

Skinned Study Guide

Skinned by Robin Wasserman

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Contents

Skinned Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
The First Day/Eyes Wide Open.....	5
Nothing/Mouth Closed.....	7
Visiting Day/Faith.....	9
The Body/Sobered Up.....	12
Date Night/Life Support.....	15
One of Us/Terminated.....	18
Jump/Turning Back.....	21
Control and Release/In the Dark.....	23
Forgiveness/Letting Go.....	26
Numb/Better Off.....	28
Characters.....	30
Objects/Places.....	34
Themes.....	36
Style.....	38
Quotes.....	40
Topics for Discussion.....	41



Plot Summary

"Skinned" is a science fiction novel by acclaimed Young Adult writer Robin Wasserman. The novel is set in the future and follows 17-year-old Lia Kahn as she attempts to adjust to her new life after her brain is downloaded into an artificial body following a car crash. Published in 2008, Skinned is the first novel in the "Skinned" trilogy, continued in "Crashed" (2009), and concluded in "Wired" (2010).

When Lia Kahn is severely injured in a freak car accident, she is taken to BioTech - one of her father's companies - where her brain is downloaded into an artificial, mechanical body which looks and feels like a normal human body. Lia is told that she will no longer need to eat or breathe, she will not feel pain or become ill, and she will never die. During weeks of intense rehab and therapy Lia learns how to control her new body, but finds that she is unable to "feel" things the way that she used to. She is told that there will be a period of adjustment and that eventually some emotions and sensations should return.

After her rehab is complete, Lia's parents bring her home and she immediately tries to resume the life she had led prior to the accident. Lia had been the most popular girl in school and the leader of a tight-knit circle of friends, but she finds that things are now very different. Her sister Zo, who had never been part of her group before, has taken over her position as the leader of her friends, and her best friends treat her as though they don't know her. Even her boyfriend Walker avoids her whenever possible. She tries to explain that even though she has a new body she is the same Lia that she always was, but none of her friends are able to accept this. After an incident at a party in which her friends believe a lie about her, Lia finds herself shunned by almost everyone she knows, including her best friends and Walker.

One day a month later, Lia's artificial body freezes in mid-step while she is walking to class as a result of her not taking proper care of herself. Many of her classmates, including her former friends, gather around and make fun of her, but a boy named Auden Heller rescues her and carries her to the school infirmary. Auden is himself an outcast and is someone Lia would have had nothing to do with in her previous life. He is the only person at school who is willing to accept Lia for what she is, and he and Lia soon become friends. Auden and Lia experiment and try to find things that will make Lia feel something intensely; although their experiments are unsuccessful, Lia finds herself depending on Auden more and more as he is the only friend she has left.

Lia is introduced to a group of other people who have received the download procedure by someone that she met at BioTech. The members of the group call themselves "mechs" and are led by Jude, who had been one of the first download recipients several years before when the procedure was still experimental. Unlike what Lia has been trying to do, the mechs have no interest in fitting into "org" (organic) society. Jude tells Lia that until she stops pretending that she is still human and embraces the fact that she is a machine, she will never realize her full potential.



Lia and Auden go with the mechs on a pair of trips. The first trip is to a waterfall which several of the mechs jump off to feel the intense sensation; although the fall would kill a human, it will not harm a mech. The second trip is to a city, where one of the mechs allows himself to be shot by a city-dweller because he enjoys the pain and violence. Although Lia thinks that the mechs are crazy and reckless, she is also fascinated by what their experiences must feel like and finds herself secretly wanting to experience those intense feelings herself.

After a fight in which she learns that her sister Zo does not believe that Lia is really her sister and that even her father is sorry that he didn't let her die, Lia returns to the waterfall and sends Auden a message to join her. She jumps off the waterfall before Auden gets there and allows herself to sink to the bottom where she stays for a while, enjoying the peace. When she surfaces she sees that Auden has arrived and that, although it is unnecessary, he has jumped into the river to save her. Auden stays in the freezing water too long and the current carries him over another waterfall before Lia can reach him.

At the hospital, Auden tells Lia that he is crippled from the neck down as the result of a severed spine, and that an anomaly in his brain makes him ineligible for the download procedure. He blames Lia for his injuries, and tells her to leave and never come back. With her final link to the human world now gone, Lia decides to join the mechs and truly begin to explore what she has become.



The First Day/Eyes Wide Open

The First Day/Eyes Wide Open Summary

"Skinned" is a 2005 Young Adult science fiction novel by Robin Wasserman. The novel is narrated by 17-year-old Lia Kahn and chronicles the first several months of her life after she is critically injured in a car crash and her brain is downloaded into an artificial body. The novel is set in the future, although exactly how far in the future is not revealed. "Skinned" is the first book in a trilogy by the author which features Lia Kahn as the main character and narrator.

The First Day. 17-year-old Lia Kahn regains consciousness after an accident. Though she does not know where she is and is certain that no one knows that she is awake, she can hear her father's voice speaking to her and encouraging her to hold on. She is aware of the passage of time - many days, in fact - and is conscious throughout all of it. She experiences periods of intense pain and terror but has no way of communicating, no control over any part of her body, and no idea of exactly what is happening to her. As she lays there she thinks about the last thing she can remember, the car accident. She had been in the car because she was doing her younger sister Zo a favor by taking her place at her job so Zo could sneak away with friends. Lia remembers the screech of metal, the crash of glass, the feeling of being ripped to pieces, and the car catching on fire before she finally lost consciousness.

To pass the time, she starts to make lists of things she likes, people she hates, words - anything to fill the seemingly endless hours. She then starts imagining moving her fingers and legs, but nothing happens. She eventually gives up and lays there in a semi-dream state until finally her eyes open on their own and stay open. She then moves her arm; she doesn't feel it move, but rather sees it. A moment later she hears (but does not feel) her legs thumping against her mattress. A moment after this she arches her back, sees herself falling out of her bed, and hears a thud as her body hits the floor, but still feels nothing. She then loses consciousness for the first time since waking up.

Eyes Wide Open. Lia comes to and finds that she can still open and close her eyes. A doctor begins to ask her questions which she answers by blinking once for yes and twice for no. Later the doctor runs his finger along a chart with letters printed on it and Lia blinks when he reaches a letter she wants. Conversing in this manner, Lia asks what is wrong with her and the doctor tells her that her body sustained extensive damage in the accident but that they have been able to save her. The discomfort she has been feeling has been her brain adjusting to its "new circumstances". A short time later several doctors as well as her parents gather around Lia's bed. The doctor who first spoke with her tells Lia that they have hooked the language center of her brain up to a computer and that if she thinks words clearly, the computer will be able to speak for her. After several attempts and failures it works. Her father tells her that it has been a month since the accident but that she's only been conscious for the last week. The doctor then tells her that she will eventually regain control over the rest of her body, but she will



require a great deal of therapy. When she asks how bad her injuries are the doctor tells her that she had third degree burns covering 70% of her body, they were forced to amputate her left arm and leg, and that her spinal cord had been crushed.

Lia says that she needs to see what she looks like. The first doctor tells her that she should wait until the cosmetic procedures have been completed, but another doctor steps in and overrules him, saying that she will need to see eventually. As they bring a mirror to her face Lia closes her eyes and tells herself that no matter how bad it is her father is rich enough to be able to fix it. After taking a moment to gather her courage, she opens her eyes and looks in the mirror - and begins to scream.

The First Day/Eyes Wide Open Analysis

These first two chapters introduce the novel's narrator, 17-year-old Lia Kahn, as well as the unique and frightening circumstances in which she finds herself. Lia is a beautiful, popular, and rather spoiled young woman with a lot of friends and pretty much everything that she could want due to her father's wealth. Lia is an athlete, a runner, and has a boyfriend named Walker who, not surprisingly, is one of the most attractive and sought after young men in her school. Although she only provides a small amount of information about her life before the accident in these chapters, it is immediately obvious that Lia has been pampered her entire life and is rather selfish. It is also obvious that she possesses a considerable amount of courage and shows a great deal of bravery as she fights her way back to the land of the living and demands to know everything that has happened to her.

As well as introducing Lia and touching on a couple of other characters who will be important in the rest of the novel, the first two chapters also give the reader a few glimpses into the future world that Lia lives in. Lia herself is the result of her parents "spending extra credits" to ensure blond hair and blue eyes, a low body-mass index, and a high IQ. Cars in Lia's world do not need to be manually driven; instead, the destination is programmed into the computer and the car chauffeurs the passenger to the desired coordinates. The accident that injures Lia was the result of a computer chip malfunctioning in a truck and a glitch in her car's sat-nav system happening at the same time - an almost unthinkable coincidence. Although the reader is aware that this novel takes place at some point in the future, there is no indication of how far in the future it may actually be.



Nothing/Mouth Closed

Nothing/Mouth Closed Summary

Nothing. When Lia looks in the mirror she sees a face that is not hers looking back, but what causes her to scream is that the top of this strange head has been removed and wires are running in and out of it. After she brings herself under control, Lia asks what they have done to her. The doctors explain that the damage to her body was too extensive to repair and so they brought her to BioTech, one of her father's companies, where her brain was downloaded into a new, artificial body. All of her memories, experiences, and everything she ever thought or felt had been downloaded. Lia knows what they are talking about because the procedure had been all over the news just a few years before. People who have the download procedure are called "Skinners"; they are freaks, and shunned by much of society. Speaking through the computer, Lia demands that they put her brain back into her old body but the doctor tells her that is not possible because her old body is dead.

