

Repossessed Study Guide

Repossessed by A. M. Jenkins

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Plot Summary

Published in 2007, *Repossessed* is the fourth of seven novels written by Texas-based author Amanda M. Jenkins. Jenkins was a high-school mathematics teacher before embarking on an award-winning career as a young adult novelist. *Repossessed* is an allegorical-type novel that describes what happens when Kiriell, a devil from hell, decides to take a break from his duties in the underworld and experience life on Earth for a few days. To accomplish this, he "hijacks" the body of a suburban American teenager named Shaun Simmons, who had been accidentally killed in a traffic accident. This allows Kiriell to experience human life for the first time with all its sensations, ranging from joyous to depressing, poignant, and ordinary.

Repossessed takes place in a familiar landscape, an American suburb that should be familiar to any reader. Although the plot is "supernatural," there are no unusual or surreal scenes that would suggest an otherworldly or unrealistic setting. Even the few descriptions of hell itself are nothing out of the ordinary. Hell is not portrayed as the typical flaming underground cavern overseen by cloven-footed demons with pitchforks and tails.

Hell is described in a matter of fact way as a rather boring assembly-line, not unlike any familiar institution like a workplace or classroom. Indeed, most of the action in this novel takes place in only two settings: the characters' homes and the school that they attend. A few of the scenes take place in a school bus and one takes place in a Methodist church. None of the scenes take place in what would be other familiar suburban locales, such as a shopping mall, gas station, library, or recreation area. By focusing on these locales, the author lets the readers know that this is a book about the central locales in every male adolescent's life: his home (and that of his friends) and the school he attends. By eliminating references to shopping malls or recreational facilities, the author emphasizes that the characters, especially Shaun Simmons, are serious and well-behaved young people.

During his three-day sojourn on Earth, "Shaun" appears to his family and friends as the ordinary teenager they have always known, though his "soul" is really that of Kiriell, an omniscient Fallen Angel. Kiriell, whose name means "mirror of souls," is given the job in hell of reflecting people's sorrow and guilt back upon them, so they come to realize their true natures, albeit sinful. On Earth, Kiriell as "Shaun" performs the same function as a kind of benevolent provocateur, causing his family and friends to have experiences and insights that are significant learning experiences for them. Kiriell resolves to do three things while living on the earthly plane: to make sure Shaun's younger brother, Jason, breaks out of his shell and is taken care of; to have sexual intercourse with Lane, his high-school sweetheart; and to redeem the school bully, Reed McGowan, by confronting him with the errors of his ways. Kiriell accomplishes the first and last of these goals. As for his desire to indulge the sin of Lust, he only succeeds in kissing and making out with Lane and finds out that this has been her true heart's desire from the beginning as well. These three resolutions form the three subplots of the book, called "tree trunks" by "Shaun."



Not surprisingly, Shaun's solicitude toward Jason develops after he has been "repossessed" by Kireil. Without much ado, the older boy simply starts being nice to his younger brother, and this warmth and spontaneity eventually makes a difference. At first, Jason and his mother are surprised that "Shaun" is behaving in a more civil fashion, a development explained away as simply adolescent mood change. Jason finds it difficult to accept his brother's suddenly bizarre behavior, but he gradually is won over when he is invited to play video games with "Shaun" and his older friends.

The relationship between "Shaun" and Reed McGowan also evolves after Kiriell has taken over. Whereas in the past Shaun shied away from confrontation with Reed, the repossessed "Shaun" is no longer afraid to stand up for himself when being bullied. To the credit of his new-found identity as a "mirrorer of souls," "Shaun" does not become aggressive; instead, he simply speaks truth to power and tries to get Ryan to see the reasons why he is behaving so shabbily.

In the third major subplot, "Shaun" tries to seduce Lane Henneberger in a convoluted fashion that will be familiar to most teenage males who have tried to figure out the mysteries of sex and romance. He involves his best friend, Bailey Darnell, as a co-conspirator. "Shaun" asks Bailey to invite Lane to his house so the three of them can do their homework together. This, hopes "Shaun," would give him an opportunity to have some private time together with Lane. The plot is foiled when Lane instead gets into an animated discussion with Bailey about his collection of manga comics. Undaunted, "Shaun" persists and gets invited to Lane's house the next day, where his attempts at seduction are thwarted by Lane's prudishness. "Shaun" concludes that he really only wanted to kiss and make out with her, anyway.

During the narrative, Kiriell also reflects on his own role as an overseer in hell, wondering if he was being punished by the Creator (God). He ends up being redeemed himself, accepting his purpose in life, even if that is to go back to hell. Just before he steps back into the afterlife by returning Shaun's "hijacked" body, he declares, "My place in this universe might not be what others would consider desirable. But it is mine."



Chapters 1-2

Chapters 1-2 Summary

Kiriell, one of the legions of devils in hell, is fed up with his humdrum existence there and decides to take possession of the body of a recently deceased human. He decides he wants to smart small and slip into a life already in progress. He wants a body that is in good working condition and that is relatively free from privation, and belonging to someone who has relatively few responsibilities in the world. Given these criteria, he thinks his ideal candidate for "body-snatching" is a middle-class suburban American teenager whose parents have divorced, allowing him to be relatively unsupervised. He settles on a seventeen-year-old high-school student named Shaun Simmons, "hijacking" his body when the boy is hit by a speeding cement mixer when he stepped into its path from behind a parked SUV. "It was a fast-motion fill-up," reports Kiriell, "like pouring myself all at once into a too-tight vessel." From that moment, "Shaun" wakes up from the accident and appears relatively normal to his parents and friends, with only minor behavioral changes that they attribute to the normal weirdness that any teenager exhibits. Since Kiriell, being a disembodied spirit, is omniscient, he already knows everything about the people in the world he has chosen to inhabit. However, for the first time in his existence, he is "immersed in an ocean of details" with the myriad of human sensations that he is feeling for the first time: touch, taste, temperature, color, and sexuality. As Kiriell begins his temporary life in Shaun's body, he describes his domestic life, where he lives with his mother, his younger brother Jason, and his pet cat named Peanut. In typical sibling rivalry, Shaun refers to his brother as a "jerkwad." Kiriell also ruminates on the nature of good and evil as well as heaven and hell in a casual way.

Chapters 1-2 Analysis

These two chapters establish the basic premise of this novel: that it is a "surreal" narrative describing the possession of a human body by a benevolent demon who wishes a respite from the humdrum of life as overseer in hell. The novel is told in the first-person, from the viewpoint of the demon "Kiriell" who takes over the body of Shaun, a middle-class, suburban American teenager. The chapters are crucial in establishing the fact that the narrator is no mere human, but a "fallen angel" with omniscient powers, though he for the first time is experiencing the sensations and emotions of life as a human. The chapters also describe the family members in Shaun's household, the one where Kiriell now lives.



