

Mortal Fear Study Guide

Mortal Fear by Greg Iles

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Plot Summary

Kali and the killer, who will eventually be identified as Edward Berkmann, are in a taxi in New Orleans. The opening is a letter written to his father, describing the trip across New Orleans, locating Karin Wheat and killing her. Thus begins the story of Edward Berkmann, a medical doctor who is known for his brilliance in neurosurgery but who is on a killing rampage. Berkmann is born to a brother-sister union, raised by his father, witnesses his father murder his step-mother and later travel the globe in search of an ancient tribe that worship the goddess of death. He is a hemophiliac who is cured after hiring doctors for a private liver transplant. He then comes across research that indicates that the pineal gland, if transplanted from a young donor to an elderly recipient, has the power to restore youthful appearance and activity. The only problem is, the procedure hasn't been tried on humans and development is far from human experimental stage. When he kills his seventh victim from an online sex chat forum called EROS, EROS systems operator Harper Cole reports his theory to the police - that someone is meeting women on EROS then killing them.

Harper, along with friend and co-worker Miles Turner, become the chief suspects in the case and they create an online person in an effort to draw out the killer. They select "Erin" as the name for this woman because Harper - who'll play the role of the woman online - plans to use details from the life of his sister-in-law Erin. They do catch the killer's attention only this time he's not interested in transplanting a pineal gland - he wants a woman to bear his children. By a twist of fate, Erin is in Harper's house when Berkmann tracks him down. Erin and Berkmann's "faithful concubine," Kali, kill each other. Berkmann is angry at having lost Erin but discovers that she was only a figment of someone's imagination after all. What he does find is his true dream woman - Drewe, wife of Harper and sister of Erin. In a fiery showdown, Berkmann puts in his appearance at the Cole home just hours after Erin's funeral, demanding that Drewe leave with him. Drewe and Harper eventually make a stand and Berkmann dies, the victim of a laser jet printer manipulated to be a bomb and the wrath of Erin's father, Bob Anderson.

While dealing with the demands of a brilliant physician who is murdering for his own gain, Harper is also faced with a personal crisis. He and Erin had an affair more than three years earlier and Erin has recently admitted that her daughter, Holly, is Harper's biological child. Harper wants to continue hiding the secret but Erin - facing marital problems of her own - wants to bring it out into the open. Just before her death, Erin demands that Harper tell Drewe and announces that she'd going to tell her own husband, Patrick. Erin is killed before the revelation can be made but Harper decides that he must tell Drewe anyway.



Prologue, Chapters 1 through 5

Prologue, Chapters 1 through 5 Summary

This is the story of Edward Berkmann, a medical doctor who is known for his brilliance in neurosurgery but who is on a killing rampage. Kali and the killer, who will eventually be identified as Edward Berkmann, are in a taxi in New Orleans. The opening is a letter written to his father, describing the trip across New Orleans, locating Karin Wheat and killing her.

Harper calls the New Orleans Police Department to report the connection he believes exists between the deaths of author Karin Wheat and six other women - that they were all account holders on a computer "chat" forum called EROS. Harper is a systems operator on EROS, recruited to the position by his childhood friend, Miles Turner, who is also a "sysop." Harper's call is returned by the lead detective, Michael Mayeux. Mayeux says that he's getting all kinds of crank calls regarding the case - that Karin Wheat was killed by vampires, mummies or an incubus. Harper gives Mayeux the names of the other six women and Mayeux promises to be in touch if there's any connection.

Harper is a stock trader but he has sufficient money that he trades only his own stocks. He is wealthy and is a natural at the trading. Meanwhile, Harper's wife of three years, Drewe, returns from her job as an OB/GYN. Drewe, at thirty-three, wants children. Harper seems reluctant to make the commitment. They live in the farmhouse of Harper's childhood in Rain, Mississippi, a farming community in the heart of the Delta. Drewe is obviously angry about Harper's time with EROS. She's heard about Karin Wheat's murder and when Harper reveals that Karin had been an EROS account holder, Drewe asks if he's had sex with her online. Harper doesn't deny it, but says that "she's dead," and when Drewe asks if the police know who killed her, Harper says that he believes he knows.

At three-twenty the following morning, Harper is jerked from sleep by a telephone call from Detective Mayeux who says that the Yazoo County Sheriff has an officer in Harper's drive "to ensure your safety." Harper is ordered to New Orleans to answer questions. Mayeux says that all six of the women Harper had listed are dead. He says that the police have not connected the murders together and wants to know how Harper made the connection. Harper admits that Miles was correct, that he shouldn't have contacted the police, and that he is now a suspect. He tells Mayeux that he will talk to Drewe and head for New Orleans, a five-hour trip.

Another letter follows, this time describing the murder of Rosalind in Michigan. The writer notes that he watches as Rosalind types on her computer, believing that the man she talks to is thousands of miles away, and that Kali "stroked" him as they watch so that he ejaculated in the flowerbed.



Harper Cole arrives at the New Orleans Police Department to discover that the FBI is waiting for him. Mayeux says that he'd been contacted by FBI agents the moment he looked into the state of the other women on Harper's list. The FBI says their purpose is to create a profile of the "UNSUB," or "unknown subject." Harper knows that they are really evaluating his statements to determine whether he is the killer.

Inside, Harper meets Dr. Arthur Lenz and Special Agent Daniel Baxter, among others. Harper says he believes the killer's name is David Strobekker, because he has observed Strobekker talking to the various women just before they drop off the EROS forum. Harper describes EROS. There are three levels of talk with the third being reserved for intense sexual chat. EROS is owned by Jan Krislov who is outspoken on topics of privacy and is serious about her clients' privacy. Many of the clients pay EROS fees with a blind draft account. Harper says that when women who had been very active dropped off the service but continued to pay the fees, he noticed. The cost of the service is three to five hundred dollars per month - a significant cost for someone who isn't going to use it any longer.

Miles learns from the FBI that the killer took Karin Wheat's head and that it hasn't been recovered. In addition, there was a hair from an Indian found at one crime scene, one of the victims was from India, the murders have something to do with the pineal gland, and the real David Strobekker was killed in Minneapolis almost a year earlier. Harper says that he's observed the killer's online conversations, that there are no typographical errors during the early conversations but that changes as the date of the deaths approach. Harper fears he'll be arrested but he is eventually released. He notes that he's only free because the FBI wants him to be.

Prologue, Chapters 1 through 5 Analysis

Harper doesn't actually know that the six women are dead. They each have "blind accounts." They put money into a bank account that only the EROS payment comes out of. The agreement is that if the account balance goes to zero, the EROS contract is terminated. It's part of the promise of absolute privacy by EROS owner Jan Kislov requires. Harper has expressed his concern to Miles regarding the fact that the six women were very active on EROS, and then dropped off the forum though they continued to pay their accounts for a period of time. Miles advises Harper to keep quiet about it.

Harper's reluctance to make the commitment of having a child with Drewe is likely related to a deep secret he holds. He fathered a child by Drewe's sister, Erin. The truth of this relationship will eventually be revealed and will become an integral part of the story.

Harper says he and Miles had been very close as children but had grown apart until Miles showed up and invited Harper to become a systems operator for EROS. Miles had promised it would "be more fun that you've had since we talked out baby-sitter into



taking off her bra." Harper says that may have been true, but that he is "not having fun now."

The letter-writer notes that it's possible that the police could find his semen in the flowerbed, but that he doesn't believe they'll look for anything other than a footprint there. He says that he's certain they'll find semen "where they expect to find it," and that "it will not be mine." It's also noted that he is leaving a message designed to "mislead with a little flair," and that "subtlety is wasted on the police." The writer indicates that he needs a day to collect his "next patient," another day to rest and to "steady my fingers." This will eventually be explained because the killer is actually working to perfect a medical procedure.

Under the FBI's questions, Harper talks about the reason for EROS and the people it attracts. He says that the high fees are designed not only to pay for the incredible security system that protects client privacy but to attract a higher class of people. Many of them are famous celebrities while others are the bored wives of wealthy doctors or the doctors themselves.

The FBI and Harper also begin to make another connection. The killer has used the alias "Shiva" - an Eastern deity, and Prometheus, a Titan who stole fire from the gods for the betterment of humans. Miles will eventually catch on to the Eastern and mythology references as well and will dub the killer "Brahma," a Hindu god.

The information about the killer's typographical errors will later be explained. The killer is using a voice recognition program so that he doesn't have to type at all. However, when he goes on the move and nears the homes of his victims, he uses only a laptop computer and cell phone for connection, meaning the voice program is no longer available to him and he must type - making mistakes like most people.



Chapters 6 through 10

Chapters 6 through 10 Summary

The phone is ringing when Harper arrives home. Miles says that the FBI has executed a search warrant at the EROS offices in New York that Jan has offered to allow tracing on the server but has locked the master list of clients in a timed safe that won't reopen for seventy-two hours. It's during this conversation that Miles says he'd talked to Karin Wheat. Harper responds that he never saw Miles online with her and Miles says he has many aliases.

Harper almost quits but Miles convinces him to stay by pointing out that "Eleanor Rigby" - obviously a woman on EROS - would be "despondent" if Harper to stop logging on. Miles also points out that Harper will be contacted by the EROS attorney. Harper's glance falls on a wooden sculpture of his father's cashmere jacket, and he knows that his father would have done what he thought was right, and damn the consequences, just as Harper has done.

When Drewe arrives home, Harper tells her of the interview in New Orleans and asks about the pineal gland. She says that it's in the brain. It produces melatonin that can be purchased at health food stores, and she's heard of a study relating the pineal gland to a possible cure for breast cancer, but can't recall the details.

There is another letter describing the murder of Jenny at Virginia Beach. Jenny is a "Navy girl," spends her time searching for a way out and doesn't beg for her life. The writer indicates that they are at the airport, that the victim is asleep behind him and Kali is at the controls, and that he is considering using the letters as "an addendum to my official findings."

Drewe and Harper are at the home of Drewe's parents, Bob and Margaret. They are joined there by Drewe's sister, Erin, her husband Patrick and her daughter Holly. It's here that the reader learns that Holly is Harper's daughter. Bob is outspoken and talks freely about the "niggers," though Harper notes that Bob had served in the military and has definite ideas about patriotism.

On the way home, Drewe says she believes Erin and Patrick are having marital problems. Harper silently admits that he knows that's true but denies it to Drewe. When they arrive home, Bob Anderson calls. He tells Harper that Sheriff Bill Buckner has called and offers help if Harper needs it. He ends the call asking Harper to "take care of my little girl." Harper tells Drewe that he's going to check the Singapore Stock Exchange but actually heads off to his office to talk to Miles.

Harper decides to log onto EROS to warn his online lover, Eleanor Markham, of the danger. While he's trying to do just that, he's interrupted by Miles who has the ability to monitor Harper's posts. Miles tells Harper to stop, that Eleanor isn't actually in danger



and that warning could cause a system-wide panic. After some thought, Harper decides that he won't try again to warn Eleanor. Instead, she asks him for online sex and he writes a fantasy situation for her in which they meet face-to-face at the Peabody Hotel in Memphis, Tennessee. Later, Harper calls Miles, demands that Miles refrain from watching his conversations but Miles refuses to promise, then asks for full access to the system as well. Miles says he'll think about it. During their conversation, Miles says that the killer, who Miles calls Brahma but who the FBI believes is a man named Strobekker, has used an "anonymous remailer" for his e-mail. This means that he sends his e-mails through a server - in this case one located in Finland - and that server assigns a random address to the mail before sending it on to the intended recipient. In this way, the location of the person sending the e-mail can't be traced. Following this conversation, Harper thinks that it would be great if the FBI could find the killer by following a "trail of breadcrumbs" but says he doesn't believe it's going to happen. He recalls hunting with a cousin as a young boy. The cousin, hearing Harper crashing around in the bushes and thinking he is a deer, shoots. A pellet lodges in Harper's leg and he later realizes that had they been hunting something larger - a bear, for example - the quarry might have come to the bleeding boy and finished him off. Harper notes that the outcome depends "on the quarry you choose to hunt."