Lia is then taken to another room where her old body has been stored. It is brought out and Lia sees that it is now nothing more than a lump of charred flesh. She asks about her brain and is told that it was removed, sliced into razor thin strips, and scanned so that every bit of information was accessed. The information was then downloaded into a computer and stored until an artificial body was ready. Once the process was over, the brain was disposed of as medical waste. Though she knows that her old self would have been repulsed and nauseated by everything she has seen and been told, Lia finds that she doesn't feel anything at all.

Mouth Closed. A month has passed and Lia has made a great deal of physical progress in rehab. She has learned to speak using the voice-box implanted in her throat, and can walk unassisted. She is turned off at night to simulate sleep, and turned back on in the morning. She has learned that her new body does not need to eat or breathe and she is beginning to "feel" sensations, although they are not like before. There is no pain or discomfort, although sometimes she wishes there was as this would make her feel more human. One evening she decides to 'link in' with the network. She finds virtual flowers and thousands of messages waiting for her from all her friends, and two private messages from her boyfriend Walker saying that he loves and misses her. Though she also misses him, she decides that she can't face contacting him yet.

During rehab her counselor, a woman named Sascha, reassures Lia that she is the same person she always was and that only her body is different, but Lia knows this is not true. Sascha continually asks Lia to concentrate on the positive aspects of her new life - the fact that she will never age, never be ill, never die - but she can't. All Lia can think about is what she has lost. During one of their sessions Sascha suggests that Lia meet one of the other "clients", a girl Lia's age who has undergone the same procedure, but Lia refuses. She does not want to meet other people who are like she is now because she does not want to be like she is now.



Nothing/Mouth Closed Analysis

Lia finds that she is literally no longer the person she was before the accident. Her body has been destroyed and her brain downloaded into a machine that looks like a human being, but which has none of the feelings a human being is supposed to have. The body she has been downloaded into will last at least 50 years after which she can be downloaded into a new body, making her virtually immortal. The reader also learns that all "Skinners" are about Lia's age; the procedure doesn't work on adults, and can't be done on children under 16.

While everyone she comes into contact with during her rehab goes to great pains to tell her how lucky she is, she feels exactly the opposite. She feels like she is a victim and wishes that they had let her die. Although she is continually assured that her life can be just like it had been, and in fact even better, Lia understands that she is now different from everyone she knows and different from the vast majority of society. The fact that she works hard in rehab and tries to regain something of what she once was shows that she is a fighter and is at least making some kind of attempt to accept her new circumstances, but she also finds that she is unable to view either herself or what is happening around her with anything other than sarcasm and disgust. She hates what she has been turned into and is afraid that she will not be able to get even a small part of what she has lost back.

The reader is also introduced to the "network", which is similar to the current internet but much more advanced and important in this future society. Lia says that "life on the network shadowed life off the network and ... sometimes it was the network that seemed more real. (p.49)" More than just a method of communication, in the world of this novel the network provides a complete virtual reality which individuals can link in to at will via implants and special "netlenses" in their eyes, as well as with "ViMs" (Virtual Machines). Lia can link in using just her mind. The network will play a significant role later in the novel.



Visiting Day/Faith

Visiting Day/Faith Summary

Visiting Day. Lia's parents come to visit for the first time since she started rehab. Her sister Zo is with them and this is the first time she has seen Lia's new body. The atmosphere is uncomfortable and the conversation between Lia and her parents is strained. Zo ignores her for most of the visit. Though her parents fill the time with small-talk, Lia sees that they are treating her the way they would treat a stranger; cordial, but distant. After an hour her parents leave and Lia spends a moment alone with Zo. She asks Zo if people at school are asking about her, and Zo tells her that the world has managed to continue to rotate on its axis without her, showing an unexpected cruelty. Though the sisters have never been close they have never been enemies either, but Lia feels that Zo is treating her like one. After Zo leaves Lia goes to her room and shuts herself down, unable to understand what just happened.

Several hours later Lia's programming awakens her when someone enters her room. The girl's name is Quinn Sharpe, and she is the other client Sascha told Lia about. Lia doesn't want to be disturbed and doesn't have any interest in being friendly with Quinn, but finally decides to go with her on a "field trip". Quinn takes her outside to BioTech's grounds. She tells Lia that her body was destroyed as the result of a car accident that killed the rest of her family. The accident occurred when Quinn was three and she was kept alive by machines, interacting only with her caregivers and the network, until four months ago when she'd turned 16 and had been downloaded into her present body. Unlike Lia, she requested the procedure. Quinn has never been happier or freer in her life, and she can't understand why Lia is so negative about everything. Lia stays behind for a while after Quinn goes back inside. She realizes that while she is nothing like Quinn she is also not acting very much like Lia Kahn, and she decides that it is time she starts trying to do so.

Faith. A week later, Lia's parents take her home. When they arrive at their house there are protesters waiting for them - "Faithers" - who believe that Lia is an abomination and that she and her parents are damned. After a few moments blocking their way and yelling slogans, the Faithers allow the car to pass. At dinner that evening, which Lia attends even though she no longer needs to eat, the Faithers are not discussed. Her father says that it is time for her to get back to school and although Lia had intended to take things slower, she doesn't want to show fear to her father and agrees to go back the next Monday.

Later, in her old room, Lia texts Walker (still not wanting to send him a voice message with her new artificial voice) and then spends some time on the network, but finds that the things she used to enjoy doing there like listening to music, playing games, or watching "vids" don't interest her. During one of their sessions Sascha told her that she might find herself indifferent to things she used to love for a while, but Lia still finds it difficult to adjust to the fact that things which were once so important to her now hardly



matter. To pass some time, and to take her mind off of the fact that Walker hasn't texted her back, she decides to run for the first time since the accident.

She runs in the woods behind her house. She hopes to feel some of the rush she used to feel, but after an hour she realizes that it isn't coming. As she walks back to the house a man comes out of the shadows and grabs her, pinning her up against a tree. She recognizes him as one of the Fathers who had been protesting in front of her house. He runs his free hand down her body and Lia feels fear and loathing as it becomes obvious that he intends to rape her, which won't be a "sin" to him since she isn't human in his eyes. She kicks him in the groin and runs back to her house. After she is safely behind the gates she realizes that the fear she felt with the man was the first intense, truly human emotion she has had since she became a Skinner.

Visiting Day/Faith Analysis

Lia continues to find it difficult to adjust to what she has become. Specifically, she finds that for the most part she is unable to "feel" things, either physically or emotionally, the way that she used to feel them before the accident. It remains difficult for her to relate to other people, even the members of her own family, in part because no matter how hard they try not to show it they are obviously extremely uncomfortable around her, and in part because the changes to her are more than simply cosmetic. What used to matter to her - the network, clothes, music, her favorite vids, and even running which was once her passion - now barely interest her and do not give her the pleasure they once did. While Sascha has told her time after time in their sessions that it is all part of the adjustment period she has go through and that it will pass, Lia isn't certain this is really the case and continues to dwell on everything she has lost. The fear and loathing she feels when she is attacked by the Father in the woods are the first "real" human emotions she has felt since being downloaded into her new body and, despite how horrible the incident was, it actually gives her hope.

The time that Lia spends with Quinn Sharpe on their "field trip" provides her with a different perspective when it comes to the download procedure that saved her life. While Lia has continually thought of herself as the victim of a procedure that has caused her to lose much of what made her human, Quinn's view is completely different. For Quinn, being downloaded into an artificial body is the most freeing thing she could possibly imagine. The procedure has replaced the useless mound of flesh she'd spent 13 years being trapped in with a functioning body that actually allows her to experience things. Quinn cannot understand why Lia is so negative about her new circumstances because the download is the best thing that has ever happened to her. Although she firmly believes that she and Quinn are nothing alike, the time Lia spends with Quinn has an impact on her and causes her to decide to try and be more like who she had been before the accident.

Along with advancing the story and developing Lia's character, these two chapters also serve to give a bit more information about the future world the novel takes place in. As Lia and Quinn lay on the artificial grass outside BioTech, they look up into a starless and



moonless night sky that glows reddish-purple as a result of the dust, pollution, and chemicals used to repair the ozone and cleanse the air after a nuclear war that destroyed Mecca, Jerusalem, hundreds of other places, and tens of millions of people. There is also a brief mention (while Lia is visiting with her family at BioTech prior to being brought home) of workers in a "corp-town" protesting for better "med-tech", and Lia's uncle being afraid that he would need to ship them all back to a city and build his staff up from scratch. Though the author only provides information about this new world very sparingly, the reader understands that this is a very different place from the world in which they live.



The Body/Sobered Up

The Body/Sobered Up Summary

The Body. Two days after she returns home, Lia's boyfriend Walker comes to visit her. After spending a few moments speaking with Zo - who has never liked him - outside the closed door to Lia's room, Walker enters and is surprised by how different Lia looks. Lia tries to put Walker at ease by treating him the way she used to before the accident. She hopes this will show him that she is the same as she was before, but he is uncomfortable. He recoils when Lia brushes her hand across his cheek and can barely bring himself to touch the artificial skin on her wrist. After trying unsuccessfully to make small-talk, Walker apologizes for not answering her text or visiting her while she was at BioTech and then tells her he needs to be going. Zo is waiting for him when Walker opens the door to leave and says that he should kiss Lia goodbye. After brushing his lips against Lia's quickly, Walker hurries from her room.