Chapters 3-4

Chapters 3-4 Summary

As Kiriell learns the new sensations of living temporarily in a human body, he comments that most of the "sins" that humans commit and go to hell for are actually quite normal and petty. He tries masturbation for the first time, since he knows Shaun does that while taking a shower. Before doing so, he examines his body meticulously in the mirror. Kiriell's experience of a body, after all, is something new—as is the body of any teenager in the throes of puberty and adolescence. After coming to climax, he comments that he can't understand why people don't do it more often and without guilt. Next, he decides he wants to have sex with a girl. With the new-found experiences of sensuality coursing through his body, Kiriell notes that Shaun didn't realize how wonderful and pleasurable it is just to be human. "Shaun" lounges in the bathroom so long that his mother thinks something is wrong with him. Kiriell rejects Shaun's habit of wearing messy, smelly clothes. For the first time puts on some of the new clothes that Shaun's mother had bought him a year ago, with price tags still hanging on them. He finally emerges fresh-scented, which comes as a complete surprise to Shaun's mother and brother, who were used to seeing Shaun messy and disheveled. The family sits down to a mostly silent dinner of hot dogs; "Shaun" devours three with various combinations of mustard, cheese, ketchup, and relish, though he likes ketchup best. He even eats a roll with ketchup, leading him to muse on the sin of Gluttony. His mother tells Jason that "Shaun" is obviously interested in a girl. This chapter is significant for the way in which it introduces readers to Shaun and the complex relationships he has with his family members, and the relationships they have with each other. Mrs. Simmons, a divorced mother, is raising Shaun and Jason on her own. (Mr. Simmons, who does not live in the household, does not appear until a much later chapter, near the end of the book, when he makes a brief cameo visit during a phone call from an out-of-town business trip.) This mealtime in the Simmons home is not a pleasant interlude when family members share stories with one another. Mrs. Simmons appears as a well-meaning mother, though one who feels overwhelmed by her responsibilities in dealing with two boys in the throes of adolescence. She tries to be a nonconfrontational, go-with-the-flow mother, not a disciplinarian. Neither of the boys have yet completed their homework, and Kiriell finds a biology assignment in the bottom of "Shaun's" backpack, while his textbooks are in his school locker. But omniscient Kiriell knows all the answers, and experiences the pleasure, for the first time on earth, of sharpening a pencil and feeling the pleasure of the delicate finger movements humans experience during the writing process. He then starts working out with Shaun's weights, and starts tidying up his room, activities that again astonish Mrs. Simmons and Jason, who are not used to seeing Shaun be responsible and proactive.

Chapters 3-4 Analysis

These two chapters describe in fuller detail the everyday existence in which Shaun existed, both his home and school life. We meet Mrs. Simmons, his mother, and learn more about Jason, his pesky little brother. More significantly, we learn of the "newness" of human life as experienced for the first time by Kiriell, who delights in all the simple joys of sensation and movement, things that most people take for granted. Also described is Shaun's typical behavior, so we get a sense of the subtle and sometimes startling personality changes he undergoes while possessed by Kiriell. These changes are attributed by Mrs. Simmons to typical adolescent unpredictability.



Chapters 5-6

Chapters 5-6 Summary

Kiriell discusses the origin of his name. He likens it to the sound of the Greek prayer "Kyrie eleison" which means "Lord, have mercy." The name actually means "mirror of souls," which is the role he plays as a devil come to earth. He says that his function is to echo back a soul's regret, so that a soul will feel the full burdens of guilt, shame, and sorrow, and by letting people know that their sins have been witnessed by someone. But in Shaun's body, Kiriell no longer has to mirror things back since he can now cast his own reflection. At the end of his first day as a human, Kiriell starts feeling sleepy for the first time; he worries that he will be taken back to hell while he sleeps, or maybe disappear completely. But he decides there is nothing to fear, since he already lives in hell and anything worse would only be a matter of degree. He reflects on the meaning of the Rebellion—the name he gives to the revolt by the fallen angels against the Creator, terming it was based on mistaken audacity and pride. Before drifting off in bed, he looks at Shaun's rock collection and magazines. He awakens the next morning to the feel of "gravity" pulling his groggy body down against the mattress. He concludes that sleep is "nothingness" or "lost time" whose purpose is known only to the Creator. He awakens to the sheer joy of experiencing his physicality, greeting Shaun's cat Peanut with exuberance. Peanut does not respond, leading Kiriell to imagine that, unlike humans, cats know that he is not really Shaun. The cat scratches him causing Kiriell to shed blood and feel pain for the first time. By describing "Shaun's new-found bodily sensations in abundant detail, the author establishes that the boy is literally experiencing human life for the first time. By juxtaposing these feelings with the aloofness and independence of Peanut, the author further delineates the fine nuances between the life of a human, the life of a demon/angel, and the life of an animal, each of which contribute to our experience of the world and of the world of this narrative. This "awakening" scene with Peanut underscores the fact that Kiriell is awakening to a new reality, that of a human being. It is one of many self-introspective scenes that take place in the boy's bedroom, which has already begun to assume a role as the place where "Shaun" meditates on his identity. The above incident with Peanut prompts "Shaun" to muse as to why the Creator made creatures—humans as well as cats—and then rejected them for doing what was in their nature to do. He concludes that "if you're one of the imperfect, you don't know the answer." After this chapter appears a verse from the creation story in the Book of Genesis: "...and the evening and the morning were the first day..."

Chapters 5-6 Analysis

These chapters describe the theological underpinnings that are crucial to an understanding of this book. While "Repossessed" is not a theological polemic, it is based on traditional Judaeo-Christian understandings of creation and the role of God, demons, and angels in the cosmos. The essential structure of the book is derived from



the medieval "chain of being" that assigned different roles in creation to animals, humans, angels, and divine creatures. The chapter further establishes Kiriell's essential nature as that of an introspective character, one who is doubly rebellious in that he is rebelling against the routine practiced by the devils in hell, who themselves rebelled against God. We learn in these chapters that self-identity is at the core of Kiriell's personality.



Chapters 7-8

Chapters 7-8 Summary

Kiriell confesses to himself that he likes Shaun's little brother, Jason, even though they frequently are at odds with each other. Kiriell compares Jason to the Fallen because it was in the young boy's nature to be curious, to experiment with things, to "bend [a thing] until it broke." For this reason, Jason was always disliked and rejected by his teachers and babysitters. As he eats Shaun's favorite breakfast of Froot Loops, Kiriell says that he feels a kinship with the Jasons of the world. He experiences the sheer joy of eating and tasting things as humans do, savoring with his lips the sweet and tasty milk on his soggy cereal. After Jason leaves for the school bus, Kiriell realizes that he forgot to bring his homework with him. For a moment, he wonders whether he should bring it to his brother, but pushes away this "twinge of sympathy" by reminding himself that he is on holiday from hell, where his punishment is to reflect the pain and sorrow of others. He decides he wants to have fun while he can, so he goes to school leaving Jason's homework behind. Waiting for the school bus, Kiriell realizes that he likes standing alone, watching the world come alive. The simple pleasures of watching a pair of cavorting squirrels gives him deep satisfaction, and he begins to hum to himself, reveling in the pleasant vibrations the sound makes in his head. He boards the school bus and sits next to Bailey, who asks him why he hadn't been in an online chat room the night before, as was Shaun's habit. Continuing his fascination with simple pleasures, such as feeling the breeze on his hand, Kiriell sticks his hand out the bus window and is reprimanded by the driver. He realizes for the first time that he has the power to make people angry. The bus driver, only a peripheral character in this novel, assumes the role of a drone worker doing her duty, not unlike the myriads of lost souls in hell who carry out their routines day after day, century after century, with no imagination or hope of relief, just as the demons who oversee them. She may have been included as a modern-day version of Charon, the oarsman of Hades who in Greek mythology ferried souls across the chasm separating earth from hell. The blandness of the bus driver helps make Kiriell seem more rebellious, since he has essentially rebelled against a system that was itself the product of the first Rebellion.