Chapters 6 through 10 Analysis

Miles points out that they constantly monitor huge amounts of input and that "output" was inevitable, going on to say that sex is a strong emotion, as is death. The two men then argue about the role of EROS with Harper saying they have a responsibility to protect clients and Miles saying Harper compromised EROS's responsibility by contacting the police. While Harper is interested in physical safety, Miles seems to be still focused on anonymity. Miles gives a clue as to Harper's depth of involvement with EROS clients by asking if Drewe had kicked him out, prompting his decision to contact the FBI. It seems that Miles could know more about Harper's online activities than Harper knows about Miles'.

As Drewe and Harper finish their talk about the trip to New Orleans, Drewe reminds Harper that they'll be going to his in-laws' on the following day. She says that he treats it as if it's a trip to the dentist and he silently acknowledges that it's a "minefield" in which one wrong step - including "one wrong word or too open glance could cause instant devastation." This is a hint to the reader of the relationship between Harper and Drewe's sister, Erin, and it will soon be revealed that Harper is the father of Erin's daughter, Holly.

Harper describes the family. Drewe was very smart in school but acted wild to avoid being the nerdy type. Erin pretended to be sweet and innocent but was actually wild, sleeping around freely. He notes that the roles reversed somewhat as the girls grew to adulthood. Erin went to New York, worked as a model and made the cover of several magazines before returning home. Drewe tended to be outspoken and in trouble with her father as a teen but Erin, as a mother, is more willing to contradict her father. Holly



is three years old and Harper has been married to Drewe for three years, meaning Harper's affair with Erin must have happened just prior to his marriage to Drewe.

It remains unclear at this point whether Drewe knows that Harper is Holly's father though it seems unlikely. Even Harper says that he isn't certain but thinks that she at least doesn't know for sure. When Harper eventually tells Drewe the truth, she seems not to require details, indicating that she might actually feel the truth in the back of her mind though she doesn't know it for certain. As the couple is driving home, Drewe points out that she's been off the pill for more than five months but still hasn't conceived. EROS provides an adequate sexual outlet for Harper and it seems that they haven't had sex during that time. For Harper, it seems likely that he doesn't really want children but that it's because of the secret of Holly's parentage. Drewe seduces Harper and they have sex in the car on the way home. Harper notes that it's the first time in the five months that he hasn't felt sex for Drewe was merely a means to an end - pregnancy.

In Harper's fantasy for Eleanor, he describes leading her into a darkened room and telling her that they are now going to play a game. He says that there is a third person in the room who has night-vision goggles and will help Harper as he searches the darkened room for Eleanor. In detail, he describes the search and that he eventually finds Eleanor in the bathroom with the third person, where she is masturbating him. After the two finish their online conversation, Harper says that he realizes the third person in the room is Miles. It's interesting that he decides that only after ending the actual conversation.

When Harper finishes the conversation with Miles, he notes that the password for full access to EROS is SIDDHARTHA - a Herman Hesse novel set in the time of Buddha. Harper says that it's interesting that the only victim who wasn't Caucasian was Indian, that the one clue the police have is an Indian hair at one of the crime scenes, that Miles has chosen the name "Brahma" for the killer, and that Drewe mentioned that taking the pineal glands reminded her of Oriental medicines related to vitality.



Chapters 11 through 15

Chapters 11 through 15 Summary

Another letter at this point outlines an encounter between the killer and two accomplices. Panikkar demands more money and Kali kills him then beheads him. When another accomplice, Bhagat, calls and asks for Panikkar, Kali holds Panikkar's head up to the window and motions for Bhagat to come inside. Bhagat does and Kali explains to him, "in their language," what has happened and that he has two hours to rest before the procedure will begin.

Harper is awakened at five a.m. by an EROS tech named David Charles who says that another blind-draft payment has bounced. The woman's name is Rosalind May and she lives in Mill Creek, Michigan. David begs Harper to handle it, and says that it was Miles who decided to kill Harper's access to the accounts. Harper calls Daniel Baxter at Quantico, doesn't say how he found the information, but asks Baxter to check on May's whereabouts. Baxter calls back, says Rosalind has been missing about fifty hours, that she is more than fifty years old with two grown sons, and that there was a file on her computer that is believed to be from the attacker - an excerpt from a popular piece of erotica literature and written in French. Baxter says the big difference in this case is that the woman was taken rather than killed.

Rosalind's fate is revealed in another letter from the killer to his father. He says that Jenny had attempted to calm Rosalind but that she wouldn't be reassured. When Kali and Bhagat attempt to put Rosalind on the table, the woman sees blood and begins to flail about. The killer decides to explain to Rosalind what he plans to do in an effort to reassure her of the benefits of the procedure, and when he tells her that he'll be opening the sternum, Rosalind has a heart attack and is dead in a matter of minutes.

Harper speaks to an array of police officers from various precincts that are investigating killings or - in the case of Rosalind May - a kidnapping. Then Drewe calls and tells Harper that the FBI has contacted colleagues and friends with questions about Drewe and Harper. She says that the questions are not good for her career and Harper calls Baxter to complain. Lenz returns Harper's call, says that he can have the police and FBI pressure turned off Drewe if Harper will agree to a personal interview with Lenz. He drops everything and heads to Jackson to catch a plane. Just as he's leaving, Miles calls. He tells Harper that the killer has logged back online and that the call has been traced to Wyoming but there the trace encounters a problem - the phone system is analogue and can only be traced manually, which requires a court order.

When Harper arrives at the upscale office of Dr. Lenz, Miles Turner is asleep in the waiting room. He has his computer, says that Brahma had logged onto the system briefly and that the FBI has their warrant to continue the phone trace. Miles says that he has an outstanding drug charge hanging over his head, prompting him to agree to meet



with Lenz. He asks Harper for a pact - that neither will say anything about the other. Harper agrees and they plan to meet after their interviews with Lenz for a meal.

Chapters 11 through 15 Analysis

The reader gets new hints of the roles of the various players at this point. Panikkar is the typist and Bhagat is told to get into his scrubs. The letter writer also notes that he can do without Panikkar but indicates that Bhagat is important to "the procedure." It seems that Jenny is still alive up to now though her condition is unknown and the details of this "procedure" have yet to be revealed.

Baxter tells Harper that he's glad "someone are EROS" is willing to work with the FBI and notes that the disappearance of Rosalind May would never have been tied to the other murders without Harper's help. He then asks if Harper has talked to Miles. Harper says that he's gotten e-mails, "nothing important," but doesn't say anything about their conversations.

It's here that the reader gets the first inkling that the killer is searching for the "fountain of youth." He notes that Ponce de Leon was searching for the fountain when it was, in fact, inside his head. The killer predicts that he will soon "stand alone at the pinnacle of the species, the only man with the courage to reach into the fountain."

Miles tells Harper that the killer has logged on as Kali, the name of a "Hindu mother goddess." As the references to Eastern culture continue, Harper notes that Miles is well-versed in the subject. Miles himself says that it makes more sense than "the chickenshit dualism of Christianity." Mile tells Harper not to worry about e-mail security because no one can read Miles' communications unless he wants them to. Harper notes that maybe someone should be reading Miles' mail.



Chapters 16 through 20

Chapters 16 through 20 Summary

Miles doesn't return to the waiting room before the receptionist calls Harper. When Harper enters Lenz's office, Miles is not there and Lenz doesn't say where he's gone. He immediately begins to question Harper, focusing chiefly on Harper's sexual experiences. Over the course of the conversation, Harper says that his father - a doctor - taught him that not all injuries are as bad as they first seem, that he got off many speeding tickets because the police feared Harper's father would demand payment for long-overdue doctor bills, and that he believes music is romantic rather than mathematical. Miles leaves Harper a note, saying that Brahma has logged back on and that the FBI is able to complete the trace. Lenz gets a phone call, tells Harper that the killer is in Dallas and invites Harper to Quantico to see the case's conclusion. Harper agrees.

Harper and Lenz are accompanied by Special Agent Peter Schmidt. On the way, Lenz explains that the online activity has been traced to the apartment of David Strobekker in Dallas, that the plan an "explosive entry" with the hope that Rosalind May is still alive, and that Lenz will be able to observe from Quantico. Lenz says that he wants to trap Strobekker and that he needs Harper's help. He says that Harper will be free to return to his own life, no longer harassed by the police, if he can convince Lenz that he had nothing to do with the murders and if Harper will help Lenz create an online personality to trap Strobekker.

Harper tells Lenz about his life as a child. He says that his father had been a poor money manager and had borrowed money annually to pay off his taxes. In the 1960s, Harper's father provided housing for civil rights workers - a fact that the Ku Klux Klan objected to. His father made his condemnation of the KKK's activities very public so it was many years before the group dared retaliate but they eventually did by prompting the banks to deny Harper's father his annual loan. The family lost the farm, Harper moved to Chicago where he gets a job with the Board of Exchange and trades fearlessly for himself. When he has enough money, he returns home, makes an offer to buy the farm back, which is initially refused until he makes an offer of four times market value and hundreds of times what the bank paid for the property. He says that giving the property back to his parents was worth every cent he paid, though his father's health had deteriorated badly by then - from overwork and worry.

Following the story, Lenz says that Harper has his respect. They then arrive at Quantico where Harper gets his first look at the Mobile Digital Command Post.

Once inside the MDCP - called Dr. Cop - Lenz asks for privacy with Harper. He says that he expects Harper to finish answering his questions - including what it is that he's most ashamed of. Before Harper can say anything, Lenz says, "It's your wife's sister," then says that Miles "doesn't know he knows," and that he believes Harper is not a



murderer. They then return to the main section of the command post to watch the events in Dallas.

The apartment windows are covered with aluminum foil, the apartments in the immediate vicinity have been vacated and that according to an EROS tech, the killer is supposedly still online interacting with a female subscriber. Daniel Baxter is in command from the command post while Joe Payne leads the strike on the apartment. Payne says they plan to sledgehammer the door in case there are multiple locks so as not to give the killer time to kill his hostage. Lenz says it's important to take the killer alive, if possible and Payne says his men will shoot to kill if the killer resists.

They push into the apartment to find only a computer hard drive. Harper says he doesn't know how he knows, but he suddenly knows that the computer is actually a bomb. He yells for the men to leave, but the warning is too late. One is killed and several injured. Then they discover that the apartment manager, who said that the apartment next door was vacant, actually said that no one "lived there." It has actually been rented by an Indian woman. The apartment manager, also Indian, refuses to continue answering questions, opting to call his brother who is a lawyer. He's arrested and taken away as Baxter, Lenz and Harper begin to consider what just happened. Baxter tells Harper that if he can help Lenz get his "alter ego" - the online woman Lenz hopes will trap the killer - up and running in three hours, they'll give him a ride back to Jackson, Mississippi, in a private jet already going that direction.

There follows another letter. In this one, the killer says that the FBI is getting closer, but that it means only that he must be more careful in his selection. He says that he must "thank Turner" for the list, wonders if EROS will shut itself down or be shut down by the government, and says that there's "quite a noise" coming from the basement and that he should "never have let Levy catch sight of the O.R." He says that unless Levy "quiets himself," he'll send Kali down to quiet him.