Sobered Up. Returning to school on Monday, Lia is surprised to find that her best friends Terra and Cass are now also best friends with her sister Zo, and that they have started wearing Zo's "retro" look which they and Lia had previously loathed. Lia asks Zo exactly when it was that she'd stolen her best friends and Zo replies that maybe it had been Cass and Terra who had stolen her. Although they act as though they are happy to see her, Cass and Terra take off with Zo shortly after the two sisters arrive at school and leave Lia behind, promising that they will catch up on what has happened to her at lunch. Throughout the rest of the day Lia finds that she is stared at by everyone, including her teachers, and that conversation stops when she enters a hallway or a room. It is even worse when she joins her friends and Zo for lunch. Their table is at the front of the cafeteria, and she finds that no one even pretends not to stare. Her friends, and their boyfriends, treat her as if she is a stranger. She does not see Walker at all the entire day.

The next few days aren't much better, even though Lia tries her best to fit in and even adopts the retro look that Zo and her friends now sport. Cass and Terra can't really explain why they started being friends with Zo, and Lia doesn't pursue it. Walker continues to avoid her until Lia finally stakes out his car and catches him as he is leaving school. He denies avoiding her and finally invites her over to play a virtual reality game that they had both loved before her accident, but Lia finds that it isn't the same. She quits the game before he does and leaves, unnoticed, while he continues to play. The next day, she asks her running coach if she can have her place back on the track team, but the coach tells her that she can't because it wouldn't be fair to the other runners since she doesn't need to breathe or rest.

On Friday morning, in her "Persuasive Speech" class, Lia finds that the seat she used to occupy in the back of the room with her friends has been given away to a new girl while she was away. She is now forced to sit in the front row next to Auden Heller, who has always been different from most of the kids at school and therefore shunned by Lia



and her friends. During the class another of Lia's friends named Bliss delivers a speech that she had prepared before knowing that Lia would be coming back; in the speech she states that recipients of the download procedure should not be afforded the same rights as "real" human beings, because Skinners are not human. Auden Heller unexpectedly protests that Lia's feelings should be respected and, when offered the choice between remaining silent or leaving and failing the class, he chooses to leave.

Later Auden finds Lia and tries to comfort her, but she tells him that she doesn't need his pity. When he tells her that he doesn't pity her but that he does understand she has feelings, Lia says that Auden has spent his entire life trying NOT to fit in, which is why he doesn't have any friends. She asks him not to "comfort" her again and to leave her alone. She doesn't see Bliss, Walker, Zo or any of her other friends at lunch and finds out later that afternoon that they ditched school early to start the weekend partying without her. Though she does not eat, she sits through lunch alone at her normal table while Auden Heller eats alone at another table.

The Body/Sobered Up Analysis

Even though she had expected there to be some differences when she returned to school, Lia is shocked by the change that has come over her friends and the reception she receives from them. Before the accident, Lia had been the leader of the most popular and most envied group of girls at school. Returning to find that her sister has taken over leadership of this group - who prior to the accident would have had nothing to do with Zo - is hard enough for her to deal with. The fact that these same "best friends" now treat her as though she were a stranger is something she never could have imagined would happen. Even her track coach, who had always treated Lia as though she were her favorite, refuses to consider even allowing her to practice with the team, showing that the lack of understanding and acceptance of what she has become is not confined to her peers.

Far from helping her to adjust, Walker avoids her for the first three days she is back at school, which is a time when she really needs him. When he does finally spend some time alone with her, he retreats into an all consuming virtual reality game so that he does not need to interact with Lia at all. There is something different about Walker, something that Lia suspects has nothing to do with the download and her artificial body. Although she has no idea what it could be, she is starting to suspect that she is the only one of her group that doesn't know what is going on with him.

The only individual who appears to see Lia as a real human being with feelings and emotions is Auden Heller, someone Lia would never have had anything to do with in her previous life. Auden is different from everyone else at school; he chooses to wear glasses even though he could easily have his vision fixed, wears clothing that is out of style and doesn't fit, and usually keeps to himself. He is nothing like the people Lia has been friends with in the past and even though he is the only one who even makes an effort to understand or defend her, she doesn't want to be friends with him. She believes

that it is only a matter of time before her friends and Walker adjust to her and accept what she has become, and she is willing to wait for as long as it takes.



Date Night/Life Support

Date Night/Life Support Summary

Date Night. Walker asks Lia out to party at Cass's house on Saturday. As Lia is dressing in the new "retro" look all her friends have adopted, Zo tells her that she will also be at the party. After they arrive at Cass's house Walker immediately disappears to play virtual reality games. Lia sees that she is the only one dressed in the "retro" look and that she sticks out like a sore thumb. When Lia finds Zo and asks her why she let her come to the party dressed that way, Zo asks her when it became up to her to tell Lia what is cool. Zo then says how interesting she finds it that all of Lia's old friends now want her opinion on things and heads off to look at something Terra wants to show her.

After Zo leaves, Lia feels a pair of hands squeeze her shoulders. She expects to find Walker standing behind her but sees that it is Jax, Cass's boyfriend. Jax starts moving his hands over her body and tells her that he wants to see what it would be like to do it with a machine. Lia tries to pull away and, when he won't let her go, she punches him in the stomach. Cass, Terra, and Lia's other friends arrive and although Lia tries to tell them what happened, they choose to believe Jax when he tells them that Lia tried to come on to him and attacked him when he resisted. Terra tells her that she doesn't want to know whoever or whatever Lia is anymore, and the rest of Lia's friends agree.

An hour later, Walker finds Lia sitting alone by the pool. Lia tells him that he can leave if he'd rather not be seen with her, but Walker tries to kiss her instead. After a few clumsy attempts to be romantic, Lia can see that Walker is repulsed by her. It is obvious that he has been taking "b-mods" (behavior modifiers) all night just to be able to stand being with her. When she confronts him with this Walker admits that it feels like he is touching a corpse when he touches her. Although she knows that Walker wouldn't break up with her and would stay with her out of loyalty, Lia understands that they are finished.

Life Support. After the party Lia loses "priv-access" to all of her friends, including Walker, on the network and is shunned at school. Lia's parents insist that she attend a group therapy session at BioTech run by Sascha which they hope will help her adjust to her circumstances better. There are six other download clients at the session, including Quinn Sharpe. Each taking a turn, the first five talk about how alienated they feel, how miserable they are, and how they wish they could go back to before they were downloaded even if that meant dying. When Quinn's turn comes she says that the reason they are so miserable is that they only think about what they have lost and they won't even try to appreciate what they have gained. She storms out of the session after telling everyone that they need to get a life. When it is her turn to talk, Lia says she agrees with Quinn and walks out as well.

When she gets home she finds her father talking with the Honored Rai Savona, the leader of the Faithers, who has come to apologize for the incident that happened to Lia in the woods. He tells Lia's father that he regrets the assault on "your property" and that



it will not happen again. It is obvious that by "your property" Savona means Lia, and she tells him that she is a real human being with free will. Savona says that, on the contrary, Lia is an unnatural creation and is nothing more than a computer that has been designed to react to stimuli. He says that Lia believes she has free will because she has been programmed to believe it. He then tells Lia's father that this thing is not his daughter, no matter how much he may wish she was. Lia's father angrily throws Savona out of his house. After Savona is gone, Lia asks her father what would happen if something were to go wrong with her new body and she were to tell him that she didn't want another one. He tells Lia that it wouldn't matter; he will not let her die again.

A short time later Lia is alone in her room when Zo comes in and says that she heard what Savona said. When Lia asks her if she thinks he is right about her, Zo hesitates for a moment and finally says that she doesn't believe what he said about her being unnatural, but that it wouldn't matter if she was because nature sucks. Zo also says that she doesn't believe anything else he said. Zo then makes a point of telling Lia that she is going out with Cass, and leaves. After Zo is gone, Lia sees that there are two texts waiting for her on her network zone. The first text, which is addressed to both Lia and Quinn Sharpe, is from an anonymous sender. It says that they have passed the first test and asks if they are ready for phase two, followed by a time, date, and address. The second text is from Quinn; the message says that she is going, and so is Lia.

Date Night/Life Support Analysis

Lia's experience with Walker and her friends at the party finally convince her that, no matter how hard she might try to keep things as they were before the accident, it isn't going to work. This is made totally clear when her friends choose to believe Jax when he says that she came on to him instead of believing her version of what happened. Before the accident her version, and that fact that she was telling the truth, would never have been questioned; now, however, it isn't even considered. Her friends turn on her not because of who she is but because of what she is, and that is something Lia understands she is powerless to do anything about.

While Walker seems willing to at least try to go back to the way things were between them he is unable to get past her new body and the way it makes him feel. He tells Lia that he is willing to keep trying, but she understands that it would be charity. Walker would stay with her because it was the right thing to do rather than because he loved her and wanted to be with her, and Lia decides that she has to end it with him. Even though she has no other prospects and is feeling almost completely alone in the world, the old Lia Kahn would never have accepted that kind of relationship and the new Lia refuses to as well.