Chapters 7-8 Analysis

These chapters are significant because they describe in fuller detail Shaun's school life and his interactions with his peers. Kiriell is more "humanized" in these chapters because he begins to establish relationships with other people and learn about life in a typical American suburb. Kiriell realizes that human life is not lived in splendid isolation, but that it is a daily struggle to deal with people life places in our path, no matter how disagreeable they might seem at first. We learn from these chapters that life is meant to be lived in the flesh, not just analyzed in the mind.



Chapters 9-10

Chapters 9-10 Summary

Kiriell muses about Shaun's interest in girls, noting the teenager's general lack of self-confidence. Kiriell describes an incident in which Shaun found an explicit letter written by Lane Henneberger, a female classmate who had a crush on Shaun, even describing herself in her diary as "Mrs. Shaun Simmons." Shaun had even guiltily masturbated while reading this note. Though Kiriell notes the features of the girl's anatomy that Shaun found exciting, he says that he himself would prefer the feelings that he was now able to experience in Shaun's body and that the girl's looks were really immaterial to this experience. Kiriell next daydreams in his World History class about his strategy for bedding Lane. Conflicted, he tells himself that he doesn't want to build a relationship with her, but he doesn't want to hurt her or anyone either. He tells himself that, as a teenager, he does not have access to prostitutes, and on moral grounds rules out rape as an option. He is shaken out of his reverie by the teacher demanding that he pay attention, though he omnisciently knows that the facts being presented about Nero and the burning of ancient Rome are not accurate. But when "Shaun" encounters Lane in the hallway after class, he is immediately seized with the capital sin of Lust. At the same time, he realizes that he likes her on a number of levels: for the way she respects her family, for the way she experiments with new foods in ethnic restaurants, for her interest in classroom learning. He decides he is in love and reaches out to touch her hair from behind, causing her to turn around and ask why he is so interested in her. While she still believes this is the "real" Shaun, she is puzzled at his sudden interest in her, suspecting some subtle change in his personality. Lane realizes that "Shaun" is smiling - something he rarely does.

Chapters 9-10 Analysis

Since this book purports to be about a typical American teenage boy, relationships with the opposite sex—and sex in general—are important subjects. These two chapters explore this in depth by introducing us to the book's major female character, Lane Henneberger, a love interest who is being pursued by Kiriell (as "Shaun"). Lane is introduced as the purveyor of a note that "Shaun" had found on the classroom floor. We learn the significant details that Lane fantasizes over Shaun, even to the point of describing herself as "Mrs. Shaun Simmons." The chapter also describes the experience of being in love, which is presented as somewhat mysterious as unpredictable, as alien to a demon as it would be for a teenaged boy. Writing from this viewpoint, the author thus solidifies her appeal to her primary audience: adolescent males.



Chapters 11-12

Chapters 11-12 Summary

"Shaun" goes to lunch in the school cafeteria with his friend Bailey and tells him about his love interest in Lane Henneberger. Bailey tries to dissuade him from pursuing her, claiming that she is a "dog," "persists in his plans, telling Bailey he's going to "plunge myself into the expanses of her many charms." When Bailey realizes "Shaun" seriously wants to "do" her, he gives him a fraternal hand-slap of approval. Bailey invites "Shaun" to come play video games after school, and "Shaun" asks if he can bring along his little brother, Jason. As he has lunch, Kiriell expresses to himself his disappointment with the rubbery pizza and tasteless pears they have been served—the first time he has experienced these foods on his tongue. As they bus their trays after lunch, they are confronted with the school bully, Reed McGowan, who jostles Bailey with a gruff order to move on. Kiriell describes Reed as a "sower of pain," one of those human beings who intentionally or passive-aggressively cause pain and self-loathing to other people. He reflects on the fact that he sees millions of these souls in hell eternally torturing both themselves and the devils who oversee them. "Shaun" confronts Reed, telling him to be more appreciative of his own life instead of always causing problems for people. Stunned by this challenge from the usually mild-mannered "Shaun," Reed catches up with him outside the school, calls him an "asswipe" and punches him in the face when "Shaun" tells him he's acting like a bully out of fear and insecurity due to his small penis. Kiriell muses that the emotional pain of being hit is more intense than any physical discomfort. Then he has an epiphany—realizing that Shaun's body has now really become his own, since Kiriell feels the pain and experiences bloodshed: "The never endings were mine. The swollen lip was mine." "Shaun" goes home, where his brother Jason expresses concern over his injuries. He tells Jason about his confrontation with Reed and about the small-penis comment. The exchange has an impact on Jason, causing him to express a twinge of admiration for his brother. "Shaun" invites Jason to join him at Bailey's house to play Tectonic Warriors 2, a video game, and he assents. At Bailey's house, Jason outperforms "Shaun" at the video game console, leading Bailey to express admiration for the younger boy. As the two play another game, Kiriell examines the books and other possessions in Bailey's room, including a photograph of Bailey seated next to Shaun. Looking at the photograph causes Kiriell to muse about grief and loss, realizing with a start that he is experiencing these emotions for the first time in a human body, though he has observed it in many others while in hell

Chapters 11-12 Analysis

These two chapters are more "action-oriented" as opposed to reflective or "theological." They establish the fact that the narrative of this book turns on what Kiriell decides to do about several significant issues. Will Kiriell as "Shaun" succeed in seducing Lane Henneberger? How will Kiriell handle the negative energies emitted by the bully and troublemaker, Reed McGowan? How will Kiriell foster a creative relationship with



Shaun's younger brother, Jason? The chapters thus introduce a note of conflict into the narrative. Will Kiriell/"Shaun" overcome his awkwardness with sexuality to approach Lane with confidence? Will he successfully navigate the difficulty in dealing with a peer who is out to thwart him? Will he be able to bring Jason out of his shell and help him grow into a more mature and sensitive human being?