On the way to the FBI safe house where Lenz is going to work at trying to trap the killer, he asks Harper to tell what it is that's "eating at him." Harper hesitates, but then tells how he came to be the father of Erin's child. He says that he and Drewe sometimes talk only once or twice a year during after high school but that they eventually reconnect and decide to marry as soon as Drewe finished her residency for medical school. Harper moves to Chicago to earn enough money for their "stake" to get them started in marriage while Drewe is completing her education. During that year, he and Drewe see each other only twice. One night, Erin arrives at Harper's apartment. During the visit, she steps into the bathroom to pee while Harper is in the shower, then into the shower with him and they spend the next four days barely leaving the bedroom. When Drewe calls, Harper makes an excuse to get off the phone quickly and the realization of what he's done fully hits him. Erin asks how they'll tell Drewe and says that she came out there to marry Harper. He says he does not intend to marry her, and she leaves. He and Drewe marry just a short time later. Erin looks up Patrick, who had always loved her, tells him that she's pregnant but that she'll marry him if he never asks about the child's father, and he agrees.



The talk then turns to Miles. Harper asks if Lenz coerced him to talk with an old drug charge. Lenz says it was not a drug charge but an assault charge that Harper apparently did not know about. Lenz asks about an instance in which Miles "faced a viper," and Harper relates a story of their childhood. He says many of the boys didn't like Miles and he was once told to "swear by his no-good daddy that he loved sucking nigger dicks" or be thrown into a flooded walled area that children used for a fort but which was occupied by snakes when it rained. Miles refused, was thrown in and both he and Harper could soon hear the rattle of a rattlesnake. Harper says he slowly put his hand inside until he felt Miles' clothing and pulled him out. Years later, one of the boys got into his car and was bitten by two snakes that were under his seat. The theory was that the snakes had fallen from a tree limb into the car. Harper says that if police could trace a snake, they would be able to trace it directly back to that incident at the fort.

Chapters 16 through 20 Analysis

Harper is at first reluctant to answer Lenz's questions but soon seems to fall under his spell and begins to answer. He generically describes early sexual encounters including his first intercourse at age fifteen with an eighteen-year-old girl who later turns out to be a slut who slept around freely, and says that he has had sex with fifteen girls. It takes Lenz only a few minutes to ask Harper what he's hiding from his wife. Harper becomes immediately defensive. Harper is asked what he's most ashamed of and most proud of, but doesn't answer. Near the end of the interview, Harper says that his father would never have tried to collect past-due accounts, and that Lenz has arrived back at the question, what is Harper most proud of. He doesn't elaborate.

As Harper learns that the FBI is on the verge of taking Strobekker into custody, he's caught up with the idea that he's soon to have his life return to normal. On the way to Quantico, it seems clear that Dr. Lenz doesn't expect the case to be resolved when the FBI breaks in on the Strobekker apartment in Dallas. Instead, he tells Harper of his plans to capture Strobekker. He is going to create a woman who will log onto EROS with the sole intention of catching Strobekker's interest. Lenz asks for Harper's help in creating the woman's online identity, saying that the FBI is creating everything necessary to convince someone that she actually exists, including a driver's license, social security number, housing and vehicle ownership.

Harper and Lenz talk about Strobekker and his reasons for killing. While Lenz says that the "taking of the pineal" gland might make some people think of "cults," the bottom line will be that the killings involve "old-fashioned lust." It's soon to be revealed that the killer isn't actually Strobekker at all, but that he killed Strobekker in order to gain his access to EROS.

Harper and Miles have not been close in recent years. Though Harper has recently seemed almost suspicious of Miles and his desire to keep the EROS information from the police, Harper suddenly seems more certain that Miles has nothing to do with the murders and suggests that the FBI call on him to help "nail" the killer. Lenz suggests that the techs who traced the killer to the Dallas apartment may simply have stopped



looking for the origin of the online conversations once they reached that apartment. The techs point out that it's possible that further traces were blocked. Harper says that he believes the computer - in addition to having a self-destruction mechanism - likely had a warning system for the killer. Baxter asks Harper if Miles is the man to track the killer and Harper says he is. Lenz doesn't dispute Miles' abilities, but says he believes Miles may be the killer and urges Baxter to find someone else.

The "Levy" mentioned in this letter will eventually turn out to be another kidnapping victim. This one will be rescued from a warehouse in New York.

Harper's true feelings about Erin and Holly are not revealed. He seems to avoid talking about what he feels with regard to having Holly so near while not taking on the role of her father. He will later see Drewe interact with Holly and note that she really needs a child of her own, that it's within his power to give it and that it is his duty.

It seems that Harper suspects that Miles is capable of killing, though he continues to tell the authorities that it isn't true. He will later admit to being relieved when it seems that Miles is not guilty. During his exchange with Lenz, Harper asks if Miles is gay. Lenz declines to answer, citing patient-client privilege, but does say that the assault charge stemmed from an incident outside a gay bar. The entire conversation with Lenz will later turn up in the possession of the killer, having apparently been taped by Lenz and later stolen.



Chapters 21 through 25

Chapters 21 through 25 Summary

They stop first at Lenz's home then at the FBI safe house where the computer equipment is set up. The plan is for Lenz to carry on an online life as "Lilith" while an agent named Margie Ressler pretends to be Lilith in real life. Harper begins to explain chat terminology - that a "thread" is a topic of conversation to which anyone can post a comment and "lurking" is observing conversations without participating. He says that there can be anywhere from a few dozen to hundreds of rooms available at any give time, that some rooms were named by the EROS subscribers and some are named and maintained by the systems operators - "sysops." Lenz logs on and Harper steps out of the room to touch base with Drewe. Margie offers him pizza and a diet Coke, which he accepts.

Harper checks the FBI's computer for a recording device, disables the one he finds, and then logs on as the sysop. He checks for the killer but doesn't find him logged on under Strobekker's account. He does soon find him, logged on under another account and it seems evident that the killer has access to names and passwords - likely why he indicated that he needs to thank Miles Turner for the list earlier. Lenz gets a phone call indicating that the killer has contacted the FBI. He's apparently hacked into the computer network and sent a message saying that his work is important, that if they only knew what he was doing they'd allow him to finish, that he will use only the number of victims necessary and that they should leave "us" alone." He later sends a second message including a threat - that if the FBI continues to harass him they'll be sorry.

Though the killer's account remains inactive, Harper finds a conversation he feels certain is the killer, writing under the alias "Levon." He is talking to a woman named Sarah, seems to believe that she was molested as a child by her father while her mother did nothing to intervene, that true help lies within oneself and that he would accept Sarah no matter who she is or what she may have done wrong. Levon ends the conversation by saying that when Sarah most needs him, he'll be there, she thanks him and they log off. Lenz briefly talks with "Levon." When that conversation ends, he asks Harper if he really wants to return to Mississippi or to stay until the killer is caught. Harper wavers but opts to catch the plane.

Touching down at Jackson, Harper uses a pay phone to warn Miles that the FBI is considering arresting him. He says he believes he's safe until the following day when the time lock on the EROS vault will open, but doesn't elaborate. He drives home to find Patrick parked in a Jeep on the road just past Harper's driveway. Patrick says that Holly and Erin are at Harper's house and that he's married to a slut who has been making a fool of him. He says that what's wrong is between "Erin and me" and promises that he's not going to do anything stupid.



Harper slips into the bed in the office at home and Erin soon comes into the room and climbs into bed with him. She tells him that he's living the same lie she's living and he says that she has to find a way to live with it and move forward. Just then, Holly begins to cry out for her mother, then for her daddy. Drewe rushes to the room, reassures Holly that her mother probably went to the bathroom, Erin slips into the bathroom and flushes the commode, then returns to Holly. As she heads back to bed, Drewe stops to talk to Harper. He tells her that Patrick is on the road and that she should wake him if she hears anything strange, declines her offer to talk about his trip over coffee, and goes back to bed with his handgun under his mattress.

Harper sleeps until three-thirty that afternoon, walks out to check the mail and to be certain Patrick isn't still parked outside, and considers that it's only been three days since he contacted the police about his suspicions. Harper sees that there are nine messages on the answering machine and while he's debating listening, the phone rings. Lenz says that Miles has run, that the vault is opened and there is evidence to implicate Miles, and that surveillance on Harper will resume by local law enforcement. When Harper leaves home that day a Yazoo County deputy - a man named Billy who Harper played against in high school football - is waiting on the highway. He says that he has orders to watch for Miles but doesn't follow Harper when he drives away.

Harper spends the day wandering around the area of the fort where Miles encountered the snakes those years before and returns to find Drewe just arriving from her mother's house. She says Erin has returned home. Harper is in the shower when Miles arrives. He says that he paid cash for tickets, traded modes of transportation several times ending with a private ride on a crop duster from a pilot who thinks Miles is running cocaine, then entered the house through an old bomb shelter connected to Harper's house by a tunnel. His long hair is now short and he's changed his usual attire. Miles says that he's "as tired as a pair of jumper cables at a nigger funeral," then says that's his effort at maintaining his "redneck" cover. Mile has two cases with him, including FBI files and police reports, and he says that he needs Harper's help to clear his name.

Miles, Drewe and Harper talk over the events leading up to this point. Drewe suggests that the killer could be a doctor. She says that when she heard of the EROS murders she asks another doctor about the pineal gland, and learned of a recent study in which the pineal gland was removed from the brains of young mice and transplanted into older mice. The result was that the old mice recovered their youthfulness, sexual vigor and avoided the aging process. While they did eventually die, they didn't seem to get older - they "just died." Drewe's theory is that the killer is a doctor who is "harvesting" the pineal gland from a younger victim to transplant in an older. This is why the early victims were in their twenties while Karin Wheat and Rosalind May were forty-seven and fifty, respectively. She suggests that Karin Wheat wasn't supposed to be killed, but that something went wrong and Rosalind May was the "backup." For Drewe's theory to be possible, they note that there must be at least one additional victim - a young woman who was to be the "donor" for Rosalind May.

By Drewe's theory, the killer isn't working a lone, has a cast of at least four additional people - including medical professionals to help with the transplant procedure - has



access to high-tech medical equipment and a state-of-the-art operating room. Drewe points out that the experiment on mice doesn't consider several things, including long-term effects and brain damage during the procedure. They agree - at least to a point - that there could be a monetary gain for the person who perfects the procedure. Killing would be the only way to conduct the experiments because formal approval from the medical community would not be forthcoming, and that the person who does manage to perfect the procedure would be, at the very least, famous. All those possibilities add up to motive.

There are additional women on EROS who might be missing or at least at risk and Drewe insists that they check on those. She says that if they come up with any information on that front, she'll insist that they contact the FBI but agrees to keep Miles' presence and their theories quiet until then. Their conversation is interrupted by a phone call from her mother regarding Erin. When Drewe later goes to bed, Harper doesn't ask about for the details of that conversation.

Chapters 21 through 25 Analysis

Lenz stops by his own home before going to the FBI safe house that is located just ten minutes from his home. It's there that Harper meets Lenz's wife who is an alcoholic, suffers from depression and makes rude comments while the two men are there. They stay only long enough for Lenz to gather some clothing and the purpose for subjecting Harper to the meeting remains unclear.

At one point while Lenz is on the telephone, Harper contacts Eleanor telling her to stay off EROS until he contacts her. When he touches down in Jackson later that night, he calls her from a pay phone but gets only her answering machine. He knows that her sister knows nothing about EROS so he doesn't leave a detailed message but attempts to warn her about the danger.

It's while the killer - now posing as Levon - is involved in an online conversation that Lenz talks to Miles on the telephone, eliminating him as the person conversing with Sarah. Harper admits to feeling relief that Miles can't be the killer.