While he has played a minor part in several previous scenes in the novel, the scene with the Honored Rai Savona is the first time that Lia's father takes center stage. Though Lia has always described him as being wealthy, this scene shows that he is also important and powerful as it is obvious that he has summoned the leader of the Fathers to his home to apologize to Lia. When Savona first refers to Lia as "property",



and then tells him that what is sitting with them is not his daughter, Lia's father becomes angry and throws the man out, which shows both Lia and the reader the depth of the feelings that he has for her. Though she is uncertain of almost everyone else in her life, her father's actions and their short conversation after Savona leaves show Lia that at least he still loves her, and that he believes she is still who she was before the accident. Later, Zo is surprisingly tender when she tells Lia that she believes Savona is wrong about her, although this tenderness is short lived. Lia cannot understand what happened to make Zo treat her almost as if she hates her, but does not confront her about it yet.



One of Us/Terminated

One of Us/Terminated Summary

One of Us. Following the directions in the text, Lia arrives at a house in the middle of nowhere and is let in by a girl named Ani, one of the Skinners from the group session she attended. There are dozens of other Skinners there, some with their hair and skin painted metallic silver, others with circuitry designs drawn all over their faces, and still others with transparent skin showing the wiring beneath. Ani leads Lia over to where she is sitting with Quinn and a male named Jude that Lia recognizes as being one of the first download recipients. Jude is completely silver colored, and the clear flesh on his right arm exposes the circuitry beneath. When Lia asks why he and the others have made themselves freaks, Jude tells her that they are embracing the fact that they are machines - "mechs" - and that she should do so as well and stop trying to pretend that she is still an "org" - organic. Lia says that she is not a machine and, after a short argument, Jude tells her to leave and come back when she is ready to stop lying to herself and embrace what she is. Lia swears she will never come back and leaves.

Lia withdraws from everyone and everything. She spends lunch periods alone outside, goes directly home after school, and talks to no one. She gets into the habit of running for hours every night instead of shutting down the way she is supposed to. She does this for a month until one day, as she is walking to a class, she freezes in mid-step. She is conscious, but unable to move or speak. She quickly draws a crowd, her old friends among them, and listens helplessly to the insults that are hurled at her. One person balances a banana peel on her nose, while another draws on her face with a red marker. After a few minutes Auden Heller comes through the crowd and screams for everyone to get away from her. He carries Lia to the school's infirmary and waits silently with her until a technician from BioTech comes to get her. The last thing Lia is aware of is the technician shutting her down. She is turned back on five hours later at BioTech where the doctor tells her that she suffered a temporary disconnect between her body and her brain caused by her not shutting down regularly. The doctor tells her that she needs to start taking better care of herself and Lia agrees. No matter what she has to do she vows never to be that helpless again.

Terminated. The next day Auden finds Lia at school and, after a bit of verbal sparring, she finally thanks him for what he did for her. Auden admits that he is fascinated by what she has become and that while he doesn't understand what it is like to be her, he does understand what it is like to be different. A friendship forms between them and they start to experiment after school, testing what Lia can and can't do. While Lia still finds Auden to be very strange, she also enjoys it more when he is around than when he isn't. One afternoon a week after they start their experiments, Auden's father comes home unexpectedly. When he sees Lia he tells Auden to get "it" out of his house. Auden is mortified and as he walks Lia to her car he tells her that his mother died years ago, and his father has hated him ever since. He also tells her that his mother had chosen to only



have the basic genetic screenings done on him when he was conceived and none of the genetic enhancements, which helps explain to Lia why he seems so different.

A few evenings later, Lia finds that her network zone account, which she has had since the age of three, has been terminated because the provider has determined that recipients of the download process are no longer "alive". All of her music, vids, saved texts and conversations have been deleted. Lia contacts Auden and he comes right over. He tells her that they can easily build her another account with a different provider, but Lia knows that she will never get back what she has lost. She tells him that it feels as if the last link with her old life has been cut, and Auden says that perhaps that is a good thing. He then tells her that it might be time for her to get back in contact with the group of Skinners she met at the house. She resists the idea, and finally admits that she is scared. Auden lets it go and starts building her a new network account.

One of Us/Terminated Analysis

Lia is both shocked and offended by the other Skinners that she sees when she shows up at the address sent to her in the text. After months of doing everything she can to fit in with her old friends and telling everyone - including herself - that she is the same person that she had been before the accident, she is confronted by download recipients who have chosen to go in exactly the opposite direction. Jude and several of the other Skinners at the house have decided to break with the humans (orgs) and embrace the fact that they are machines (mechs). Rather than attempt to hide what they are and fit in with the rest of society, Jude and some of the others have altered their appearance to look more machine-like. This goes against everything Lia has been told by her counselors and doctors, and everything she has told herself, since the accident. However, there is also a small part of her that is fascinated by the freedom Jude and the others seem to have.

The relationship that she cultivates with Auden Heller, although tentative at first, quickly becomes one of the most important things in Lia's life. Although he is someone that the old Lia would never have had anything to do with, it is becoming more and more obvious to her with each passing day that the old Lia's life is gone. Abandoned by her other friends, Lia finds that Auden is willing to accept her for who she is and also help her explore and find out what she is. Auden has spent much of his life as an outcast, in large part because being different is more important to him than being accepted, and he is in a unique position to understand and sympathize with what Lia is going through. When he tells her that his mother decided not to have any genetic enhancements added before birth, Lia realizes that he is almost as much of a freak as she is and has been all his life. Even though Auden states that he has no romantic interest in Lia, there are some indications that this might not actually be the case.

The termination of her network account because the provider company has decided that download recipients are no longer living is an indication that the prejudice against what Lia has become is not just confined to small-minded individuals, but that it is spreading throughout all segments of society. The fact that it is Auden who she calls when she

finds that her account has been terminated rather than her father, who might actually have been powerful enough to pressure the provider into restoring it, is an indication of how much Lia has come to trust and count on Auden, even though she is reluctant to admit it to herself.



Jump/Turning Back

Jump/Turning Back Summary

Jump. Auden continues to bring up the idea of Lia getting back in touch with the group of mechs she met out at the house, and she finally gives in. She gets a set of coordinates from Quinn and takes Auden with her. They drive to a place almost an hour away and then continue deep into the woods bordering the road on foot. Eventually they come to a river bank where dozens of mechs are gathered. Quinn and Ani are the first to meet them, and both are unhappy that Lia has brought Auden. They are joined by others who demand that Auden leave, but Lia insists that he stay and eventually Jude says it is okay, which ends all discussion. The group heads off following the riverbank until they come to a waterfall. Jude tells Lia that the drop is 40 feet and that 80 thousand gallons of water per second fall into the pool below. She watches as several mechs jump off the waterfall and when she asks Jude if they are trying to kill themselves he reminds her that they can't die. He tells her the thrill is unlike anything she has ever imagined. She is tempted to try it despite Auden's protests, and even goes to the edge, but in the end jumps into a shallow pool next to the falls. Jude tells her that she doesn't belong with Auden or the orgs because she is stronger than they are, but she doesn't believe it and she and Auden leave.

Auden drives her home and apologizes to her for insisting that she get back in touch with the mechs, but Lia tells him that she is glad she did it and thanks him for coming with her. She then hugs him tightly, after which Auden leaves hurriedly. Lia considers going inside and shutting down, but instead remains outside staring at the sky and wondering what it would have been like if she had jumped.

Turning Back. Lia and Auden decide to cut out of school early and, as they are leaving via a service alley running behind the building, they find Walker and Zo kissing passionately. After apologizing to her, Walker says that after the accident he had been upset and had started talking to Zo, and things had moved on from there. Zo says that it had been she who first came on to Walker and that they had stopped the relationship after Lia came back so that Walker could try again with her. After the break-up at the party, however, they got back together and had been hiding the relationship from her ever since. Lia can't believe that Zo would actually do this to her and, in a moment of anger, says that it should have been Zo in the car when the accident happened and not her. Zo puts her arm around Walker and as they walk away he apologizes again, but Zo doesn't even look at her.

After they leave, Auden asks Lia if she still loves Walker and Lia says that she doesn't, but that it hurts that Zo would be with him. She then wonders if anyone will ever want her again, and Auden tells her that he wants her. He knows that she has never looked at him in that way, but he wants to give it a try with her. Lia kisses him but feels nothing, and says that she can't risk the only friendship she has left. What she already has with him is too important to her. He then asks her if she would go back to her old life if she



could, even though it would mean that they wouldn't be friends. When she immediately says that she would, Auden is hurt and tells her that he needs to leave. Lia lets him go and wonders if the ability to want someone is something else that she has lost.

Jump/Turning Back Analysis

Although she tells Auden that she is only going to meet with the mechs again to stop him from nagging her about it, Lia finds herself excited by the prospect. The others are not happy about her having brought Auden since these gatherings are supposed to be for mechs only, but Jude silences the protests quickly showing that he is the undisputed leader of the group. It soon becomes obvious that one of the reasons he allows Auden to stay is to show Lia how different orgs are from what she has become. The jump off the waterfall would probably kill Auden instantly, but it has no major effect on any of the mechs who do it including Quinn, who jumps off hand-in-hand with Ani. It is obvious that Jude has come to believe that the mechs are superior to the orgs in almost every way, and he wants Lia to believe this as well and join them. Lia is still unable to accept the idea that she is as different from the human being she once was as Jude says she is, but a part of her wishes that she had jumped off the waterfall just for the experience of it.