Chapters 13-14

Chapters 13-14 Summary

"Shaun" and Jason walk home after visiting Bailey, and Kiriell is pleased that he may have helped unlock the younger boy's emotions a little bit. Back in his room, Kiriell starts to do Shaun's homework but is distracted by his cat, Peanut, who sits staring at him. To Kiriell, the cat's steady, unblinking gaze seems to be accusing him of going against the Creator's will by leaving his post in hell—his "assigned place in the universe." For dinner that night, the Simmons family sits down to a meal of McDonald's takeout, and Kiriell has his first experience with ketchup packets. As he eats, he thinks about how Mrs. Simmons had always tried to get Jason to be more sociable and express his emotions. She tries to persuade Jason to make friends with Cameron, a boy from the neighborhood, but Jason refuses. Kiriell thinks to himself that Cameron, like Reed, is a "sower of pain." She next suggests Jason make friends with Benny, but Kiriell knows him as a troublemaking kid who is up to no good. Mrs. Simmons is pleasantly surprised to know that "Shaun" had invited Jason to join him playing video games at Bailey's house that afternoon. Back in his room, Kiriell turns on the computer and receives Instant Messages from Bailey (fullmetal7bd) to Shaun (trojanxxl). Suddenly a message appears from a user named angelofthelord, warning Kiriell that he is being watched and that he should return to his duties in hell under the threat of punishment. At first, Kiriell thinks this is the Creator himself finally trying to speak to him, but then concludes it is one of the Unfallen angels in heaven. The experience leaves Kiriell shaken and fearful. He turns off the lights and sneezes for the first time in his life, then reflects on the multiplicity of fragrances wafting toward his nose in the night air. Again, as when Reed had punched him in the nose, Kiriell experiences a feeling of belonging in the body he had possessed, exclaiming "I felt. I saw. I heard. I tasted. I got to experience something besides secondhand misery." He begins to cry real tears for the first time and expresses his joy in the sensual pleasures of human life, hoping to spend a little longer time on Earth and maybe even attracting the notice of the Creator. After this chapter, there is a verse from the creation story in the Book of Genesis: "...and the evening and the morning were the second day..."

Chapters 13-14 Analysis

These chapters describe Kiriell as having grown to the point where he begins to solve the dilemmas that confront him in a creative and productive way. In a sense, he takes full possession not of another human body, but of himself as an entity who has self-confidence and clarity about his role in the cosmos. Although Kiriell is troubled by the sudden message he gets on his computer, he also emerges in these chapters as self-possessed and forthright about who he is and what his mission is all about. Especially important is his affirmation that he fully belongs in Shaun's body and is experiencing life on its own terms, not secondhand. Growth and fulfillment are much in evidence in this part of the book.



Chapters 15-17

Chapters 15-17 Summary

Kiriell awakens, exulted to be alive for another day, exclaiming to Peanut, "the repo men haven't come yet"—a reference to being "repossessed" by the devils of hell after his own "possession" of Shaun's body. He longs to touch Peanut and have closer contact with the cat, but declines to do so. He also expresses his determination to make a mark on human existence in the little time that he is spending on the earthly plane. At breakfast, Mrs. Simmons remarks that he may have had a bad dream that night. She hopes that "Shaun" will again invite Jason to play video games with him and Bailey, and asks him to remind Jason to take his medication. When Jason does so, he uncharacteristically thanks his older brother for his concern. On the school bus, Bailey remarks that "Shaun" seems unusually quiet. Kiriell thinks to himself that he wants to leave his mark on three "tree trunks" (concerns): making sure that Jason is taken care of after he leaves, having sexual intercourse with Lane (by being an instrument to fulfill her desires), and by leading the bully Reed McGowan to the light. As he watches Bailey study vocabulary cards on the bus, Kiriell notices the school bus is passing a Methodist church, which makes him wonder if the Creator spent time there trying to communicate with human beings. He also convinces himself that any sexual liaison with Lane will have to take place after school, not during school hours. After one of his classes that day, one of the teachers, amazed at how "Shaun" has gotten a perfect score in an examination on Arthur Miller's play "The Crucible," and suggests the boy may have cheated. But "Shaun" convinces him otherwise by intelligently discussing the test material. "Shaun" then asks Lane if she can come to his house after school for geometry tutoring, a pretext for sexual activity. Lane says she's not allowed to go to someone's house without an adult present—"Shaun's" mother doesn't return from work till six p.m. Lane invites him to her house, but he refuses, knowing her grandmother will be there. "Shaun" then invites her to Bailey's house (though without first asking his permission). When he is finally brought in on the scheme, Bailey doesn't think he will be able to allow "Shaun" and Lane to spend time in his room together, but is persuaded to give it a try. At the cafeteria that afternoon, Kiriell realizes he needs to deal with his third "tree trunk": Reed McGowan. Despite Bailey's advice that Reed should not be confronted, "Shaun" resolves to do so, believing he is called to make a difference by speaking his mind. He apologizes to Reed for having confronted him the other day, but Reed is unmoved, calling "Shaun" a freak and ordering him to move away. "Shaun" does so, believing that he has, however, planted a seed that may eventually take root in Reed's psyche. "Shaun" returns home to find Jason playing video games as usual, but expecting his older brother to take him again to Bailey's house. He realizes Jason would get in the way of his plan to seduce Lane, but also realizes he had made a promise, and that Jason and Lane were two of Kiriell's "tree trunks." After going to his room and cursing his fate, Kiriell decides to let Jason come along.

Chapters 15-17 Analysis

After the psychological and identity breakthroughs of Group 7, Kiriell now has the wherewithal to put into action the things he has resolved to do. He confronts Reed McGowan in a way that he hopes will alter his personality. He invites Jason to participate in activities with Bailey and other friends. Most significantly, he comes up with a plan to make his moves on Lane Henneberger. This section is significant in presenting Kiriell's new-found confidence as an engine for positive change and fulfillment in the lives of others.



Chapters 18-20

Chapters 18-20 Summary

"Shaun" arrives at Bailey's house, making Mrs. Darnell think of Eddie Haskell with his lubricious attitude. Mrs. Darnell suggests he and Lane can study at the kitchen counter, which disappoints "Shaun" who thinks it is not a good place for a sexual encounter. As Lane tutors him in geometry, "Shaun" confesses that he liked the girl and wanted to be more intimate with her. At Mrs. Darnell's suggestion, the two go into Bailey's room to play video games with him and Jason. Predictably, Lane does not do well playing video games, but she becomes fascinated with Bailey's large collection of manga comics. She impresses Bailey with an intelligent discussion of manga and anime, and Bailey invites her to borrow some of the books. Lane starts to go home, and "Shaun" invites himself to walk along with her and maybe hold her hand. He accompanies her to her doorstep and resolves to stay on Earth one more day so he can eventually make love to her. Back at Bailey's house, Jason asks Bailey about his guitar, the first time—notes Kiriell—that Jason has opened conversation on his own accord. Bailey lets Jason play his guitar, and suggests the younger boy borrow Shaun's guitar. Jason refuses, saying his brother would never let him do that. "Shaun" reassures him that it's all right to do so, surprising Jason, who was used to rejection by his brother. On the way home, "Shaun" even suggests that Jason make friends with Carson, a boy in the neighborhood, by going up and ringing his doorbell, but Jason is not yet ready for this bold step. At dinner that evening, roast chicken is served. Staring at the carcass, Kiriell is both fascinated and repelled. Jason is allowed to use Shaun's guitar, and Mrs. Simmons praises "Shaun" for his generosity, telling him about her own estrangement with her brother, Mark. "Shaun" tries to persuade Mrs. Simmons to reach out and make contact with him after years of silence, but she declines, feeling uncomfortable about being lectured. Then her estranged husband, Shaun's father, calls the boys while on a business trip. He asks them perfunctorily about how they are doing in school and tells them he has some souvenirs for them. Kiriell then realizes that he has learned something about Shaun, that he, like any human being, is bound to others by bonds of affection and trust. Kiriell thinks that maybe he is on Earth to learn this lesson. The next morning, Kiriell awakens to a scary presence in his room, which he imagines at first to be The Boss coming to take him back to hell. It turns out to be Anius, one of the "middle-management" overseers in hell, who tells Kiriell that he should get back to his duties in the underworld. As he was wont to do in hell, Kiriell at first addresses him as "Anus," which irritates the devilish apparition. Kiriell speaks frankly to Anius, criticizing him for being a sycophant and only interested in following the minute routines of hell. Anius is not interested in anything creative; he's just afraid of looking bad if he doesn't properly oversee Kiriell. This incident causes Kiriell again to wonder if the Creator is really looking out for the universe, and maybe that his own role as a "mirror of souls" is superfluous. He even wonders whether he or anyone else had to be in hell at all, speculating whether the entire universe is nothing but a cosmic joke. After this chapter, there appears a verse from the creation story in the Book of Genesis: "...and the evening and the morning were the last day..."