Lenz, as Lilith, invites Levon for a conversation that he accepts. They speak only briefly with Levon breaking it off by saying he "must be away." Though Lenz wants to prolong the conversation, Harper pushes him to say goodbye rather than appear overly anxious, which Lenz admits was the correct move. Harper reminds Lenz that he's the bait - not the hunter. He says the difference is that the hunter is aggressive while the bait simply is whatever it is. If it's raw meat, it just lies there looking like raw meat. In this case, "Lilith" is just to be a woman who the killer might want to contact - she isn't supposed to be looking for him.

Patrick asks Harper where he's been and Harper says that he's still dealing with the FBI regarding the EROS murders. On a whim, he asks Patrick about the pineal gland and notes that Patrick can turn into "android MD" at a moment's notice, even when his life is



in shambles. Patrick says that many people want the hormone secreted by the pineal gland for an array of purposes, but that it's all "homeopathic bullshit."

When Drewe goes to Holly, she seems somewhat skeptical that Erin is really in the bathroom because there were no lights on. Erin says she's used to finding her way around strange houses in the dark, but doesn't elaborate. Drewe says she finds that sad. Holly asks for a story and Erin declines but Drewe makes up a story about "queendom" and two princesses who were very different but ruled together - a play on the lives of Drewe and Erin. Harper says that Drewe deserves a child of her own and that he doesn't think he has the right to deny her. As Harper goes back to bed, he says that he's certain that without "divine intervention" they are headed for an "explosive revelation" of all the secrets.

Miles has said that the FBI agents are waiting outside the EROS vault like it was Jesus' tomb. Now he tells Harper that there's a definite parallel to Jesus' tomb because both were empty when the "stone was rolled away." In this case, the master list was being dumped into a computer inside the vault. Miles used a connection to that computer, moved the files to another computer off site, and then wiped the computer inside the vault so that the files no longer existed. Just before the vault was to open, he traded clothes with another tech, cut his hair and left through a private entrance.

During the conversation, Miles says that calls the killer "Brahma," which prompts Drewe to ask why he would name it after a god. Miles says that he admires the man's skills, which seems to make Drewe at least momentarily wonder if Miles might be the killer. It's interesting that she and Miles don't seem to like each other and Harper interrupts, saying that he's heading off the inevitable arguing between the two. This is the first look at the history between Drewe and Miles though they must have known each other in high school just as Miles and Harper did.

When Drewe suggests that the killer could be a doctor, Miles objects on the basis of the killer's thorough knowledge of computers. Drewe says that Miles - had he chosen that route - could have become a surgeon. She says that intelligence is required for both but that the time to learn computers is significantly less than to become a doctor. It's clear that Miles and Drewe don't particularly care for it each other but that they do have some level of respect for each other. Miles later says that he'd forgotten how intelligent Drewe is.

The FBI are considering doctors among their suspects, but haven't ruled out the possibility of a psychotic veterinarian or even a butcher with a working knowledge of anatomy.



Chapters 26 through 30

Chapters 26 through 30 Summary

Miles installs new voice synthesis and recognition software on Harper's computer. Miles then asks for details about Lenz's plan. Harper says that he doesn't believe Lenz can adequately pretend to be a woman but Miles doesn't share that view. Miles asks Harper if he's certain of every person he's talking to on EROS. He asks, for example, about Eleanor Rigby and Harper becomes immediately defensive. He says that he tries to anticipate what Miles is going to say about Eleanor but isn't prepared when Miles says that she doesn't have a crippled sister and isn't a body double, but is herself the cripple.

Miles says that he wants Harper to pretend to be a woman in an attempt to get close to the killer. He points out that many young women have confided in Harper through the years as his reasoning that Harper could pull it off. Miles' plan is to have Harper eventually correspond with the killer via e-mail and then to send a "Trojan Horse" - a virus of sorts - into the killer's computer in an attempt to locate him. Miles says that he can either create a new person, including social security cards and credit history, just as the FBI did for Lenz or can choose someone online already. The problem with choosing a real person is that puts that woman at risk. They don't come to any hard and fast decisions before Miles falls asleep.

While Miles sleeps, Harper watches EROS, listing with the new voice software Miles has installed. He happens upon a conversation between Lenz, posing as Lilith, and a man named Maxwell who Harper immediately recognizes as the killer. Lenz - as Lilith - tells of an event in her life. She says that she was having sex with her date at a fraternity house when another young man walked in the room, climbed up on the top bunk and watched. When the sex was completed, Lilith offered to solve the young man's frustration and her date agreed. Before it was over, she'd had sex with a dozen young men though at some point she'd become afraid and it had actually turned into a gang rape. Under Maxwell's questioning, Lilith admits that her former boyfriend was in the house and that her motive was to hurt him as he'd hurt her. The former boyfriend tried to intervene, was beat "to a pulp" and thrown out. Maxwell says that he would have stopped it. Under Lilith's questioning, Maxwell says that he is forty-seven and a member of the medical community but refuses to say more.

Watching the exchange, Miles and Harper say that Lenz became inconsistent by asking Maxwell how she could find him for a future exchange. As soon as the exchange is completed, Lenz phones Harper asking if he observed and for his opinion on the outcome. Lenz says that the FBI is not tracing the killer's number as he is talking to Lenz so that it doesn't raise suspicion, but that they are only going to do this for a week. As the conversation ends, Lenz asks why Harper hasn't asked whether the FBI has located Miles. Harper covers by saying he felt Lenz would have bragged about it if Miles had been captured.



Lenz spends several days having periodic conversation with the killer while Harper and Miles work on their strategy. Miles eventually writes a program to search for the killer's specific phrases and word patterns so that they are able to locate him more easily. After about three days, the killer contacts Harper, posing as a woman named "Erin." His first question is whether she is using voice recognition technology. Harper says that he is, adding that it's a prototype being tried out by her husband - a physician. The killer then invites "Erin" into a private chat room.

"Erin" says that she's searching for a man with the soul of a woman who retains his masculinity, that she became sexually active at fourteen, that she's not attracted to women, that no one can see past her beauty and then rather abruptly signs off. Miles believes Harper has struck the right tone and that he signed off correctly, leaving the killer wanting additional contact. After that conversation, Miles says that Harper seems to have correctly summed up Erin's life and admits that he once had sex with Erin himself. That night, Harper dreams about Erin and Miles together.

A few hours after his conversation with the killer, Harper logs onto EROS as the operator and finds "Maxwell" and "Lilith" in a conversation. It's been noted that the killer makes no typographical mistakes for the first days of contact with his victim but then, over the last two or three days before a murder, his conversations become filled with typos. It's believed that he uses a voice recognition program during the early conversations and switches to a laptop and manual typing for the final few. When they note that the killer is now making errors, Harper calls the FBI safe house where Margie - the decoy - assures him that they are aware and that the situation is under control.

Harper and Miles begin to look for a way to observe the happenings at the safe house and take that search to the ham radio network with the hope that someone there will have the capability to listen into police traffic and will be willing to share that.

Miles and Harper pretend to be reporters and convince a ham operator - a former Marine - named Sid Maroney to listen to the FBI radio traffic with the hope of hearing what happens at the FBI safe house. There is traffic indicating that the FBI is near to locating the killer through his telephone connection then there's a message on EROS from "Maxwell" to "Lilith." The message begins with "Greetings Dr. Lenz," then goes on to say that Lenz put his own life at risk as well as those he is responsible for. There's then a veiled "apology," and it's soon discovered that Lenz's wife is dead. Maroney seems angry that the situation was so serious, saying that he's violated laws to listen in and Harper knows that he is in trouble even more deeply because Maroney called him - meaning the FBI can figure out that Harper was listening to the traffic during the event.

After the death of Lenz's wife is discovered, Harper wants to simply quit. He points out that he can testify that Miles is not the killer. Miles replies that the killer wasn't at the Lenz home while he was typing - meaning there are at least two people involved in the killing. The two men are alibis for each other and the FBI could argue that the two are working together on the murders. Miles says that the only thing left to do is finish the Trojan horse. He finds an old movie to put him into programmer's mode and settles down to work.



Chapters 26 through 30 Analysis

Harper comes out and asks Miles if he's had anything to do with the killing. Miles says no but Harper points out that if he has to ask, the FBI must also have doubts. When Miles tells Harper about Eleanor, Harper's immediate reaction is anger that Miles would spy on his private conversations. Then he says that he can believe that Miles was concerned about him.

As Miles sleeps, Harper tries to decide what he should do. He admits that of all the information Miles has stolen from the FBI and the various police departments, the photos of the murdered women speak loudest. He then considers the massive search they are undertaking. Women have been killed across the nation, in Los Angeles, Portland, Nashville and Houston. Their murders have been an apparent accidental fall, a beating with a hammer, a shooting and even one in which the woman's eyes were cut out and stakes driven into the sockets. The killer has eluded police and it's been noted that without Harper's initial intervention the connections between the killings might never have been discovered. Harper likens the search to a parent searching for a lost child in the hopeless vastness of the world without any real clues. In this case, the killer has the added assurance of safety because there are no maps to lead police to him.

After the exchange between "Lilith and Maxwell," Harper points out that the killer's choice of names this time could be referring to the Maxwell from the Beatles' Abbey Road album. In that song, Maxwell is a doctor who uses a "silver hammer" to kill a woman.

Harper still hasn't listened to more than a dozen messages on his answering machine and Miles plays them. One of them is from New Orleans detective Mayeux who says that he is concerned about Harper. He says that there has been a system of cooperation between the FBI and local police departments in recent years, but that is not true with this case. Mayeux says that he can help Harper and that Harper should call him. Harper immediately asks Miles whether it's possible to use Mayeux to their advantage.

Harper agrees to go forward with Miles' plan to create an online woman that they hope will lure the killer to them so that they can implant a Trojan horse onto his computer. Harper tells Miles that he wants to create a person from scratch but that she will be a "hybrid" of Harper and Erin. Miles asks why and Harper says that he knows intimate details about Erin so that he can make her believable. Miles asks if there's a history between the two and Harper says yes. He almost seems ready to explain but when he turns back around Miles is already hunched over the keyboard creating what's needed to make "Erin" appear real. He plans to hack into the AT&T switchboard, change around numbers and addresses as well so that if the killer were to trace the number from which "Erin's" transmissions originate, it won't be Harper's home.

After his own conversation with the killer, Harper listens in on a conversation between the killer and Lenz, still posing as Lilith. Harper and Miles each believe that Lenz is clumsy, feeding out entirely too much information about his character without gaining

information about the killer. Harper notes that Lenz is reeling in only rope - "enough to hang himself."

Harper logs onto EROS as the systems operator and happens upon a room in which the Karin Wheat murder is being discussed. Thinking he might add his own thoughts, he logs on as "Erin" and is immediately contacted by Maxwell, which answers the question as to whether the killer had the ability to watch the system as a system operator. Harper points out to Miles that if the killer did have that ability, he'd have seen Harper as a system operator switch to the "Erin" identity.

Harper points out that he and Miles are playing a deadly game because the killer was able not only to detect Lenz's duplicity but to track down his family. Miles says that because of his own work on the telephone line, a trace to their Internet connection will relay to another address in another part of Mississippi. Miles points out that what concerns him more is that the killer knew where Lenz lived - not the location of the safe house associated with "Lilith." That information could very well be an FBI leak.



Chapters 31 through 35

Chapters 31 through 35 Summary

Miles wakes Harper to say that there's a message from the killer asking to meet "Erin." Miles has responded only to say that she'll be online at nine a.m. Shortly after Drewe leaves for work, the police execute a search warrant. Miles rushes out of the house through the tunnel, leaving behind a file of the Trojan horse with instructions of how Harper is to deliver it. Harper hopes that Miles will return, but he doesn't. Harper eventually returns to his office where he logs onto EROS as the system operator and sees the killer, logged on as "Maxwell" sends a message to Erin. The message reads, "The dry earth awaits the rain." Harper comes to the decision to finish what he and Miles began, logs on as Erin and replies, "I am the rain."