Even though she ended things with Walker the night of the party at Cass's house, Lia is still hurt and angry when she finds him and Zo together. Walker is apologetic, but Zo makes it clear that the relationship was her idea and that she is not ashamed of what she has done. Lia cannot understand why Zo seems to hate her so much. After she tells Zo that it should have been her who was in the car the night of the accident Lia is immediately sorry that she blurted it out, but she does not take it back. After Zo and Walker leave Auden tries to comfort Lia and he finally manages to tell her that he wants a romantic relationship with her. This is something that he has hinted about in the past but has never really made clear, but it is the worst possible timing. When Lia kisses him she feels absolutely nothing, and knows that the sort of relationship Auden wants would be impossible. She doesn't want to hurt him, or risk ruining the relationship she already has with him, but she also refuses to lie to Auden and ends up doing both by being honest with him.



Control and Release/In the Dark

Control and Release/In the Dark Summary

Control and Release. Later that day Lia goes back to the waterfall and uploads a pic of it to her network zone. An hour later, after seeing the pic, Jude joins her. Lia wants to be alone but finds herself being drawn into another conversation about the differences between mechs and orgs. Jude tells her that the only way she will ever become what she is capable of being is to forget about the past and allow herself to let go of what she was so she can gain control of what she is. He gives her a small black box which contains a program that she can upload directly into her brain through her eye. When she asks what it is, he tells her that it is something to help her let go and "dream" but won't tell her anything else. She says that she isn't interested in the games that he and his friends play and gets up to leave, but Jude grabs her and kisses her roughly. She pulls away, angrily telling him to go away and leave her alone.

Later that night she uploads the program. At first she feels nothing, but that is soon replaced by hot, searing pain and then the feeling of being ice cold. Suddenly she begins to experience hundreds of things all at once, and feels every one of those things deep inside herself in a way that she has never felt anything before. It is the most intense experience she has ever had in her life and she wants it to go on forever. When it ends, she feels empty inside and wishes that she could go back into the "dream" immediately. After it ends she hears Jude's voice in her head explaining that the program sent an electrical jolt through various parts of her system overwhelming certain safeguards and allowing her to experience things with an intensity humans could never feel. He then tells her that he will be seeing her soon.

In the Dark. Lia corners Auden, who has been avoiding her for days, at school and apologizes to him. She then asks him if he will come with her on another trip with the mechs that night. He reluctantly agrees and when they meet up with them, Jude says that they are going into a city. Auden tells her it is a bad idea, but Lia is excited by the prospect and he agrees to go with her. There are ten of them including Lia and Auden, and they enter the city in two cars after dark. After camouflaging the cars, Jude leads them on foot to a skyscraper where he informs Auden that he will have to wait outside. The building has security that would detect an org, but not a mech. Lia offers to wait with him but Auden says he will be fine. After breaking into the building, Jude leads them to a bank of elevators and lets the others take one while he takes another with Lia. She asks him about the program and, although he won't tell her where he got it, he does tell her there is more where that came from. The elevator door opens onto the roof and Jude disappears into the shadows.

Lia walks over to where Ani is standing alone looking at the view. Ani asks Lia what she thinks about what they are doing and Lia says that she doesn't really see the point. Ani tells her that Jude says there doesn't always need to be a point to everything. When Lia asks if Ani and the others always listen to Jude, Ani says that of course they do. She



then tells Lia that Jude had been born in this city, and that she comes from another city. She was born legless as a result of radiation poisoning and her parents had abandoned her. She was sent to a shelter where she lived until she was 16, at which point she became one of the earliest download test subjects, along with Jude and another of the mechs named Riley. She then shows Lia a picture of three teenagers. She identifies the legless girl in a wheelchair as herself, a boy with withered and twisted limbs in a wheelchair as Jude, and a healthy looking teen standing between them as Riley. All three of them are black. Ani tells Lia that they were the first mechs - the experiments - and that they hadn't been given any choice about receiving the download procedure. Lia wants to know more about Riley and Jude, but Ani refuses to tell her anything else and asks Lia never to tell either of them that she showed her that picture.

Lia rejoins Auden when she leaves the building. When they reach the cars all of them get in except for a mech named Tak. After a signal from Jude, Tak starts screaming at the top of his lungs for anyone who can hear to come and get him. Jude orders everyone to scrunch down as two men come out of the shadows. One has a gun and shoots Tak; the men then run away as Tak falls. Jude and Riley jump out of the car and grab him, tossing him into the backseat on top of Lia and Auden, and the cars speed away. Jude tells Lia that Tak is into intense pain and violence and has done this several times before, but Lia is angry because they could have all been hurt. Jude tells her to stop looking down on them and Lia blurts out that while his old life in a wheelchair might have sucked, hers doesn't and she isn't ready to give it up yet. Jude demands to know how Lia found out about his old life and when Lia refuses to tell him, he stops the car and throws her and Auden out. Though they are out of the city, they are still in the middle of nowhere. Not having any other options, Lia calls Zo and asks her to come get them.

Control and Release/In the Dark Analysis

Lia experiences intense physical and emotional sensations for the first time since undergoing the download procedure as a result of uploading the program that Jude gives her by the waterfall. Far from simply giving her back the feelings she had lost as a result of the procedure, what she experiences is hundreds of times more intense than anything she ever experienced as a human. Later, as they are riding in the elevator to the top of the skyscraper, Jude explains that just because BioTech doesn't make certain things like that program available to mechs doesn't mean that they aren't available if you know where to look. He tells her that BioTech has the technology to make them different and better than the orgs, but they choose not to use it. Lia does not tell Auden about the upload, or about her meeting Jude by the waterfall, because she is afraid that he wouldn't understand any of it and that she would lose him again.

Neither Auden nor Lia had ever been to a city before the trip with Jude and the other mechs, but both know what to expect. The cities are filthy, dangerous places where people are crowded in with limited food and medical supplies, and while there is a police force they are mostly used to keep people in rather than stop crime. Most city-dwellers die before the age of 40 and they hate Skinners more than any other part of society



does. The trip into the city is extremely dangerous - more so for Lia than for Auden - but the sensations she experienced from the upload convince her that she must keep exploring what it means to be a mech. The only way she knows of to do that is by joining Jude and the other mechs on their trips.

Lia's conversation with Ani on the roof of the skyscraper gives the reader a chilling insight into the history of the download procedure. Although Lia and everyone she knows have been told that the early test subjects such as Jude and Ani had been volunteers, Ani tells her that neither she nor Jude were given any choice in the matter. The procedure was new and dangerous and it was tested on those teens that society didn't care about, whether they wanted it or not. To her horror Lia learns from Ani that Riley was healthy when they did the procedure on him against his will. The fact that the download was not voluntary for him helps Lia understand why Jude is continually telling her to forget about her past and move on into the future, but she is still unable to make the complete break with her old life that Jude wants her to.



Forgiveness/Letting Go

Forgiveness/Letting Go Summary

Forgiveness. Zo picks Auden and Lia up and ignores them both during the ride. They drop Auden off at his house and Zo immediately closes herself in her room without a word when they get home. Lia considers shutting down but she can't stop thinking about the bullet entering Tak's body and the way it must have felt. She finds an old razor in her bathroom and after hesitating for a few moments she cuts her arm, just a little at first, and then finally raking the razor from her wrist to her elbow. She hears a gasp and sees Zo standing in the doorway.

Lia tries to explain that she is just experimenting, but Zo tells her that she doesn't care because her sister is dead. She says that what Lia said in the alley was true, that it should have been her in the car that night, but that it wasn't and now she has to live every day with the fact that she killed her sister. She says that she hates wasting her time with the losers who used to be Lia's friends and hates trying to be everything that Lia had once been, but that she'd never had any choice. She couldn't let a machine take her sister's place in the world. Lia tells her that she is not just a machine and when Zo refuses to listen Lia asks her why their parents would want her to live in their house if she weren't still Lia. Zo tells her that they don't want her there and that every night their father waits until he thinks everyone is asleep, and then goes into his study and cries. Lia refuses to believe her and throws Zo out of her room. Hours later Lia sneaks down to her father's study and sees him on his knees crying and asking God to forgive him. He sobs that if he could do it over again he would make the right choice this time, and Lia understands that he means he would make the choice to let her die.

Letting Go. Lia goes back to the waterfall and messages Auden to meet her at the bottom of it. After a while she goes to the top of the waterfall and, peering down, sees that he is still not there. She strips off her clothes and wades carefully to the edge. Then, stretching out her arms, she allows herself to fall. When Lia hits the surface she is dragged down by a whirlpool and stays on the bottom for a while, allowing the darkness to engulf her. She lets herself rise to the surface and be dragged down by the whirlpool several times, reveling in the experience, until she hears Auden screaming her name and sees that he has jumped in to rescue her. Lia reaches him at the edge of the whirlpool where he is struggling to keep his head above water. She puts her arm around his waist and they swim to a place where their feet touch the bottom. Auden notices that she is naked, but tells her that he lost his glasses and can't really see anything. The water is ice cold but Lia doesn't want to come out yet. Auden refuses to leave without her and stays in, playing in the water with her.