Chapters 18-20 Analysis

In this section, Kiriell reflects on his mission in the cosmos, specifically thinking about his purpose for "hijacking" the body of Shaun. The appearance of Anius, the sycophantic overseer from hell, reminds Kiriell of his own significance and confirms his rebelliousness as having been a good thing. Unlike Anius, Kiriell has effected positive change in people because he risked taking a bold action, something that Anius would never do. Also, Kiriell meditates on his own relationship with the Creator by visiting the sanctuary of a local church, another extraordinary act that cements his identity as an authentic person, whether demonic or human. The section is aptly closed with the line from Genesis about this being the "last day" of creation, signifying that Kiriell had accomplished his purpose in coming to earth.



Chapters 21-22

Chapters 21-22 Summary

Kiriell awakens to another bright morning, feeling that at last he is no longer afraid of Peanut. He talks to the cat, telling him he is not really Shaun, and the cat responds by nuzzling his finger. At breakfast, Kiriell resolves to make one last-ditch effort to seduce Lane that afternoon, finish up his other "tree" projects, and then maybe leave Earth, his missions accomplished. On the school bus, he even reconciles himself to the fact that Bailey may try to steal Lane from him once he has departed. In the cafeteria for what he believes to be his last meal, Kiriell is again confronted with Reed McGowan as the latter harasses a boy in a wheelchair. The handicapped boy trips Reed, causing him to sprawl unceremoniously on the floor, with none of his so-called friends coming to his aid. Kiriell feels that his mission with Reed has been accomplished, that he has successfully mirrored back to the bully what he needed to hear, that he had no real friends. Yet, Kiriell feels guilty over having hurt another human being, even while trying to give him a taste of victimhood. He wonders if this is what being human does to souls—causing them to inflict pain on one another. On the way home from school that afternoon, Kiriell visits the Methodist church he used to pass to and from school. He picks up a Bible and reads the passage (from the Book of Job) about Satan telling God that he has been "roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it." Again, Kiriell wonders whether he is the victim of a cosmic joke, whether he is a mistake or a failure of free will? In the silence of that church sanctuary, he offers up a prayer to the Creator announcing his availability in case He wanted to get in touch with him. Leaving the church, he walks to Lane's house. Knowing that her grandmother is taking a nap, he tells Lane she is the most beautiful creature he has ever seen. Lane rejects his advances, telling "Shaun" that there are other, prettier girls, but he persists. When he kisses her, Lane's attitude changes and they begin to make out. She refuses to have sex with him after only the first kiss. This prompts Kiriell to realize that Lane's fantasy was to be affirmed and hugged, that she was not interested in the mechanics of sex: her fantasies dwelled on the "before and after" but not the "during." Lane's grandmother awakens and the two teenagers call a halt to their innocent necking, though Kiriell reports that "Lust incarnate strained at the zipper of Shaun's pants." Here, Kiriell again seems to be retreating into his own identity, looking at Shaun as a separate, disembodied entity. They part, for the last time, content to have engaged in nothing more than affectionate kissing. "Shaun" goes home and officially presents Jason with his guitar. Once again, he invites him to make friends with Carson, a neighborhood kid. As he watched Jason leave, "Shaun" realizes he is the only brother he has ever had. He says farewell to Peanut, who again nuzzles his finger. "Shaun" pets the cat, who responds warmly with purring, giving the boy a great sense of satisfaction. The cat suddenly gazes out the window, and Kiriell looks out, seeing a moving van across the street. He recognizes the mover as an angel—one of the Unfallen—who has come to escort him back to hell. Kiriell engages the angel in conversation. The angel tells him his name is Hanael, and that his body is "of his own making." Hanael has sparkling eyes and speaks to Kiriell with a voice that is at once "deep and musical, lovely and terrible." Hanael tells Kiriell that he has to go back to his



"proper sphere" as Kiriell tells Hanael of the beauty he has experienced in the material world. Just as Kiriell had experienced earthly pleasures just a few days earlier, Hanael is now experiencing bodily sensations for the first time and asks Kiriell if he is feeling the wind. Kiriell asks Hanael whether the Creator is angry with him, but the Unfallen tells him that is not his function. Like Anius, he is just a functionary in the grand scheme of things. Kiriell concludes that his punishment is never to get the answers to this profound question, and Hanael tells him that he took Shaun's body, which was not his to take. Kiriell speaks affectionately of Shaun, and tells Hanael not to be too hard on him when he returns to life. Kiriell has the epiphany that, because of him, even though he is a devil from hell, Shaun is going to get a second chance, and Shaun's family and friends will enjoy his presence once more. This makes Kiriell realize that he has fulfilled his role (in addition to the three "tree trunks" described earlier). Kiriell accepts his summons to return to hell, declaring "My place in this universe may not be what others would consider desirable. But it is mine." At peace with himself, he steps into the path of a speeding vehicle so Shaun can get his body back. Mission accomplished.

Chapters 21-22 Analysis

This section cleans up the final "loose ends" of the plot, most significantly, Kiriell's long-standing plan to seduce Lane Henneberger. Although their liaison only results in innocent necking and not the full sexual congress that Kiriell had hoped for, he can return to hell content—knowing that he has done the right thing. As a sign of his affection toward Jason, he presents him with Shaun's old guitar. This section also presents a final conversation with Hanael, the demon who will escort Kiriell back to hell, thus giving the reader an opportunity to listen to Kiriell's reflections on the several days he has spent on earth. The reader also learns that Shaun will be given another chance at life once Kiriell returns his body to him. This last section thus presents a "happy ending" to readers who can close the book with a sense of affection and gratitude that "all's right with the world."