Jan Krislov contacts Harper via the EROS system but then turns the conversation over to Miles who asks if Harper managed to deliver the Trojan horse to the killer. Harper asks why Miles would use a photo of Erin and Miles reassures Harper that Erin is not in any danger. Following another hunch of Drewe's, Miles and Harper have handed over information to the FBI - anonymously via computer - that there could be additional victims and that those might be listed on donor registries. Miles tells Harper that there have been two kidnappings of listed donors, including Peter Levy. Miles says that FBI Detective Baxter has now asked that EROS be temporarily shut down and Miles believes it's because they are close to an arrest. When Miles terminates his connection, Harper knows Jan still wants to talk but he terminates his own connection saying that as soon as the killer is captured he plans to have no more dealings with EROS or with Jan.

Harper later talks to Baxter who says they now have a name for the UNSUB though he won't tell Harper. He also says the killer is a medical doctor. Harper suddenly recalls sitting in the New Orleans police station and saying that the killer's name is Strobekker, and finding out minutes later that Strobekker is dead. He fears the same thing will happen this time, though Baxter assures Harper that they have this man under surveillance.

When Drewe arrives home, she is very upset and says that Patrick beat up Erin. Harper's initial reaction is to retaliate against Patrick. He asks about Holly and is assured that the girl is fine. Drewe then asks Harper if he and Erin are having an affair. Harper assures her that he is not. Harper offers to make sandwiches for dinner. Drewe goes to bed and draws Harper under the covers with her without taking time to eat.

Harper is awakened by a call from Baxter who says the doctor they traced by way of an airplane that had arrived in the vicinity of every murder isn't the killer. He's been cleared and is threatening to sue the police for wrongful death. Miles then calls and says that there's a problem with the Trojan horse. While they talk, Harper receives a message via EROS e-mail saying that Erin's photo has captivated him.



Chapters 31 through 35 Analysis

Harper wonders about the photo file in which the Trojan horse is embedded. He has based his online character on Erin, his sister-in-law, but draws the line at using her photo. He reassures himself that Miles would not use Erin's photo but then finds his camera and photo albums containing pictures of Erin in the office and guesses that Miles has used Erin's photo.

Harper continues to wonder how the killer came to have access to EROS clients. He again asks Miles who seems uncomfortable for a minute then suggests that Jan could have had a lover who accessed the files from her home. Jan will later go back over every date she had around the time they believe the data was accessed and come up with no possibilities, but she will hire detectives to check out men she dated anyway. Though it won't be revealed for some time, the killer actually got the data from Miles' home. The two men had a brief encounter that included sex and the killer accessed Miles' computer while Miles slept.

When the killer e-mails Harper saying he's taken with Erin's photo, Miles's immediate reaction is "We've got him going and coming." Harper is more realistic and is more accepting of the superior intellect of the killer. Miles continues to believe he can take down the killer while Harper worries that they are putting themselves - and their families - in danger.

As it turns out, the reason the killer is able to come and go so freely is that he's traveling by private plane. There is no need to purchase tickets, provide identification or deal with authorities. A private plane was eventually identified as being in the vicinities of all the murders and that's how they tracked the doctor who was later cleared. It is then revealed that the killer has duplicated that doctor's plane, down to the identification numbers. The real plane being used by the killer is simply somewhere else and officers will now focus their attention on trying to find that plane.



Chapters 36 through 40

Chapters 36 through 40 Summary

The next day, Drewe phones Harper demanding that he go immediately to Jackson to check on Erin. She says that Erin has said that she's come to a plan of action that will be difficult for people at first but is necessary in the long run. Drewe believes that to be a threat of suicide. Harper arrives to find Erin calm. She says that they were stupid to think they could maintain a secret of this magnitude, that she plans to tell Patrick and demands that he tell Drewe. They argue but Erin is determined and Harper, convinced that Erin is not setting out to hurt herself and that Holly is safe, leaves.

He notes that it takes half as long to return to Rain. When he arrives, Mayeux and Detective Jim Overstreet from the Jackson Police Department are waiting to place him under arrest for obstruction of justice and for harboring a federal fugitive - Miles. On the way to Jackson, Harper drops the name of his father-in-law who is an important person, who knows many important people including politicians, and who is well-known himself. Harper is held only a short time before being released.

Harper gets a ride back to Rain with Mayeux, promising to answer any questions the officer has if he'll just hurry. They're slowed by a tremendous rainstorm and see emergency vehicle lights when they near Harper's farmhouse. They arrive to find deputies around the house and Erin dead in Harper's study along with a "Jane Doe." Harper assures Drewe that Erin was in Jackson earlier in the day and that she was fine when he left her. Harper enters the study to find it covered with blood. Erin's body is behind the head of the twin bed in the room. There is blood on the walls and covering the floors. Erin has been stabbed in the back and the other woman has been cut several times and stabbed with a Civil War sword that had been hanging on the office wall.

Harper says that there were no typos in the killer's messages, which had previously alerted them to the fact that he was on the move. However, Miles points out that he could have flown into a nearby landing strip maintained for crop dusters, which would mean he hadn't been on the move but a few hours before the killing - a time in which Harper had not conversed with him. Harper talks to Bob Anderson who tells him to call Drewe's mother with the news that Erin and Drewe have gone shopping. Bob wants to be certain he is the one to tell his wife of their daughter's death.

Harper also requests that the police guard the house to be certain the killer doesn't go after Erin's daughter.

While Drewe sleeps off a sedative Harper gave her, he takes out a mop and disinfectant and begins to scrub up the blood in the office. While he's cleaning, Miles calls with the news that the Trojan horse has worked after all and that he has gained access to data files from the killer's computer - including details of many of the murders. Harper interrupts to tell of Erin's death. Miles accepts responsibility though Harper says they



are both to blame. Then Miles admits that he didn't actually manage to route past the address system with the telephone company, meaning the killer could have tracked "Erin" through the phone lines for the computer connection.

Miles and Harper begin to evaluate the reason the killer was interested in "Erin." The killer first murdered young women who were potential donors, taking their pineal gland, then moved to older women as recipients. Erin is too young to be a potential recipient - as Karin Wheat and Rosalind May were to have been. Miles says that he checked on the date of Patrick and Erin's wedding, compared that to Holly's birth date and came up with the idea that Harper was likely Holly's father. Miles believes Erin caught his interest because of the "semi-incestuous" event in her own life. Miles thinks the killer has admitted that his pineal work is "going down the tubes" and was searching for another means of immortality - children. Miles tells Harper that he and Drewe should "get away" for awhile, pointing out that the killer could be very angry about the death of Kali.

While he's in the kitchen, Harper realizes that none of the officers would have known about the tunnel and that the killer could very well be hiding there even now. He rushes to Drewe's bedroom, knowing they can't make a run for it because Drewe is sedated and it's too far for Harper to carry her in a hurry. He calls for help from the sheriff's department and is assured that there are two deputies on site. They rush in and head down the tunnel. Drewe awakens and they soon hear a gunshot followed by screaming. Harper gives Drewe a gun telling her to shoot anyone who comes through the bedroom door and goes to the tunnel though he says he knows it's a foolish thing to do. He finds Deputy Billy Jackson down but it's later discovered he was shot by his own partner.

After the danger appears to be past, Drewe wants to go to her parents. Harper helps her into a police car and rides there with her though he's under orders to return home with the deputy.

Chapters 36 through 40 Analysis

While he's trying to figure out how to get back to Rain, Mayeux offers him a ride. Harper agrees on the condition that Mayeux hurry. Harper has been worried about Drewe the entire time he was under arrest, even asking to be allowed to remain at home to take care of some personal business. He seems worried that Erin might call Drewe despite her promise to give him time to break the news of their affair himself. While in Erin's home, Harper considers that Erin's death is the only way to stop her from revealing their secret but he is stopped from taking any action on his own by Erin's mention of Holly. When Erin's body is found a short time later, Harper's thoughts will return to the fact that she'd planned to tell Patrick and Drewe the truth of her affair with Harper and now couldn't carry out that intention. He'll note that he wishes he could feel genuine remorse for Erin but admits that he feels relief as well.

The "Jane Doe" dead in Harper's office will soon be identified as the killer's wife - who he calls a "concubine" - a woman of Indian descent who the killer calls "Kali."



There's a minor incision in Erin's abdomen, and Harper will later learn that the killer removed her ovaries and that he put them in Harper's guitar that is hanging on the way. He also urinated into the guitar. When Harper discovers this, he takes the guitar outside and burns it, despite the fact that the instrument is worth thousands of dollars. The killer will say that he'd planned to have children with Erin before he discovered that the Erin he knew online was not real. It will later be revealed that it was apparently just a fluke that Erin is in the house when the killer and Kali arrive.



Chapters 41 through 46

Chapters 41 through 46 Summary

After Drewe is taken to the home of her parents, Harper is taken to the Yazoo County Sheriff's Office where Harper finds out that a plane has been found in the river but the cockpit was empty. While some say he must have drowned, Harper isn't certain. When Harper talks to Miles the next day, Miles claims to be in the home of the killer. He found the man by tracking a piece of software found on the killer's computer by the Trojan horse. Miles reveals that the man's name is Edward Berkmann - a doctor. He's an alum of Columbia University, is a brilliant brain surgeon and created a working model of the human brain that's used in an array of settings, including as a teaching tool.

Miles tells about Berkmann's newest findings on the pineal gland. He has determined that he needs only a sample from the donor rather than the entire gland, meaning he can retrieve what he needs in a matter of minutes. The implanting need not be done in the head of the recipient, but can in fact be injected into the sternum. It seems Berkmann is trying to perfect the procedure before he tries it on himself.

After their conversation, Harper goes to the restroom where he finds a note on the toilet paper that reads, "Sorry I missed you. Left a present in the fridge. Check the lettuce. B" Harper finds film from an eight-millimeter video tape stuck in a hollowed out spot in the lettuce head. He winds it onto a case and finds that it's Dr. Berkmann in Harper's home. He pulls out the disc labeled "Trojan horse" and shows it to the camera. He says that Kali was his "faithful concubine of twenty years," and that her death is Harper's fault. He says that as he began to take interest in Erin, Kali grew angry, and that he brought Kali along with the intention of getting Erin away from Kali later. Harper's farmhouse is too isolated for surveillance so Berkmann and Kali decided on a "blitz attack" and found Erin inside, quite by accident. Erin and Kali fought and both died. Berkmann was wounded and stitched up the wound himself. He says that Erin "died in my arms" and that he'd tried to save her but the wound to her back was too deep.

Berkmann then holds up a photo of the family - Harper, Drewe, Patrick, Erin and Holly - and says that he's now figured out that it was Harper who created the online version of Erin and who duped him into the situation. He then tells of his quest for a liver donor, that he'd found surgeons willing to do an illegal transplant and that the new liver had effectively cured his hemophilia. He takes Harper's guitar from the wall, drops in Erin's ovaries and then urinates in it. He says that he'd harvested her ovaries before discovering that Erin "wasn't who I thought she was." Berkmann says he's not concerned that Harper will share the tape with the authorities because he has too much to lose - Berkmann reveals on tape that he's figured out that Harper is the father of Erin's child.

Harper calls Miles then calls Dr. Lenz, revealing that he and Miles had executed a plan like Dr. Lenz's "Lilith," and that it had been successful in drawing out the killer - too



successful. Harper says that he wants Dr. Lenz to evaluate the conversations between "Erin" and the killer and the tape left by the killer, then to give an opinion on whether the killer was likely to be a continued threat to Harper's family. Later that afternoon, Harper receives a call from Drewe who says that Harper is not to attend Erin's funeral nor to contact Drewe. She says that her father is "looking for someone to blame," but Harper believes that it's Drewe who doesn't want Harper's presence. Harper obeys with regard to the funeral but attends the burial service.

