediately chasing stories of black-robed figures that danced around bonfires and chanted demonic incantations" (Chapter 19, p. 219).

"I was kept there for eight hours. I was not allowed a drink of water, a bite of food, or even to use the restroom. They screamed and threatened me the entire time, trying to force me to make a confession. The psychological pressure was enormous. They would have kept me all night if I hadn't finally demanded they either charge me with a crime or let me go home" (Chapter 19, p. 222).

"It makes me sick and fills me with disgust to think about how the public trusts these people, who are in charge of upholding the law yet torture kids and the mentally handicapped" (Chapter 19, p. 227).

"Joe and Bruce both acknowledged that after speaking with locals, it was clear to them that the three of us were being put on trial for crimes we didn't commit" (Chapter 20, p. 244).

"In a later example of the hysteria, during a post-trial hearing, new evidence was presented - they had found teeth marks on one of the bodies, and they did not match my teeth. There was no mention of it in the next day's paper" (Chapter 21, p. 247).

"It's maddening to sit there hour after hour, day after day, on trial for something both you and the cops know you didn't do" (Chapter 21, p. 248).

"Jail is preschool. Prison is for those earning a Ph.D. in brutality" (Chapter Twenty-two, p. 251).

"The most potent and powerful means I had of entering the Land of Nod was through writing. Every day I disappeared into the pages of my journal, scribbling from margin to



margin, wallowing in the memories of a thousand December afternoons as my hand moved the pen" (Chapter Twenty-four, p. 299).

"Therefore it was ingrained in me, into the deepest levels of my being, to expect there to be magick in my life. I had all the faith in the world that magick would guide me and save me" (Chapter Twenty-six, p. 318).

"In it she claimed I was schizophrenic, bipolar, and suicidal, and suffered from extreme hallucinations, and anything else you could think of. To this day that report is still cited as the most damning piece of evidence against me" (Chapter Twenty six, p. 319).

"My own son doesn't even know me. All he has is a handful of someone else's dusty memories, most of which aren't even accurate" (Chapter Twenty-six, p. 327).

"When I try to picture heaven, I see a place where it's always December, every radio station plays hair bands, and every time I check my pockets they're full of Hershey's Kisses. There's a Christmas parade on every street, every day is my birthday, and the sun always sets at 4: 58 p.m" (Chapter Twenty-six, p. 334).

"All my life I've heard people say, 'Why would God allow this to happen?' I think it's because while we can see only the tragedy, God sees only the beauty. While we see misery, Divinity sees us lurching and shambling one step closer to the light" (Chapter Twenty-six, p. 342).

"I like to compare spirituality to riding a bicycle. You can believe with every fiber of your being that it's possible to ride a bicycle, but until you start practicing you won't be able to do it. Spirituality has to be about action, not belief" (Chapter Twenty-six, p. 346).

"That's what I pray for - rain. Enough rain to wash away the corruption, the cover-ups, the darkness, and the apathy that has stolen the past seventeen years of my life" (Chapter Twenty-six, p. 348).

"What is legal and what is right are often two different things" (Chapter Twenty-six, p. 353).

"Of course, this doesn't mean you'll see any actions of honesty, integrity, or sanity come from the attorney general's office in the near future. They'll continue to do as they've always done. They'll fight to defend a corrupt trial until the state goes bankrupt" (Chapter Twenty-seven, p. 369).

"I was willing to do whatever the courts and lawyers wanted by that point, just to avoid a miserable death in a filthy prison cell" (Chapter Twenty-eight, p. 377).

"He said that the plea deal was a tragedy on many counts. It wouldn't bring the children back, and it wouldn't replace a minute of the time we'd spent in prison. He thanked outside forces — supporters, celebrities, and friends - for getting involved and for their enduring loyalty. When I watched the speech on tape afterward, it was the first time I

believed the justice system was anything other than corrupt to the core" (Chapter Twenty-eight, p. 382).

"I believe there are only two unstoppable forces in the universe. One is love, the other is intelligence" (Epilogue, p. 390).



## Topics for Discussion

What is the role of religion in the novel?

What is the role of magick in the novel?

Describe Echols' childhood.

On what grounds is Echols arrested?

What evidence does the court use against Echols?

Who is Lorri Davis and what is her relationship with Echols?

How does Echols keep himself fit while in jail? How does he keep his anger and hatred from eating him alive?