After a while Auden says that he is freezing and Lia says that she will race him to the shore. Halfway there she turns to see that Auden is headed the wrong way - towards another, smaller waterfall - because he doesn't have his glasses. Lia swims after him and realizes that he is no longer swimming; he is being carried along by the current.



She doesn't reach him in time and they both go over the waterfall. When she surfaces Lia desperately looks for him and realizes that he has sunk to the bottom. She searches the bottom for several minutes before finally finding him and towing him to shore. Auden isn't breathing and, linking into the network, she first calls for help and then gets instructions on how to do CPR. Though she doesn't breathe she is able to force air into his lungs with her mouth and he finally comes to. He is battered and badly injured and when Lia tells him that he will be okay, he tells her that he hopes not so they will make him like her, and then loses consciousness. Help arrives and as the ambulance speeds towards the hospital, Lia hears an alarm. One of the attendants yells "flatline" and starts pushing on Auden's chest.

Forgiveness/Letting Go Analysis

Lia's discussion with Zo finally forces her to accept the fact that even her own family doesn't believe that she is human. Zo "hijacks" her friends and Walker and essentially takes over Lia's old life not out of meanness or spite, but rather to protect her sister's memory. Zo is consumed with guilt over having indirectly caused Lia's death and simply can't bring herself to accept that what Lia is now is truly her sister. Although this hurts Lia, it is finding her father crying and praying to a God that he had always told her didn't exist that finally causes her to accept the fact that the human part of her life is all but over. The only human who accepts her is Auden, and he is the only person Lia wants with her at the waterfall. When Lia jumps off the waterfall it is as much a symbolic break with pretending to be human as it is an attempt to feel the intense sensations Jude assured her she would feel if she did it. It is a wonderful, frightening, and freeing experience.

After Auden goes over the second waterfall and Lia is finally able to get him on shore, Auden says that he hopes they will make him like Lia. Although Lia tells him that he will be fine, she finds herself secretly hoping that Auden will need the download procedure because that would give her someone to go through everything together with. Auden is all that she has left and as she holds on tightly to his lifeless hand in the ambulance she realizes that if she loses him, she will be truly alone.



Numb/Better Off

Numb/Better Off Summary

Numb. At the hospital Lia is given some clothing and her wounds are tended to, even though this is unnecessary as her self-healing skin is already repairing itself. A doctor tells Lia that Auden's injuries are very severe and that he was technically dead for almost two hours, but they managed to revive him and that there is a good chance that he will get most brain function back. His low body temperature slowed his system down which made the doctors' job easier. Auden's father arrives and Lia tries to tell him what happened, but he screams at her to get out and stay away from his son. Lia moves to the other end of the waiting room but does not leave. After a short time Auden's father is allowed to see Auden and stays with him for hours. Lia asks for information on how Auden is doing and is told that his father has ordered that she not be allowed to see his son or be told anything about his condition. Lia continues to wait though the day and night. At dawn a nurse escorts Auden's father through the waiting room and tells him to go home and get some rest. After he leaves, Lia sneaks into Auden's room.

Auden is in bed; he is covered with bandages, has tubes connected to him, and has braces holding his head and neck motionless. He opens his eyes as Lia enters and tells her about the injuries to his heart, lungs, liver and most of his other organs, ending with the fact that he also has a severed spinal cord. He tells her that in time he might get movement back in his neck and shoulders, and eventually they might even be able to fuse his spine so he can walk a few steps at a time, but nothing is certain. Lia asks him if he will go for the download option and Auden tells her that when they scanned his brain they found an anomaly that disqualified him. They could have fixed it before he was born if his mother had chosen to have him scanned for that type of thing, but it was too late now and he was stuck in his ruined body until he died. Lia tells him that she will be there for him and help him through it, and that she will do anything he asks her to. Auden tells her that all he wants her to do is get out and not come back. He angrily says that it is Lia's fault that this happened to him and that he was a fool for trying to save her. When Lia tells Auden that she loves him, he tells her that he is finished groveling at her feet and being grateful for whatever he can get from her, and tells her again to get out. Lia leaves, but remains in the waiting room until late that night when Auden's father leaves again, and then sneaks back into Auden's room and stays with him as he sleeps.

Better Off. In the morning Lia leaves the hospital and texts Jude that she needs to see him. When she arrives at the coordinates Jude gives her she finds that it is a huge estate complete with a mansion and outbuildings. Jude tells her that it belongs to Quinn, and that she is letting a few of them stay there for a while. Lia tells Jude about Auden's accident and says that it is his fault for pushing her so hard when he knew that she wasn't like the rest of the mechs. Jude tells her coldly that, on the contrary, Auden was right when he said that it was Lia's fault. She got careless and forgot that things that couldn't hurt her - like the waterfall, the ice cold river, even the trip to the city where Auden could have been shot while she was in the skyscraper - could easily kill him



because he was an org and wasn't like her. Jude tells her that as long as she keeps pretending to be something she is not and tries to stay a part of the org world she puts everyone she cares about there at risk. He then tells Lia that she can stay with them at the mansion, or go back and watch everyone she cares about be destroyed in one way or another by her selfish denial of what she really is.

After leaving Jude, Lia sends a message to her father that she is in trouble and needs him, her mother, and Zo to meet her at BioTech immediately. She wants them all out of the house so that she can pack a few things and go without a scene. Her parents fall for it, but she finds Zo waiting for her in her room. As Lia packs clothes and a few small reminders of her past life, Zo says that her running away will kill their mother and father, but Lia reminds her that it was Zo who clued her in to the fact that no one - including their father - wanted her there. Zo tells her that she shouldn't have said the things she did, and that Lia's leaving is stupid. Lia then asks Zo to tell her that she really is her sister and that she wants her to stay, but Zo can't do it and hurries from the room. A short time later Lia leaves for Quinn's mansion to pursue her new life with the mechs.

Numb/Better Off Analysis

Although Lia insists that it was simply a stupid accident, Auden blames her for everything that has happened to him. Lia believes that much of his anger at her is due to the fear and helplessness he is feeling - things that she herself felt just after she came to at BioTech - but she also knows that for the time being he needs her to leave him alone. There is nothing she can do to help him yet and even though she finally realizes that she loves him, she also understands that there may never be any way she can have a relationship with him again. Having lost the last person in her life who really cared about her, Lia finds that she is truly alone.

It is finally Jude who makes her understand that, without meaning to, she puts every org that she cares about in danger by denying what she is and pretending that she can live normally in their world. When Lia thinks of Auden and his ruined body, her father sobbing on his knees to a God he doesn't believe in, and Zo being reminded that it should have been her in the car every time she sees Lia and spending her every waking hour consumed with guilt, she realizes that he is right. Jude tells her that it is their immortality and their invulnerability that makes the orgs hate them and that is something that will never change no matter how hard any mech tries to fit into their world. Although she does not completely believe everything that Jude says, Lia knows that her old life is now over and that the org world no longer holds anything for her. She decides that rather than continue to pretend that she is something she's not, she will join Jude and the other mechs and explore what she truly is.



Characters

Lia Kahn

Lia Kahn is a beautiful and intelligent 17-year-old girl who is horribly injured in a car accident. Her body is almost completely destroyed and to save her life, her brain is downloaded into an artificial body which does not age, never gets sick, and will not die. Prior to the accident Lia was one of the most popular girls in her school. Following weeks of rehab to learn how to control her new body Lia returns to school and finds that everything has changed. Her friends are unable to accept what she has become and turn against her, her boyfriend wants nothing to do with her, and even her sister Zo treats Lia like she hates her. Almost no one she knows is able to accept that Lia is still human, and they want nothing to do with her. The one exception to this is Auden Heller, himself an outcast, who Lia would have had nothing to do with in her old life. Lia forms a friendship with Auden and, as the novel progresses, comes to depend on him more and more.

Lia finds that on top of the prejudice she encounters from almost every segment of society because she is a "Skinner", she is also unable to feel things - either physically or emotionally - the way she did before the accident. Auden tries to help but their experiments are mostly unsuccessful. Lia then meets a group of other download recipients who call themselves "mechs", and she and Auden accompany them on a pair dangerous trips. Lia does not take the risks that the other mechs take, although she is fascinated by what the things they do must feel like. Lia indirectly causes Auden to be horribly injured when she finally does one of the things she has seen the other mechs do and jumps off a waterfall. Auden dives in the river to save her and is horribly injured. Auden blames Lia, telling her that he never wants to see her again. Finally understanding that she poses a risk to everyone she cares about in the human world, Lia joins the mechs to explore what she has become.

Auden Heller

Auden Heller is a classmate of Lia's. He is a smart, sensitive person and is the only one at school who is willing to accept what Lia has become and be friends with her. Auden has always been different from the other people at school - dressing in unfashionable, poorly fitting clothes, and wearing glasses even though his eyes could be easily fixed - and it is the fact that he has always been an outcast that allows him to accept Lia. Auden tells Lia that his late mother had chosen not to get him any of the genetic enhancements that most other people got before they were born which helps to explain to Lia why he is so different.