Bob Anderson approaches Harper and asks if he knows who killed Erin. Harper says that he knows the man's name. Bob exacts a promise from Harper - that he will call Bob when he encounters the killer. Bob then tells Harper that "no man is immune to the temptations of the flesh," that Harper needs to work on making up with Drewe, and that Harper will punish himself for whatever role he played in Erin's death. After Bob leaves, Harper has his guitar and sings a farewell song to Erin. He tells Drewe that he believes Erin would have wanted him to say good-bye in this manner. They look into the open grave and see a pair of sunglasses and Harper is suddenly certain that the glasses belong to the killer. He tells Drewe this and says that they must make a run for Harper's truck. They do and encounter a man as they near the vehicle. Harper strikes out, knocks the man down and later learns that the man was an FBI agent sent to keep an eye on the scene in case the killer appeared. It will later be revealed that the sunglasses do belong to the killer, that he was at the funeral and that he didn't strike at Harper and Drewe because of the FBI agent's presence.

After the incident at the cemetery, Drewe decides that she will return to her parents' home for an hour, and then go home with Harper. Harper, saying that he's putting in a "desperate bid for normalcy," makes a joke about the number of chickens that gave their lives for the many casseroles waiting at the Anderson house. Drewe playfully hits him. Drewe says that she no longer wants to live in the farmhouse. She says she wants to leave, rent a home in Jackson first and then decide what to do. Harper agrees.

On the way home, Harper allows himself to believe for a moment that he might be finished with the entire escapade, and that the killer might actually be at the bottom of the Mississippi River. At home, Harper gets a call from Lenz who says that he has updated his profile of the killer. He says that Berkmann believes that the ends justify the means, that he's searching for a specific freedom - freedom from death - and that having been denied that he now seeks a different kind of immortality by having children. Lenz ends their conversation by saying he believes the killer will be trying to reach Drewe. Harper and Drewe return to the farmhouse to pack. Harper has secured a rental house for three months and they are planning to take only the necessities. While Drewe is taking a shower, Harper sees a message on the EROS computer from "SYSOP Edward Berkmann, M.D."

Chapters 41 through 46 Analysis

On the way to her parents' house, Drewe questions Harper about Erin's presence in their house. She asks why Harper would leave Erin alone after Drewe expressed



concern that Erin might be suicidal. Harper says that he hadn't wanted to share this information with Drewe, but that Patrick is not Holly's father. She asks who is and Harper says that Erin doesn't know. He says that he feels bad for having slandered Erin who isn't even around to defend herself. He says he also feels bad that Drewe accepts it without argument. Harper then says that he feels like a junkie and that he knows his "habit" is affecting lives. When they arrive at the Anderson's home, Harper asks for a moment alone with Drewe. He then tells her that he's Holly's father. Drewe gets out of the car and walks away. When Harper would have followed, the deputy refuses to allow it.

Harper's request that Dr. Lenz evaluate the information left by the killer indicates that Harper doesn't believe that the killer is dead. Over the next days, Harper will often conclude that the killer is nearby without any real proof. Some of those incidents may seem like paranoia and when Harper tells the Sheriff about the sunglasses, Buckner will treat it as paranoia. Harper's suspicions will later be proven but even before that, Bob Anderson says that he's seen men swim the Mississippi River, so he also believes the killer could have survived. It will later be revealed that the crash was staged and that the killer wasn't even in the plane when it went into the water.

When Harper returns to the Anderson house to pick up Drewe, Holly runs to give him a hug. After a brief conversation, Drewe takes Holly from Harper's arms and gives her to Patrick. Harper notes that it's a symbolic gesture. Drewe then tells Harper that she believes they shouldn't tell Patrick the truth and that she believes he'll now realize that he shouldn't have become fixated on that detail so that he can move on. She says that Harper will have to realize that Patrick and Holly will lead their own lives, that Patrick will likely eventually remarry and they will see less of each other.



Chapters 46 through 50

Chapters 46 through 50 Summary

Miles and Harper are discussing what to do about the message from Berkmann and Miles suggests that Harper talk to him, at least for a few minutes. Their idea is that if Berkmann is making no typographical errors, it means he's working from his home base - which Miles believes to be in New York. That would mean Drewe and Harper were safe for the moment. Berkmann's first words to Harper are, "How did you like my little film?" Harper says that the FBI liked it and Berkmann calls Harper "a little ankle biter," believing that Harper would not have shown the film because of the personal aspect. There are no typos in the first pages and Miles believes that Berkmann is in New York. That will soon prove to be false.

Berkmann says he wants Drewe. Harper is using the voice program, meaning Berkmann's messages are being voiced aloud by the computer. Drewe overhears her name and wants to know what's going on. Harper considers lying but then tells her that Berkmann is alive and that he's become fixated on her. Drewe asks about the reference to the film and Harper says that Berkmann left a movie after Erin's murder. Drewe insists on seeing it though Harper objects.

While Drewe watches the film, Miles is in New York on a search for Berkmann's "killing house." He's found street people who know Berkmann by sight and is following up on leads he hopes will take him to the place Berkmann uses for computer chat and for his murders. Drewe then contacts Berkmann via EROS and Miles tells Harper on the telephone that he's been arrested by the FBI before he could gain entrance to the warehouse he believes is being used by Berkmann. Miles, accompanied by the FBI, tells Drewe to keep Berkmann talking while they break into his warehouse. Drewe does this, sparring with Berkmann who doesn't know that Harper has confessed to his affair with Erin. Berkmann then begins to quote passages from the conversation Harper held with Lenz on the drive to the FBI safe house and Harper realizes that Lenz must have taped that interview. When Kali broke into the Lenz home and murdered the doctor's wife, she took session tapes - including Harper's. Though Drewe knows about the affair, Berkmann is now giving her details that Harper would never have divulged. Drewe is hurting from the conversation but continues to talk to Berkmann, hoping that he'll still be online when the FBI enters the warehouse. The official entry is accompanied by a series of explosions but Berkmann simply continues to type, making it apparent that he isn't in that building.

Suddenly, Harper asks Miles if there's a chance the killer knows that they were using the error rate to predict his traveling patterns and he's now using the voice program on the road. In fact, he is using a voice system on his home computer - at the warehouse - but is working from a laptop. Miles and Harper come to that conclusion when Miles picks up a telephone receiver at the warehouse, temporarily breaking the connection and causing skipped words on the EROS chat between Berkmann and Drewe. Harper



quietly steps to the office door and turns the lock, saying that it's now pretty obvious where the killer is. He asks Miles to request that the FBI send agents to the farmhouse as quickly as possible and begins to consider what he must do next.

He alerts Drewe to the situation then calls Bob Anderson. Mrs. Anderson says Bob and Patrick have gone to the cemetery and Harper phones the FBI agent who was stationed at the cemetery, alerting him to the problem and asking that he tell Bob and Patrick. Next, he calls Buckner but the phone goes dead in the middle of the call.

Drewe wants to run but Harper fears being in the open without knowing where Berkmann is. He slips into the bedroom and retrieves Drewe's gun. Then, he enters his father's gun safe, and chooses a handgun for himself.

Harper comes up with a plan and has Drewe type a long note on the computer screen, supposedly from Harper to Berkmann, outlining everything he plans to do to the man. He then loads the laser jet printer cartridge with gunpowder, uses a wire from his guitar and reprograms the keyboard so that any key will prompt the "print" command. His plan is that Berkmann won't be able to see the entire screen without scrolling down, that once he tries to scroll down he'll prompt the printer, and that the printer will explode. Drewe doesn't want to depend on that plan and continues to try to talk to Berkmann. She convinces the doctor that she wants to leave with him but that Harper won't allow it. After some tense haggling in which Berkmann assures her that Harper won't really shoot her if she just walks out, Harper fires in the Drewe's direction, Drewe jerks to the side as if shot and Berkmann shows himself. Harper fires in his direction but misses. Drewe and Harper then try to slip out the back door and encounter the unconscious but breathing body of Detective Mayeux. Harper picks up the man and carries him away from the house, which has been doused with gasoline. Then Harper and Drewe ease back toward the house. Harper discovers that Berkmann is in the office reading the computer screen but he sees Harper the instant before touching the keyboard. As he's about to fire at Harper, he does touch the keyboard and Harper is suddenly deafened by the blast.

Berkmann is dying but not dead. As one of his hands clasps spasmodically and the gun in his other hand fires, igniting the gasoline that he's poured all over the house. Harper asks Drewe if there's anything to be done for Berkmann but Drewe says she has other patients to tend. She moves back to Mayeux and begins checking his wounds, including the screwdriver sticking from his chest. She doesn't remove it for fear of excess bleeding. Harper has a piece of glass embedded in one arm and has been shot in the other, but his injuries are not life-threatening.

When Bob Anderson arrives, he asks about the identity of Berkmann and Harper confirms that he's the man who killed Erin. Bob disappears back to the front of the house where Berkmann is and returns a few minutes later with the news that the man is no longer alive.



Chapters 46 through 50 Analysis

Harper first calls Miles to ask how Berkmann could be on the system with EROS shut down. He next asks where Baxter is currently located and Miles says he's in Connecticut. As soon as Harper realizes that Berkmann is actually at the farmhouse, his next call is to Bob Anderson, who had gone to the cemetery. Following Harper's encounter with the FBI agent at the cemetery earlier in the day, the agent had given Harper his card. Harper now uses it to track down Bob Anderson. Though Harper is also seeking help from the law enforcement as he prepares to face Berkmann, he seems to be hoping for Bob's help. At the cemetery, when he and Drewe had prepared to run, Harper had said that he would face down the killer if he had Bob's help.

When Harper comes up with the plan to blow up Berkmann using the printer, Drewe is skeptical. She continues to insist that they find another way. At one point, she asks Harper how big of an explosion it will make and Harper admits that he doesn't know. He wants the two of them to get into the closet, cover themselves with everything they can find, and wait for the explosion. Drewe is on the verge of agreeing to the plan when Harper sends her to get wet towels - just in case the house goes up in flame. At that point, Drewe is again frantically searching for alternatives.



Characters

Harper Cole

Harper is the husband of Drewe and father of an illegitimate daughter, Holly. He's a gifted musician and soon after college goes on the road with his talent. After only a short time, he decides to give it up, believing that he doesn't have what it takes to succeed. Instead, he begins trading on the stock market and finally makes enough money that he buys and sells only his own stocks. He says that he often deals in commodities that aren't real to him and so once takes possession of what he's just purchased - gold. He retains that gold in a tunnel beneath his farmhouse in Rain, Mississippi.

Harper is wealthy in his own right and has taken on duties overseeing an online chat forum called EROS only as something that sounded interesting. The chat is largely sexual and Harper himself has engaged in online sexual encounters with several women, including one who calls herself "Eleanor Rigby." Privacy of EROS members is imperative and Harper goes against the advice of his friend, Miles, to report his suspicions when seven women - all account holders on EROS - have been murdered. His information is the first tip the police have that the murders could be connected.

Despite the fact that Harper reported the connection, he is soon the prime suspect, as is his friend, Miles. The two men concoct a scheme to catch the killer. Miles "creates" a woman - social security cards, credit accounts and other information. Harper pretends to be that woman and soon catches the attention of the killer. In this case, the killer isn't interested in a donor or a recipient, but is looking for a woman to bear his children. The fatal flaw in the plan is that Miles hasn't been able to disguise Harper's actual location and the killer arrives at the house to take this woman who doesn't actually exist at the same time Harper's sister-in-law, Erin, arrives. Erin is killed and the killer soon fixates on Harper's wife, Drewe, though the killer will die in the process of trying to take Drewe.