Characters

Kiriell

Kiriell, a demon who goes missing for a few days from his drone job as a mid-level overseer in hell. Eager to experience human life on Earth and get a sense of why men and women behave the way they do, Kiriell "hijacks" the body of a seventeen-year-old American teenager who has died in a traffic accident. Though he is omniscient (being "one of the Fallen"), Kiriell cannot experience human feelings or emotions until he has started living in bodily form. The name "Kiriell" means "mirror of souls"; his job in hell is to reflect peoples' regrets back at them, allowing them to feel their own shame and guilt. Kiriell is a complex character, one not easily defined by stereotypical images of what a devil or evil person might be. In fact, he is not really "evil" in the traditional sense of the world since his actions and motivations spring from humanitarian motives: Kiriell's "mirroring" can be interpreted as a deep psychological tool in which he inspires others to plumb the depths of their own soul ("psyche" is the Greek word for "soul"). Using the terms of traditional Christianity, which inform the characterization and plot in this book, Kiriell can even be seen as the flip side of an incarnate Christ, a divine figure who takes on human form. Even though Kiriell is not "divine" in the traditional sense of the word, he does come from the realm of spirits: an angel who understands human struggle because he has taken on the flesh of another person. Kiriell is shown to be human in every respect as he inhabits the body of Shaun Simmons: he experiences sexual desire, peer pressure, sibling rivalry, frustration over school and relationships. In the scene where he prays in church, he experiences the feelings of meaninglessness that people have when they contemplate their role in the grand scheme of life. Kiriell may be a demon from hell, but he is likeable, approachable, and a complex character who is not easily pigeonholed.

Shaun Simmons

Shaun Simmons, a seventeen-year-old suburban teenager who dies when he foolishly steps into the path of a speeding cement mixer. At the instant of impact, his body is possessed by Kiriell, who uses Shaun's physical form to exist on the earthly plane. During Kiriell's three-day sojourn, "Shaun" appears to his friends and family mostly as he had always appeared, but with some subtle improvements that cause them to wonder at his transformation. Shaun is portrayed as a typical teenager who experiences all the vicissitudes of his age and station. He struggles with adolescent sexual desire, plotting to bed Lane Henneberger, his girlfriend. He has a love-hate relationship with his pesky younger brother, Jason. He daydreams about the meaning of life, sometimes sharing his inner thoughts with his best friend, Bailey Darnell. He ruminates about his role in the cosmic scheme of things, as when he visits a church one afternoon after school to pour out his soul to God just in case he was listening. Like many adolescents (and humans in general), Shaun wonders whether his life has any meaning at all, or whether he is just the victim of a cosmic joke. In general, Shaun is an easygoing and non-confrontational



young man who takes his schoolwork seriously and tries to cultivate good friendships. He is neither a slacker or a delinquent. He also does not hang out with the wrong crowd.

Jason Simmons

Jason Simmons, Shaun's thirteen-year-old brother, a pesky kid who would seem to make a good poster child for sibling rivalry. Jason typically refers to his older brother by derogatory names and finds it difficult to socialize and make friends. Renowned for not making eye contact, Jason seems borderline autistic, preferring to spend his time in isolation, playing online games with invisible competitors. His anti-social behavior is a matter of concern for his mother and teachers, who seem unable to have any impact on the boy's behavior. Under Kiriell's influence, he begins to open up emotionally and feel more confidence in himself. Jason finally begins to open up to others when he is included in activities at "Shaun's" invitation. When Jason is invited to play video games at Bailey's house, he begins to feel more comfortable and confident. As a result of these activities, he realizes that he has a talent for playing guitar, and this helps bring him out of his shell.

Mrs. Simmons,

Mrs. Simmons, Shaun's divorced mother who is head of the household where Shaun and Jason live. She is surprised at the positive changes in "Shaun" as a result of Kiriell's possession of his body, but she attributes this to typical teenage behavior influenced by hormones and identity crises. Mrs. Simmons is portrayed as a rather clueless, anxiety-ridden suburban housewife. She is not a warm and fuzzy mother, but appears somewhat remote and detached. She cares about her children, but doesn't seem to have a real maternal instinct.

Peanut

Peanut, Shaun's pet cat, whose typical feline aloofness is regarded by Kiriell as a sign of animal wisdom. Kiriell believes that only Peanut really knows that "Shaun" is not really Shaun. At several points during the narrative, Kiriell describes his interactions with Peanut to indicate his overarching belief that life and existence are far more complex than that experienced by the narrow mindsets of rational human beings. In many ways, Peanut is portrayed as a typical feline: independent, self-possessed, cunning, and emotionally detached.

Lane Henneberger

Lane Henneberger, a girl Kiriell chooses for a sexual experience. Lane has a secret crush on Shaun, writing torrid entries in her diary, where she even describes herself as "Mrs. Shaun Simmons." However, as Kiriell points out, her diary entries are imaginative fantasies about feelings of intimacy and togetherness, not about the actual details of



sexual activity. When she is finally together with Shaun, intent on deflowering her, Lane is more restrained, allowing herself only to be kissed and held. Lane portrays herself as a "good girl" on the surface, though her inner fantasies border on the risqué. However, as Kiriell wisely concludes, Lane's fantasies are more romantic than realistic, more the stuff of pulp romance cliché than reality. She can get quite emotional imagining herself as a damsel in distress rescued by a tall, dark, and handsome man but she would never try to imagine the specific details of what lovemaking might entail.

Bailey Darnell

Bailey Darnell, Shaun's best friend who is with him at the time of his accident and observes him woozily coming back to consciousness, unaware that Kiriell has just possessed Shaun's body. Bailey is Shaun's best buddy and confidante, the dude he can talk to about the vicissitudes of teenage life. He commiserates with Shaun's desire to have a sexual liaison with Lane Henneberger, and helps set up a meeting at his house where the two can be together in private, ostensibly to do homework together. Bailey is a good-natured, practically minded young man who responds rationally and maturely to the situations that face him. Like Shaun, he is a serious student who is not a slacker or a delinquent.

Reed McGowan,

Reed McGowan, a bullying classmate at the local high school, described by Kiriell as a "sower of pain"—one of those insecure people who picks on other people, instilling fear, self-loathing, and doubt. Kiriell confronts Reed about his aggressive behavior and is punched in the face by the bully. Kiriell knows, in his omniscient way, that Reed is insecure about the small size of his penis, and confronts him with this revelation as well. Ultimately, Reed is tripped by a wheelchair-bound student he has been harassing and sprawls to the floor, but none of his so-called "friends" come to help him up. This is seen as a victory for Kiriell, ever the "mirror of souls" as he gives the handicapped youth confidence to "stand up" to his attacker. Reed slowly begins to learn his lesson when he is exposed as a lonely bully that no one else will help. Reed is portrayed as a troubled and wounded young man who is so out of touch with his emotions that he fails to recognize the impact his aggressive behavior has on others. He comes across as rather pathetic and lonely, without the courage to accept overtures of love and affection when they are offered to him.

The Boss

The Boss, Kiriell's name for Satan, the chief devil. Kiriell refers to him frequently during the narrative, though he never materializes. The Boss is the chief devil in a complex hierarchy of hell, where legions of angels are engaged in various tasks. He is not portrayed as a typical satanic figure with pitchfork and horns; rather, The Boss is described as a kind of chief executive officer in a sprawling and stultifying bureaucracy.