As their friendship grows Auden falls in love with Lia, but is unable to tell her how he feels for a long time. When he finally does tell her it is at the worst possible time, and Lia tells him that she can't think of him romantically. Auden is hurt but remains friends



with her. He is severely injured and crippled from the neck down as the result of jumping into a freezing river to save Lia when he mistakenly thinks that she is in danger. He learns that there is an anomaly in his brain that disqualifies him from having the download procedure, which means that he will be trapped in his ruined body for the rest of his life. He blames Lia for the accident, and ends their friendship.

Jude

Jude is the leader of the mechs, and was one of the first human beings to receive the download procedure back when it was still in its experimental stages. Jude and several of the other mechs in the group received the procedure against their wills. Jude believes that mechs are superior to orgs in almost every way, and tells Lia that she is wasting her time trying to go back to her old life because the orgs don't want her there. Jude believes that the past is irrelevant and that until she is willing to let go of it, Lia will never realize her full potential.

Jude's decisions are never questioned by the other mechs, and it is he who makes the decision to allow Auden Heller to accompany them on their trips although the others don't want Auden to go. Although he seems cold and emotionless to Lia, she is none-the-less fascinated by him. It is Jude who tells Lia that the longer she tries to hold on to her old life the more people she will destroy and, in the end, it is Jude who convinces her to leave her old life and join the mechs.

Zo Kahn

Zo is Lia's younger sister. Although before the accident Zo wanted nothing to do with Lia's friends or lifestyle, when Lia returns to school after rehab she finds that Zo has taken her place as the leader of her friends, has taken her spot on the track team, and has even taken her boyfriend Walker. Zo is consumed with guilt because she blames herself for Lia's accident, and has taken her place everywhere because she believes that the downloaded Lia is just a copy of her sister and not really Lia at all. Zo believes that Lia is dead because of her, and she will not allow a machine to take her sister's place.

Quinn Sharpe

Quinn is the first other download recipient Lia meets. They meet while both are still in rehab and Quinn, who had been trapped in a wrecked and useless body for 13 years since the age of three, is thrilled with her new body. She has never been more free or happy in her life, and cannot understand why Lia is so negative. Quinn becomes one of the mechs after meeting them for the first time and lets some of them live at her mansion, which is where Lia goes to live at the end of the novel.



M. Kahn (Lia's Father)

Lia's father is a wealthy, powerful, and important man. He owns BioTech and is the one who made the decision to have Lia get the download procedure. Initially he insists that Lia try to reintegrate into society as quickly as possible, but at some point comes to the conclusion that downloading her into a new body was a mistake. He loves Lia and tries to do his best for her, but eventually comes to believe that he should have let her die.

Ani

Ani is one of mechs; she is the one who first invites both Lia and Quinn to one of their gatherings. Along with Jude and another of the mechs named Riley, Ani was one of the first recipients of the download procedure back when it was in its experimental stages. As was the case with Jude and Riley, the procedure was done to her without her consent. It is Ani who tells Lia a bit about Jude's history when they are on the top of the skyscraper.

Walker

Walker is one of the most popular boys at school, and was Lia's boyfriend before the accident. Walker is basically a decent person and makes an effort to get back together with Lia after the download procedure, but he is repulsed by her artificial body and the relationship soon ends forever. Walker ends up in a relationship with Lia's sister Zo.

Cass

Cass was one of Lia's best friends before the accident. Along with Lia's other friends, Cass is unable to accept what Lia has become. During a party, Cass's boyfriend comes on to Lia because he wants to see what it feels like to make love to a machine. When Lia tries to explain what happened, Cass chooses to believe her boyfriend's version that it was actually Lia that came on to him and ends their friendship.

Bliss

Bliss is another of Lia's best friends who cannot adjust to what Lia has become. Shortly after Lia returns to school, Bliss gives a speech in their Persuasive Speech class in which she states that Skinners are nothing more than copies of human beings and should not have the same rights as "real" people. She, along with another friend named Terra, also ends her friendship with Lia after the party.



M. Heller (Auden's Father)

M. Heller is Auden's father and only parent; Auden's mother has been dead for years. M. Heller tells Auden to get "it" out of here when he finds Lia at his house, and then forbids her from seeing Auden in the hospital. Although Auden tells Lia that his father hates him, M. Heller spends hours with Auden after the accident and only leaves his side when a nurse insists.

Sascha

Sascha is a counselor at BioTech who works with Lia to help her accept her new circumstances after the download procedure. Although Sascha continually tries to point out all of the positive aspects of her new body, Lia believes that her sessions with Sascha are a waste of time. Eventually Lia starts saying the things Sascha wants to hear even though she doesn't believe them because it is easier than arguing.

The Honored Rai Savona

The Honored Rai Savona is the leader of the Faith Party, also known as the Faithers. Savona comes to Lia's house at her father's request to apologize for the behavior of one of his followers, but ends up saying that Lia is not human and telling her father that the "thing" seated in the room with them is not his daughter. Lia's father angrily throws Savona out.

Tak

Tak is one of the mechs. During the trip to the city, Tak remains outside after everyone else is safe in the cars and screams for someone to come and get him. He is shot by two city-dwellers. Afterward, Jude explains that Tak is into violence and pain and that they have done this before.

Riley

Riley is another of the mechs who, along with Jude and Ani, was one of the original experimental download recipients. Unlike them, however, Riley was healthy when he was given the procedure against his will.



Objects/Places

Cars

Cars are the main mode of transportation for Lia and her friends. Cars no longer need to be driven manually; coordinates are programmed in and the car does the rest.

The Network

Much like the current internet but far more advanced, the network is a virtual reality world that plays a major role in the lives of all of the novel's characters.

ViMs (Virtual Machines)

ViMs are one of several ways that individuals can link in to the network; Lia received her first ViM when she was three years old.

Retro Fashions

Lia's sister Zo has always been a fan of "retro" fashions. Although Lia and her friends always hated them, after the accident her friends start to wear them following Zo's lead.

Faithers (Faith Party)

The Faithers are a religious group who believe that recipients of the download procedure are an abomination, and are damned by God. A Faither attacks Lia in the woods behind her house.

Skyscraper

Jude takes Lia and the other mechs to the top of a skyscraper, just to see the view.

Gun

Tak - one of the mechs who goes to the city with Jude and Lia - is shot with a gun.

Artificial Grass

Lia and Quinn lay on artificial grass during their "field trip" on the BioTech grounds.



B-Mods

B-mods are behavior modification drugs which are widely used by most of the people Lia knows, including her former friends and her parents.

Virtual Reality Games

Walker plays virtual reality games the first couple of times he is alone with Lia so that he will not need to interact with her.

School

Many significant events take place at Lia's school including her becoming frozen, and her finding out that Walker is now Zo's boyfriend.

Hospital

Auden is taken to a hospital when he is injured after going over the waterfall.

City

Jude takes Lia, Auden, and a number of other mechs to an unnamed city where he was born.

BioTech

BioTech is a company that is owned by Lia's father. It is at Biotech that Lia and all of the other mechs are given the download procedure.

Waterfall

The waterfall is where Auden is severely injured after he jumps in the pool below to save Lia, even though she does not need to be saved.



Themes

Prejudice and Intolerance

After she receives the download procedure, Lia finds herself encountering prejudice and intolerance at almost every turn. When her parents bring her home from BioTech they are met by "Faithers" who chant slogans and carry signs with the message that "Skinners" are an abomination, that they are unnatural and not part of God's plan, and that Lia and her parents are damned. A short time later her network zone provider terminates her account without warning, stating that the company has decided that recipients of the download procedure are, for all intents and purposes, deceased and they will no longer provide service to them. Strangers including Auden's father refer to Lia as "it", and refuse to have anything to do with her because she is different from them. Even her friends and family - people who once loved and cared about her - rapidly begin to pull away when she comes back from BioTech and eventually shun her not because of who she is, but because of what she is.

The prejudice and intolerance that Lia encounters is in no way unique to her, as is shown clearly by the episode during the trip to the city where Tak is shot by two human city-dwellers just because he is a mech. Lia learns that many of the mechs in Jude's group have been the victim of prejudice and intolerance, and that after a while it just becomes a part of what it means to be a mech. Jude explains to Lia that humans hate them because they are immortal and indestructible, and that it is natural for most humans to hate those groups who have something they don't or who are different from them. Though she has experienced intolerance at every level, at the end of the novel Lia still believes that there has to be some way that mechs and orgs can live together.

Friendship

Friendship, and what it truly means to be a friend, is one of the major themes in the novel. When Lia returns to school after receiving the download procedure she knows that there will be a period of adjustment as her friends get used to her new body, but believes that eventually things will go back to the way they were before her accident. When her best friends first avoid her and then believe a lie about her and decide to have nothing more to do with her, Lia realizes that the people who once mattered the most to her are nothing more than shallow, stupid creatures that can only see what she is on the outside and refuse to look any deeper. She also comes to the realization that she, herself, was exactly the same way before the accident. Lia understands that these people are no longer her friends and wonders if they ever really were.