As Harper is battling the online killer, he is also dealing with a personal crisis. He fathered a child by his wife's sister, Erin, though Harper has only recently discovered that fact. Erin's marriage is deteriorating and she determines to tell her husband and sister the truth just before her death. Harper decides to tell Drewe the truth anyway but they don't reveal it to Erin's husband.

Dr. Edward Berkmann

A noted neurosurgeon and the man behind the killings, Berkmann continues to elude police until he sets his sights on Harper's wife, Drewe. Berkmann is born to siblings, Catherine and Richard, who were encouraged in their incestuous relationship by their mother. Their father had come to America where he practiced medicine until killing himself after the market crash of the 1920s. Berkmann's father married and his mother ran away to give birth to Berkmann. He idolized his mother and mourned her death with



is entire being. His life is complicated by the fact that his uncle is also his father. His father is married and the wife suspects that Berkmann is really the product of an incestuous relationship. One day, Berkmann's father throws the woman from the stairs and Berkmann witnesses the murder. He says simply that his father should have taken that step sooner.

Berkmann has trouble with his sexuality, always seeking a woman equal to his mother and never finding her. His father was hemophilic as was Berkmann and he fears being injured, even in the sexual act. The two men eventually travel the world in search of a mythical tribe that worships death, and find it in the Thuggee tribe. Berkmann falls for a young girl and his father purchases the girl for two thousand dollars. Berkmann renames her Kali - the goddess of death - and marries her so that she can move to America with him. His father dies of complications of the hemophilia but Berkmann himself eventually hires foreign doctors and kills a man who is his own tissue match, having the victim's liver transplanted into his own body to lessen the effects of the hemophilia.

He later becomes a brilliant neurosurgeon, well-known for his model of the brain. Then Berkmann becomes obsessed with the pineal gland located in the brain. A study has proven that the gland lengthens life and Berkmann begins performing his own experiments, killing women for their pineal glands and planning to implant the glands into living recipients. Several victims are from EROS - the computer program Harper Cole helps oversee - and it's Harper who connects the murders for police. From that point, Berkmann is on the run and becomes obsessed first with Harper's sister-in-law, Erin, then with Harper's wife, Drewe. He plans to achieve the next best thing to immortality - children with Drewe. His obsession is his downfall and he's almost killed by a homemade bomb set by Harper. Harper's father-in-law finishes the job.

Miles Turner

Miles is Harper Cole's long-time friend and the man who monitors EROS during the nighttime hours. When Harper tells Miles of his hunch regarding the murders, Miles warns Harper against going to the police with the information. The two had been very close as children but had grown apart before Miles contacted Harper regarding the position with EROS. Miles was abandoned by his father at age five, attended MIT on scholarship and was among the pioneers in the computer industry.

Miles comes up with the plan to trap the killer by having Harper pretend to be a woman. Though Harper points out that the FBI is already working on a plan exactly like that, Miles says he believes he can succeed because of his ultimate plan - to implant a Trojan horse computer virus into the killer's computer. The two embark on the plan, and Miles sends the killer a photo of Erin with the Trojan horse implanted in the photo. When Erin is killed, Miles blames himself though Harper says they were both culpable in the murder. It's later revealed that Miles himself gave the killer access to the list of EROS users when the two engaged in a homosexual relationship. The killer later verifies that.



It's Miles' tenacity that eventually leads him to the killer's base - a warehouse in New York - though the killer is no longer there at that time.

Drewe Cole

Drewe and Harper have been married three years at the beginning of this story. She is an OB/GYN and is feeling the need to have children though Harper is reluctant because of a secret he holds that he fears will end his marriage. Drewe figures out that the killer is likely a doctor who is harvesting the pineal gland from his victims with the plan to implant them into living recipients. Drewe eventually learns that Harper had an affair with her sister, Erin, and that there's a child of that union. After some time, she comes to believe she can live with the situation. Drewe asks Harper to move from their farmhouse in Rain, Mississippi, and they are packing to leave when the killer contacts Harper again. He has become obsessed with Drewe and Drewe spends some time with him online in an attempt to have him remain stationary while the FBI arrest him, but then learns that he is actually outside their home.

Erin Graham

Erin is Drewe's sister. Erin left school, became a model, did drugs and had sex with many men, leaving the field very soon after her career began. While Drewe was finishing medical school and Harper was living in Chicago, Erin shows up at Harper's apartment. They have sex almost constantly for three days, and Erin ends up pregnant with a daughter, Holly. She soon marries Patrick with the understanding that he is not to ask about Holly's father. When Erin's marriage deteriorates, she tells Harper that she plans to tell Patrick and demands that he tell Drewe. For some unknown reason, Erin then shows up at Harper's house and encounters the killer, Berkmann. She dies but also kills Berkmann's wife, Kali.

Bob Anderson

Bob is Drewe's father. Harper notes that Bob is outspoken and has definite ideas about patriotism. While Harper may not agree with many of Bob's stands, he notes that Bob has served his country in the military and that is reason enough to remain quiet about the aspect of Bob's philosophies with which Harper doesn't agree. After Erin's death, Bob asks Harper if he knows the killer. When Harper says he knows who killed Erin, Bob demands that if there comes a time Harper has access to the man, he'll notify Bob. Harper agrees and when that time comes, he calls Bob. Though Berkmann is mortally injured, he is still alive when Bob arrives. When Bob learns that Berkmann is the killer, he returns to where the man lies on the ground. When he returns to Harper's location, he says simply that Berkmann is no longer alive.



Jan Krislov

Jan is the widow who owns EROS. Jan is known for her outspoken views on several topics, including privacy. With that in mind, it's no wonder that she's serious about protecting the privacy of those who use EROS. She provides several safeguards, billing is done automatically and there is a monetary compensation if the membership information of anyone becomes generally known. This makes Harper's actions more serious because he's violated his company's policy.

Dr. Arthur Lenz

Lenz is the FBI psychiatrist who talks with Harper during his first interview. At the conclusion of the interview, Lenz asks Harper what instrument he plays, then says that he knew he played because of the calluses on Harper's hand. Lenz eventually pretends to be "Lilith" online and lures Berkmann into several conversations. Though Lenz believes he's getting close, Berkmann has really discovered the truth and has Kali kill Lenz's wife in retaliation.

Patrick Graham

Patrick is Harper's brother-in-law and husband to Erin. He is an oncologist in Jackson, Mississippi, and is the same age as Harper. When Erin and Patrick marry, Erin tells him that she is already pregnant and that she'll marry him only if he never asks about the child's father. Patrick later begins to badger Erin for the information. After Erin's death, Drewe determines that they won't tell Patrick the truth.

Kali

Kali is the woman married to Edward Berkmann. She was actually a member of a tribe in India when Berkmann and his father found her. Berkmann immediately fell for her and they had sex while he was a visitor in her village - a feat he'd never before accomplished. Berkmann asks Kali's father for her hand in marriage but the father refuses. Berkmann's father buys the girl for two thousand dollars and Berkmann notes that the girl doesn't seem to mind. It's Kali who does the majority of the killing. She's completely devoted to Berkmann and is very angry when she discovers that he's become enamored with Erin.

Eleanor Rigby

Eleanor Rigby is the online name used by EROS subscriber Eleanor Markham and Harper's online lover. She is a "moderately successful mystery writer." She tells Harper that she lives in Los Angeles with her crippled sister and seldom leaves home except to work at her second job as a body double for famous actresses. Harper will later learn



that she actually doesn't work as a body double, that she has no sister but is crippled herself.

Rosalind May

Rosalind is the woman David Charles reports has insufficient funds to make her EROS payment - the same thing that happened to the six women who were murdered prior to Karin Wheat's death. Rosalind was actually intended to be a pineal gland recipient but the woman has a heart attack and dies before the procedure can be completed.

Michael Mayeux

Mayeux is the New Orleans detective who is investigating the Karin Wheat murder and who is the first officer contacted by Harper Cole regarding his suspicions. Mayeux later takes time off work to provide surveillance to the Cole home in case the killer returns. He is shot with a dart and stabbed with a screwdriver, but not killed.

Karin Wheat

Wheat is a wealthy writer who is a member of EROS. When she is killed, Harper Cole becomes convinced that there are additional murders and that they are all connected because of their membership on EROS.



Objects/Places

New Orleans

New Orleans is where Karin Jones is murdered and where Harper Cole talks with police and FBI about his suspicions about the murder.

EROS

EROS is the acronym for Erotic Realtime On-line Stimulation, a computer service providing three levels of communication and role play. Harper Cole monitors EROS and is the first to discover the link between the seven murdered women.

Rain, Mississippi

Mississippi is where Harper Cole and his wife, Drewe, live in a farmhouse.

Yazoo County, Mississippi

Yazoo is the county where a part of Harper Cole's farm property is located.

Iris

Iris is the name of Karin Wheat's book.

SIDDHARTHA

SIDDHARTHA is a Herman Hesse novel about a spiritual journey in the time of Buddha and the password for the EROS systems operator.

Ward Cleaver

Ward Cleaver is a computer program written by Miles Turner that filters unsuitable content from EROS. Those who produce these messages are not turned over to the police, but in theory are notified that the content is not suitable. Words like "children" prompt the program but Harper notes that Miles doesn't always get around to notifying the senders immediately.

McLean, Virginia

Virginia is where the office of Dr. Lenz is located.

MDCP

MDCP stands for Mobile Digital Command Post, also called "Dr. Cop." It's located in the trailer of a tractor-trailer rig and is at Quantico when Harper goes there with Dr. Lenz.

Thugee Tribe

The Thugee are a tribe of people in India who worship the goddess of death, Kali. This is where Berkmann meets up with his wife, who he names Kali and who does killing as he requires it.



Themes

The Desire for Immortality

Edward Berkmann's desire for immortality leads him in two different directions. He first tries to gain immortality by perfecting a procedure to transplant the pineal gland from a young donor to an older recipient. He takes the limited knowledge he has from a study done on mice. In that study, the mice that were given the transplants acted younger, exhibited renewed vitality and were more interested in sex. It's noted that they didn't really grow old but eventually just died. The fact that the study worked in mice is all Berkmann has to go on, but he believes it to be sufficient. He has actually done enough research on his own that he has the entire harvesting procedure down to a matter of minutes. He is also able to quickly do the transplant. The problem is that he has no idea of the side-effects or the long-term effects of the procedures on humans. The pineal gland is located in the brain. It could be that the recipients, even though they received the transplants in the sternum rather than in the brain, could have suffered brain damage or other problems that researchers were unable to document during the study of the mice.

When the plan for the pineal gland transplant begins to fall apart, Berkmann looks to another method of immortality - children. He first selects Erin for that task believing her to be what he considers the perfect woman. When he learns that she isn't what he'd believed her to be, he fixates on Erin's sister, Drewe, as the perfect mate.

Reaction to Fear

There are a number of reactions to fear when the various characters are faced with threats. When Harper Cole realizes that the killer is at or near his home and that he and Drewe are unprotected, he calmly reaches over and locks the door. He will soon slip out of the room to get guns for both himself and Drewe, but he also begins to look around for a proactive way to attack without meeting the killer face-to-face. When he comes up with the idea of creating the bomb from the laser jet printer, Drewe is immediately skeptical and just as carefully looks for another answer. Her faith in Harper's plan drops even more when he admits that he doesn't know how big the explosion will be.

Rosalind May's reaction to fear is intense. Berkmann notes that he tries to explain to her that they're going to conduct an experiment that includes opening her chest. He says that he'd thought explaining it to her would lessen her fear, but it actually heightened it to the point that she had a heart attack and died.