He does not preside over a pit of fire and brimstone; rather, he manages underlings who are condemned for eternity to supervise and discipline the suffering souls in their charge. Typical of most CEO's, The Boss is remote and unemotional; he never really emerges as a flesh-and-blood character in his own right; instead, he is spoken of in the third person by the drone-like demons whose eternal punishment consists in keeping records and maintaining hell while on a corporate treadmill.

The Creator

The Creator, (also known as The One), Kiriell's name for God, the creator of the universe, against whom he and some angels rebelled, to be cast into hell as the Fallen. Kiriell has a problem with God because he set up all the rules in the universe, but doesn't seem interested in the fact that Kiriell and his fellow devils are being overworked. At one point, Kiriell goes into a church to get God's attention through prayer. The Creator is just as remote as The Boss (described above). Like his hellish counterpart, The Creator is not portrayed as a traditional white-bearded old man sitting on a cloud. He is regarded as a remote, benevolent bureaucrat who has set the universe into motion but doesn't pay much attention to things afterwards, preferring to let underlings like angels or devils manage things in a vast cosmic bureaucracy. The language of traditional Judaeo-Christian theology is used to describe the attributes of The Creator, though he doesn't emerge as a complex character in his own right.

The Fallen

The Fallen, Kiriell's name for the devils who rebelled against God and were cast into hell. They are not portrayed with traditional forked-tail-and-pitchfork imagery, but as drones in a vast hellish bureaucracy where they are charged with supervising condemned souls.

The Unfallen

The Unfallen, Kiriell's name for the angels who stayed loyal to God and are with Him in heaven. They are not portrayed with traditional wings-and-harp imagery, but as messengers in a vast heavenly bureaucracy that is a mirror image of the hellish bureaucracy below. The world of The Unfallen is one of clockwork, where things move according to a hidden cosmic plan—a plan that does, however, include miraculous interventions such as that orchestrated by Kiriell when he repossesses the body of Shaun Simmons.

Anius

Anius, a devil from hell, also described by Kiriell as "one of the Fallen." Kiriell mischievously calls him "Anus." Anius is an "overseer of overseers" in hell's bureaucracy. He appears to Kiriell one night in the form of a poisonous blob to condemn



him for stealing a human body and taking a vacation from his duties in hell. Bravely, Kiriell laces into him for being such a sycophant to The Boss, telling Anius that he shouldn't be so obsessed about his slavish devotion to duty. The incident provokes Shaun to reflect on the fact that even God (The Creator) didn't care enough about the situation to send an emissary to him. Overall, Anius is indeed a sycophant, so wrapped up in his own desire to please his superiors that he cannot deviate from his pattern—just the opposite of Kiriell, who spontaneously skips out on a vacation. Anius is the kind of taskmaster that would never permit himself a vacation, let alone anyone else. He is condemned to be forever a cog in the wheel of hell.

Hanael

Hanael, an angel from heaven, also described by Kiriell as "one of the Unfallen." It is Hanael who is sent to Kiriell in the final chapter to persuade him to go back to hell by giving back Shaun's body and allowing the teenager to live again. Hanael appears good-natured and kindly, though with a limited imagination and a reluctance to take initiative. If these faults were greater, he would be condemned to hell, perhaps as a colleague of Anius. But he is redeemed by his humility and willingness to play his part in the Boss's cosmic scheme of things.



Objects/Places

Suburban street

The suburban street is where Shaun foolishly steps off the curb behind a parked SUV to be mowed down by a speeding cement mixer. It is here where Kiriell "hijacks" Shaun's body and where he yields it back to Shaun at the end of the novel. The suburban street(s) in *Repossessed* are bland and anonymous; there are no indications (as by signage or vegetation) as to geography. The street could be in New England, in the South, the Midwest or the West. The street(s) are strictly of a residential nature: there are no shopping malls, highways, or recreational facilities. The only places of interest on the streets are the homes of the characters and the high school they attend.

Shaun's room

Shaun's room is described by his mother in somewhat hellish terms as "one big pit without any organization whatever." It seems like the typical teenager's room, with dirty clothes, random CD's, and plates of food strewn about haphazardly. It is the sanctuary where Kiriell muses introspectively about his life and feelings, and goes to sleep wondering if his absence in hell has been noticed. There are no scenes involving other characters in Shaun's room: it is the sole preserve of himself and his cat, Peanut. When Shaun interacts with other characters outside of school, it is in the home of friends, like Bailey's bedroom or Lane's living room.

Shaun's guitar

Shaun has a guitar, which he has never learned to play. In an act of brotherly love, Kiriell gives the guitar to Jason in the hope that his younger sibling will be able to express his individuality and thus gain self-confidence. The guitar symbolizes the self-confidence and creative instinct that has been buried in Jason and that only emerges when his older brother invites Jason to participate in activities with Bailey and other friends.

Bailey's room

Bailey's room, considerably neater and more organized than Shaun's. It houses Bailey's large collection of video games and manga/anime books. It is a typical refuge for male teenagers where Shaun and Jason come to play video games, joined on one occasion by Lane Henneberger. Bailey's room thus serves as an important "flip side" of Shaun's room. Whereas Shaun's room is a place for his personal meditations and self-inquiry, Bailey's room is a place of camaraderie and social gathering. Several significant events in the novel's narrative take place in Bailey's room, such as Jason's evolution into a boy with greater self-confidence and Shaun's "plot" to seduce Lane Henneberger. The plot is



initially foiled when Lane comes to Bailey's room and has a lively conversation with Bailey about manga/anime—dashing Shaun's hope for a romantic rendezvous.

Tectonic Warriors 2

Tectonic Warriors 2, the video game that "Shaun," Bailey, and Jason play in Bailey's room. It is depicted as a typical game for anti-social nerds who spend all their time and energy interacting with a computer screen and not with other humans.

poisonous cloud

Apparition of Anius, one of the middle-level overseers in hell, who comes to accuse Kiriell of shirking his duty. The apparition, in Shaun's room, takes the form of an amorphous blob that Kiriell describes as a "poisonous cloud."

Lane Henneberger's house

Lane Henneberger's house, where Kiriell goes on his last day on earth, ostensibly to do homework but with the avowed purpose of seducing Lane. They end up making out on the large three-piece sofa in the living room until Lane's grandmother, risen from a nap, interrupts their lovemaking. Like Shaun's and Bailey's house, Lane's residence has all the trappings of a typical middle-class American home, though it seems somewhat more elaborate and expansive.

High school

High school, attended by Shaun, Bailey, Lane, Reed and other students. A typical American high school in a middle-class suburban community. Only two settings appear in the novel: a classroom and the cafeteria. Other settings, like a principal's office, gymnasium, or lavatory, do not appear. It is in the classrooms that Kiriell daydreams and is confronted by a teacher who can't believe "Shaun" scored a 100 on a test after being an unmotivated C student for so long. It is in the cafeteria that Kiriell has his confrontations with the bully, Reed McGowan.

School cafeteria

School cafeteria, where Kiriell experiences for the first time the taste of such foods as pizza and dessert pears—he dislikes both. This room serves as the scene of several confrontations between "Shaun" and Reed McGowan, the school bully. The cafeteria is a traditional one in which students fill their trays while pushing them along a shelf.

First Methodist Church

First Methodist Church, a house of worship "Shaun" passes every day on his way to and from school. Its interior is that of a typical American Protestant church, with pews arranged in rows in front of a central altar. The pews have racks holding Bibles and hymnals. One afternoon, the boy enters its quiet, peaceful sanctuary to meditate on his purpose in life and to invoke the Creator, just in case God was aware of his plight. In the church, he wrestles with his own inner demons and comes to a deeper understanding of his role in the universe.



Themes

Identity Transformation and Coming of Age

Identity Transformation and Coming of Age: Kiriell's transfiguration into a human is symbolic of Shaun's own journey through puberty and adolescence, a time marked by rapid and sometimes unpredictable types of behavior. Even though Kiriell successfully "impersonates" Shaun during his three-day existence on an earthly plane, Shaun's friends, family, and pet cat notice subtle changes in his behavior, which they attribute to the hormonal or behavioral vicissitudes of youth. Thanks to Kiriell's influence, many of the other characters, causing them to improve and grow during the course of the narrative.

The Ultimate Questions

The novel discusses ultimate questions of good and evil and right and wrong, as well as the meaning and purpose of life. Even though these questions are phrased in traditional Christian language about the Creation and Fall as described in the books of Genesis or Job, this is not a religious tract, but an allegory of these ultimate questions through the prism of contemporary American suburban culture. The novel also emphasizes the point of having a place in the grand scheme of things that is ours and that wanting something more or different, while appealing, might not be what is best for oneself.

Traditionalism

The novel takes place in a contemporary American suburban setting, where traditional values about success, education, self-improvement are paramount. The only non-traditional element in the environment that is not traditional is that Shaun's parents are divorced. Even Lane Henneberger's sexual fantasies are traditional ones where a strong man sweeps a willing woman off her feet. There is no hint of feminism or alternative sexual lifestyles, except in the last chapter when the encounter with the angel Hanael is described in terms that subtly hint of a homosexual encounter. Kiriell does not understand why pleasures are seen as sins in this traditional world.

Style

Point of View

The novel is recounted in the first-person point of view of Kiriell or the demon from hell who assumes the identity of Shaun, the American teenager. Early on, Kiriell refers to himself from the "I" perspective while referring to "Shaun's body" almost as if it were an alien being. He gradually merges into full possession of Shaun's body, using sentences showing emotion such as "I feel" or "I enjoy."

Setting

The novel takes place in an American suburb. Scenes are set in various locales: a typical high school classrooms and cafeteria, a school bus, a Methodist church, and the homes of the major characters. Although Kiriell is from hell, none of the scenes are set there, unless it be accepted that everyday life is a kind of "hell" when people do not live authentic and compassionate lives.

Language and Meaning

The tone is conversational, reflecting the ease with which Kiriell has "hijacked" the body of a typical American teenager of the early 21st century. He speaks in Shaun's idiom, but occasionally rhapsodizes in heightened language, reflecting his intelligence and omniscience. The traditional language of Christian redemption—the Creation and the Fall—is alluded to throughout as Kiriell confronts the issues of good and evil and his ultimate purpose during his temporary three-day reprieve from his duties in hell. The language reflects the author's (and the characters') belief that we live in an orderly universe, with a role for everyone.

Structure

Repossessed is divided into 24 chapters, separated after chapters 6 and 20 with quotations derived from the Creation story in the Book of Genesis. God created the universe in six days, but Kiriell spends three days on Earth ("morning and evening the first day"). While most of the chapters describe typical suburban settings, several of the chapters describe visions or dreams experienced by Kiriell, or his meditation in a church. Thus, the structure combines narrative action with introspection and self-scrutiny.



Quotes

"Body-snatching is pretty rare among my kind. Technically speaking, I broke a few rules, but what are they going to do? Send me to hell, ha ha" (Chapter 1, p. 3).

"But from the way souls moan and whine about the afterlife, you'd think that Sloth and Envy were biggies, akin to murder" (Chapter 3, p. 18).

"It is clear to me that masturbation is natural. Even apes do it. Why is it a big deal to so many people? And if it's so awful why do they keep doing it" (Chapter 3, p. 19).

"My function has always been to echo souls' regrets back at them, thus letting them feel the full burden of their shame, guilt, and sorrow" ((Chapter 5, p. 34).

"People like Reed spent eternity torturing themselves—torturing me—because they were too thick to take control of their behavior when they'd had the chance" (Chapter 11, p. 70).

"An eternity of wishing to speak directly to my Creator, I thought in despair—and this is how he finally contacts me? Through AOL Instant Messenger" (Chapter 14, p. 98).

"Most American curse words seem to be related to perfectly natural bodily functions, and I've never seen why they strike people as being wicked. They don't strike me as being particularly fulfilling anyway. The only word commonly used that indeed felt like a curse was one that started with a d and ended with mn, and I had no desire to use that. No human would let it cross his lips if he knew what it meant in truly practical terms" (Chapter 17, p. 134).

"The Boss. Of course I'd met him; I'd once followed him even to my doom. Beautiful and terrible and endlessly compelling - that was the Boss" (Chapter 20, p. 172).

"Was this what being human did to you? Warped you so that all you could think about was the tiny points at which other people's lives intersected yours? Made you forget that every one of these points has not only a history, but an infinite number of possible futures that can be spun out or stunted—or even unraveled to make more possibilities" (Chapter 21, p. 187).

"This [a church] was not the Creator's dwelling place, no more than any other on earth. But the air, the furniture, the walls all seemed to me to be laden with the hopes, the prayers, the love and despair of generations of humans. All they felt toward their Creator lingered here. And that made the place expand beyond its actual dimensions. I could feel the immensity of it—a tiny shred of the true immensity of the Creator, but immense enough for all that" (Chapter 21, p. 188-189).



Topics for Discussion

What are some of the allusions to the Bible and theology that the author uses?

Is Kiriell basically good or evil? How does his character compare with the typical portrayal of devils as evil creatures?

Does Kiriell do a good job in impersonating the character of Shaun. What kind of things does he do differently?

Why does Kiriell use the term "tree trunks" to describe his threefold mission on earth? How does he fulfill or not fulfill this mission?

Why does Kiriell, a devil from hell, enter a church? What does he hope to accomplish there?

What is the role of the cat, Peanut, in the narrative? What changes can you see in Kiriell's relationship with him as the story unfolds?

How do we know that Kiriell is omniscient? Give some examples from his classroom activities to support this fact.

Why does Kiriell have such a confrontation with Reed McGowan? Do they both change during this process? How or how not?

Why does Kiriell have such a confrontation with Anius, the overseer devil from hell? Do they both change during the process? How or how not?

Other than the angels/demons, are the characters believable? Do you relate to them?