Both Karin Wheat and Erin Graham met their attackers fighting. It's noted that Karin was to have been kidnapped, as Rosalind May was. However, when she discovered Berkmann in her house, she panicked and was eventually killed. Berkmann says that



Erin also fought valiantly against the threat when she encountered Berkmann and Kali at the Cole home. She fought so furiously that she killed Kali.

Desire

Desire is a recurring theme, though the various characters desire different things. In the case of Berkmann, the desires change over the course of his lifetime. As a young man, he fears being injured because of his disease but still apparently has normal sexual desires - though he is unable to fulfill those. He eventually discovers that he is most excited by a cadaver and later finds sexual fulfillment in the arms of a woman who was willing to lie still with him during their first encounter, effectively leading him to enjoy other types of sex.

Of course, Berkmann's desires don't end at sexual. His killing apparently begins because of his desire for immortality. He is killing women, harvesting the pineal glands from their brains, and transplanting those into older women. His hope is that he will perfect a process whereby the old will be renewed and rejuvenated - effectively providing a near-immortality. When his quest for this procedure seems to be a complete failure, he looks to the next best option - immortality by way of having children.

Harper and Erin gave in to their desires and the result was a secret - and a child. Those desires eventually tore Erin's marriage apart and created serious problems for Harper and his wife. Though Harper and Drewe were not married at the time of Harper's affair with Erin, it carries some resemblance to Berkmann's own life. In that case, desire brought a brother and sister together. While the relationship was overtly sexual, there was another element - much needed companionship. In the case of Berkmann's parents, the children were largely isolated without outside friendships. They seemed to have needed the solace of each other's companionship.



Style

Point of View

The majority of the story is written in first person from Harper's point of view, which is very limited. The exception are letters from the killer, addressed to his father. These are also limited with the writer limiting his facts, indicating that his "father" knows the facts of the story so that his letters need only provide particular facts. The story is written in chronological order with occasional flashbacks to provide information to the reader. These are done well so that they are not confusing. For example, the story of how Miles was thrown into the flooded fort where he encountered the snake is revealed through a conversation between Harper and Dr. Lenz. In this way, the reader gets insight into Miles' past without interrupting the flow of the story.

It's interesting that there are occasional lapses into past tense though the majority of the story is written in present tense. The use of present tense is an effective literary device that seems to keep the reader in the story rather than looking at it from a distance.

Setting

The majority of the story is set in Rain, Mississippi, though the killer will strike in cities around the nation, including New Orleans, Portland, New York and Houston. The "killing house" where he has an operating room and where hostages were held and killed was in New York. The descriptions of the New York neighborhoods seem reasonable and accurate, as do the descriptions of the cities where Harper's in-laws live, including Jackson, Mississippi.

It's interesting that Rain, Mississippi does not appear on current-day maps though Harper describes it with great detail, including how the town got its name. According to that description, in the days of gambling and plantations, the owner of the land in that region placed a huge bet on a hand of cards. Being unable to cover the bet, he put the plantation house up for collateral - and lost. When the new owner went out to claim the property, there came a huge rain shower, which prompted the name, "Rain, Mississippi." The details of Harper's family home include a tunnel leading to the cotton field, providing both storage and hiding places. A nearby Indian mound where Harper goes to think and other details of the region seem believable.

Other descriptions - of the time, technology and people - are also reasonable, making the entire setting believable.

Language and Meaning

The book is written in a straightforward style but there are medical, computer and timed references that could be confusing to some readers. One of the women on the EROS



system is named "Eleanor Rigby." The Beatles had a hit with their song about her and it's that connection that makes Harper at one point even more concerned about "Eleanor" than he had been previously because of the killer's use of the online name, "Maxwell." The reference is explained to some degree but readers unfamiliar with the Beatles' song that describes the action of "Maxwell Edison" may not get the full impact of that connection. In that song, "Maxwell's silver hammer" comes down on the head of several women.

The medical terminology is largely explained in layman's terms and those passages that are not explained are not critical to understanding the book. The explanations are given in the form of conversations. For example, Drewe talks to Miles and Harper - both who have little medical background - about the study of the pineal gland and its hormones as they relate to the aging process. The explanations are critical to understanding what motivates the killer but are explained in such a way that the reader isn't getting a lesson in medical terms but is gaining the necessary information. The same is true of computer terminology though some of the computer knowledge of 1998 - when the book was published - is no longer up-to-date. For example, Harper notes the sound of the "dot-matrix printer," saying that it reminded him of the sound gerbils would make if they were on drugs. He also talks of the novelty of the JPEG file though within a few years that would be commonplace. Some of the technology and methodology used to track the killer - such as the search for the "remailer" account - is complicated but a complete understanding is not necessary to the casual reader.

The book begins with a prologue, followed by the sentence, "Life is simple." The book ends with the same words followed by, "You are healthy or you are sick. You are faithful to your wife or you aren't. You are alive or you are dead. I am alive." The wrap up might be lost to the casual reader but can really carry a profound message to the reader paying close attention to detail.

Structure

The story begins with a letter to "Dear Father," from the killer, who will eventually be identified as a doctor named Berkmann though the identification will not occur until much later. There follows a brief piece of the story followed by other letters. The story does flow in chronological order though some of these letters are flashbacks into previous events. One interesting point about the letters is the tense the author uses. For example, the first letter describes the trip across New Orleans and gaining access to Karin Wheat's property in past tense, and then switches to present tense for the description of the actual assault.

In addition to the letters, there are segments of online conversations included in the book. Letters and online communication are printed in a font different than the body of the story, effectively setting it apart. The online chat forum may seem unrealistic to some readers but it should be noted that the use of voice recognition ware changes the way of talking at least to some degree and that those "chatting" are not the type of people who would normally be found in later day "chat rooms."



There are fifty-two chapters of varying lengths. In at least one case, the chapter is less than a full page. The chapters that are letters from the killer to "dear father" are typically much shorter and provide the only first-person look into the killer's personality for some time. Other chapters are fourteen pages or more in length.



Quotes

"I come to save, but who can grasp great purpose with vision clouded by terror? My hoes crash around me like shattered icons. I slip my right hand behind my back and grip the butt of the pistol." Prologue, Page 13

"The real freaks are on their way home from work. My wife should be as well." Chapter 1, Page 20

"The heart of the house is the kitchen. It is a long room, and too narrow. I once thought of tearing out a wall and expanding it, but a black carpenter friend told me that since the entire house seemed held to this core by some form of redneck magic, I'd do better to enjoy rubbing asses with my wife whenever we passed between the stove and the opposite counter at the same time. That turned out to be good advice." Chapter 1, Page 23

"To Bob Anderson, 'politically correct' means you salute the flag, work your butt off, pay your taxes, pray in school, and you by Gog go when Uncle Sam calls you, no questions asked. I could ridicule his views, but I won't. Guys like Bob Anderson fought and died for this country years before I was born. Guys like Bob Anderson liberated Nordhausen and Buchenwald. Bob himself fought in Korea. So I keep my thirty-three-year-old mouth shut." Chapter 8, Page 76

"And my skill at deception is crumbling. Beyond this, I have an irrational feeling that my secret has taken on a life of its own - that it is trying to get out. It flutters at the edge of Patrick's consciousness, polishes the fine blade of Drewe's mistrust." Chapter 8, Page 82

She died of a massive myocardial infarction, and no one could have been more surprised than I. There were no relevant risk factors in her history. As unscientific as it may sound, I believe the woman died of pure terror. When she flatlined, doubt assailed me like a shadow. Should I stop? Should I go on?" - The killer on the death of Rosalind May, Chapter 13, Page 118

"Then he picks up his computer and his cellular phone and disappears through the door like a tall and undernourished White Rabbit." Chapter 15, Page 131

"All murders of this type are sexually motivated. It's just that the sexual component may be deeply repressed. The taking of the pineal conjures images of cults or mad



scientists, but in the end, all this will resolve into some variant of old-fashioned lust."
Chapter 17, Page 155

"Please stop trying to locate us. You cannot succeed. You were not even close today in Dallas. An innocent man died for nothing. If you knew what we are trying to accomplish, you would not even try to find us. You would realize that our work will ultimately benefit all mankind. Our work is almost complete. We will sacrifice no more lives than necessary. When the time is right we shall come to you. You must trust us, and leave us alone. Thank you." - The message from the killer to the FBI, Chapter 21, Page 214

"All my system queries on the Strobekker account have come back: Subscriber not currently logged on. The characters scrolling across my screen turned to alphabet soup long ago, and the dot-matrix printer recording them now sounds like a herd of cocaine-addicted gerbils." Chapter 22, Page 217

"But those lost parents stared across an uncharged sea of people, praying in vain for the phosphorous glow of a long-vanished trail, each town an eddy, each city a whirlpool that could swallow a hundred children without trace. And across that sea float the millions of milk cartons carrying photographs of the missing like messages in bottles, bound for garbage cans as surely as the ruins of last night's dinner." - Harper describing the hopelessness of a parent finding a lost child, Chapter 26, Page 297

"Richard was terrified, not that I would report him to the police, but that he might have lost me forever by committing murder before my eyes. I remember my reaction to this day. I said, 'It's about time you did something about that shrew,' Uncle." Chapter 33, Page 395

"The chilling thought that possessed me for an instant this afternoon - that only death could stop her from revealing our secret - has been fulfilled. And as I scrub fiercely at her blood, fighting to feel only honest grief at her passing, the pathetic rat voice of human instinct whispers in my heart: Than God they'll never know." Chapter 38, Page 470

"I listen in a way I have not since my grandfather took me on my first and last deer hunt. Shooting Bambi seemed cruel and unnecessary to me then. Now blowing off a man's head seems entirely justifiable." Chapter 39, Page 481

"As Drewe stares at me, willing me to deafness, I realize I'm in a position I've seen a hundred times in movies. Seen, and then screamed silently at the hero not to go into the woods or up the attic stairs or wherever any half-intelligent person would know the



monster or murderer was waiting. But sitting here now, in the awful silence following those screams, one fact is inescapable: I brought those men here. If I don't help them, I will carry their lives on my conscience forever. And I'm already carrying too much." Chapter 40, Page 486

"Given Berkmann's background, particularly his disease, he sought the only fire modern man is still denied: freedom from death. He committed the gravest mortal sin - premeditated murder - in pursuit of immortality." Chapter 45, Page 551

"I got to my feet. I'm not sure why but doing something always feels better than doing nothing. Even if you're doing something stupid." Chapter 50, Page 617

"Sheriff Buckner arrived with an army loaded for bear but found the bear already dead. He might have been unpleasant about that, but Bob's presence had an amazing effect on his demeanor. He couldn't seem to do enough for us." Chapter 50, Page 621

Topics for Discussion

What does Harper Cole do for a living? What has he done in the past? What prompted that career? What ended it?

What does Drewe do for a living? How does that eventually help in their pursuit of the killer?

Who do police think the killer is? Why? How is he eventually identified?

Describe Berkmann's birth and childhood. How did this shape him into the adult he became?

What is the secret between Harper and Erin? What prompts Erin to decide to tell Patrick? What does she demand of Harper? What happens? What is it that they agree on? How is the secret revealed to Drewe? To Patrick?

How do both Miles and Dr. Lenz propose to catch the killer? How are their methods similar? Different? Why is Lenz not successful? Why is Miles' method successful?

Describe the relationship between the killer and Kali. What is it that the killer wants of Erin? Of Drewe? What is it about his infatuation with Drewe that eventually leads to his downfall? Describe the scene at Harper's home.

Describe at least three times that the killer is one step ahead of law enforcement.