Lia learns the true meaning of friendship through her relationship with Auden Heller. Auden is the only person who is willing to look beyond Lia's artificial body at the person underneath, and he accepts her completely. Over a period of just a couple of weeks Auden becomes the best friend that Lia has ever had. He is completely devoted to her



and she finds herself depending on him more and more as time goes on. Unfortunately, it is the fact that Auden is willing to do anything he can for his friend that causes him to be horribly injured in an unnecessary accident and ends the friendship. Lia realizes too late that a friendship must be a two-way street and that her inability focus on Auden's needs as well as her own may have been indirectly responsible for the accident that caused his injuries.

Self Acceptance

Throughout the novel, Lia fights against the idea that the download procedure has made her completely different from the person she once was and that, as a result, she no longer fits into the world she once inhabited. Although Auden, and later Jude, tells her that there is nothing wrong with no longer being what she was and that she needs to explore, understand, and accept what she has become, Lia resists. She is unwilling to break away from the world she has always known even though most of the other people in that world make it clear that they don't want her there.

More than anything else, it is Lia's relationship with Jude and the other mechs which causes her to begin to explore and try to understand what she has become as a result of the download. Although unwilling to take the risks that the other mechs take at first, she eventually realizes that until she puts her fears aside and starts testing her own limits she will never have a chance at happiness. When she finally jumps off the waterfall, she is taking the first major step towards accepting who and what she has become and exploring what she is capable of. When she decides to join the mechs after Auden is injured, the reader understands that she is finally leaving her old life behind and taking the first steps towards truly accepting what she is.

Style

Point of View

"Skinned" is written in the first person point of view; the narrator is a 17-year-old girl named Lia Kahn, and all of the action in the novel is seen through her eyes. The narrator presents events, situations, and conversations as though they have just recently happened to her; there is no reference to events that are yet to come at any point in the story. Although there are some paragraphs that describe major world events, various groups or organizations, and scientific principles for the purpose of clarification, these are few and far between and all "facts" are presented as they are understood by the narrator. There are no major flashback scenes, nor are there any scenes in which the narrator is not present and at the center of the action.

The story is told using a mixture of dialogue and descriptive prose; all of the dialogue consists of conversations that the narrator has with other characters. Along with presenting facts and describing action, the narrator also comments frequently on what is happening and regularly provides the reader with information about what she is thinking and feeling. This literary device is very effective and works well as this is a very personal story and understanding what the narrator is feeling helps to give the reader an excellent insight into her character.

Setting

The novel is set in the future, although the author is intentionally vague about exactly how far in the future it actually is. In this future world severely injured individuals who fit the age and genetic requirements can be downloaded into a new, artificial body which - along with several other technological advancements which are described in some detail - indicates that it is several generations in the future at least.

Although the author only provides facts about this future world very sparingly - obviously preferring to allow the reader to use his or her imagination - she does relate that a nuclear war has essentially ruined most of the natural environment and that there are shortages of resources including food and "med-tech" in large segments of society, particularly in the cities. Lia and her friends and family are wealthy and privileged and live in a "safe" area. The reader understands that this safe area is located somewhere in the United States, but again no information as to its exact location is provided.

The story takes place over a period of months and there are a large number "physical" locations in this future world where the major action and events in the novel are set. These include BioTech, where Lia undergoes the download process and spends time in rehab; Lia's school, where she "freezes", is shunned by her friends after the party, and learns the truth about Walker and Zo; the city (unnamed) where Lia learns the truth about Jude, Ani, and Riley and where Tak allows himself to be shot; and her home,



where a number of important events take place throughout course of the novel. The most significant setting in the novel is the waterfall where Lia first sees what the mechs are capable of, receives the upload from Jude which allows her to "feel" things intensely and, finally, explores her limits by jumping off it which indirectly causes Auden's accident and ends their friendship. These multiple settings work well with the novel's plot and help to give the story a realistic and natural feeling and flow.

Language and Meaning

The language used in "Skinned" tends to be quite informal and is very easy for the reader to understand. It is exactly what one would expect from a reasonably intelligent and well educated 17-year-old girl and so fits the narrating character perfectly. The language used helps to keep the story interesting and entertaining; the dialogue is unforced and natural sounding, and the descriptive passages move along at a steady pace. There is some mild profanity used by a number of characters throughout the novel, and there is also some mild sexual content. Both of these are appropriate to the characters and circumstances in the story, and most readers will not find these instances to be in any way offensive.

There are a number of words which will be unfamiliar to readers as are they are slang terms which are widely used in the future world the novel is set in (med-tech, b-mods, ViMs, Fathers, etc). However, the context in which these words are used allow the reader to understand immediately what is being referred to. The use of these unfamiliar words is also very effective in keeping the reader grounded in the futuristic setting of the novel.

Structure

The novel is 361 pages long and is divided into twenty chapters. The chapters range from eleven to thirty-one pages in length. Each chapter is titled and features a short, one sentence quote from the chapter's text at the beginning. The chapters are broken up into shorter, untitled sections of varying lengths. The novel takes place over the course of several months, although exactly how much time passes between chapters and individual events is not always made clear.

The novel contains one main plot and a number of subplots. The main plot follows the narrating character Lia Kahn as she attempts to adjust to her new life after her brain is downloaded into an artificial body and come to terms with who and what she has become. One subplot revolves around Lia's friendship with Auden Heller, who is the only person at her school who even attempts to understand what she is going through. Another subplot involves Lia's relationship with Jude, who is the leader of a group of download recipients who call themselves mechs and who tells her that she will never realize her full potential until she stops pretending to be human and joins them. As this book is the first part of a trilogy, none of these plot lines are brought to a conclusion at the end of the novel, and the story is carried on in the next installment of the trilogy.



Quotes

"Just for the record, I didn't do things because they were cool. Things were cool because I did them." *The First Day*, p. 9

"If I could speak, I might have pointed out that I couldn't move my arm or raise my eyebrow. And then thanked him for rubbing it in." *Eyes Wide Open*, p. 21

"Skinners. Computers - machines - that hijacked human identities, clothing themselves in human skin. Except the flesh was just as artificial as what lay beneath." *Nothing*, p. 33

"'And then there's the big thing,' Sascha prompted. 'A lot of people would envy you ... If the government allowed it, a lot of people might even download voluntarily.'" *Mouth Closed*, p. 58

"God made man. Who made you?" *Faith*, p. 86

"I was used to people watching me. I just wasn't used to them gawking, then twisting away as soon as I caught them at it." *Sobered Up*, p.119

"They were, in fact, shallow bitches. News flash: So was I. It didn't make me miss them any less." *Life Support*, p. 165

"I didn't feel strange before it happened. I didn't feel much of anything, which was the new normal." *One of Us*, p 195

"Why did no one seem to get that living forever was only a good thing if life didn't suck." *Terminated*, p.228

"Zo had only told one lie that afternoon - that she didn't hate me. Because obviously she did. Fine. That made us even." *Turning Back*, p. 253

"People only fear letting go because they fear they won't be able to get the control back." *Control and Release*, p.264

"There were too many people afraid of what I'd become. I wasn't going to be one of them. Not anymore." *Letting Go*, p.317

"I wondered if he'd discovered the secret to shutting down his emotions for good. And if he would teach it to me." *Better Off*, p.353



Topics for Discussion

Who and what is Lia Kahn? After the download procedure is Lia a human being with a mechanical body, or a machine with a human brain? Is there a difference? Why is Lia unable to fit into her old life when she returns home from BioTech? Does she not try hard enough, or is she not really given the opportunity? Is it a combination of both?

Discuss Lia's relationship with Auden Heller. Why is Auden the only person who accepts Lia? Why does he help her when she freezes at school? Why does Auden become friends with her? Why does he take so many risks by going with her on her trips with the mechs? Does he really love Lia? In the end, does Lia really love him?

Who is Jude? Why does he paint parts of himself metallic silver and have transparent skin on parts of his body which exposes his wiring? Why does Jude believe that the past is irrelevant? For what reason does Jude allow Auden to accompany the mechs on their trips? Why does he give Lia the program to upload? Does what Lia learns about Jude from Ani on the skyscraper change her opinion of him? If so, how?

Discuss Lia's relationship with Zo. Why does Zo take over her old life? Why do Lia's former friends all gravitate to Zo? Are the sisters more alike than Lia ever noticed before? Why does Zo act like she hates her? Does Zo really feel responsible for Lia being in the accident? Is she responsible? Why is Zo unable to ask Lia to stay when Lia asks her to?

Discuss Lia's father. Does Lia's father love her? Why does he invite the Honored Rai Savona to their house? What does Savona say that causes him to throw the man out of his house? Why does he beg God to forgive him? Is it his feelings for Lia that change, or his feelings about the download procedure that change, or both?

Why do Lia's friends treat her the way they do after she has the download procedure? Why does Cass's boyfriend come on to her at the party? Why does everyone believe his version of the story and not hers? Does Walker really try to get back together with Lia? What is it about her that repulses him? Why does he end up with Zo?

Discuss the accident at the waterfall. Why does Auden jump in the river to save her when it is unnecessary? Is it Lia's fault that Auden is injured? Is it Auden's fault? Was there anything Lia could have done to prevent the accident? Was this - or some other similar accident - destined to be the inevitable result of their being friends?

Why does Auden blame Lia for his injuries? Are his reasons valid? Why is Auden ineligible for the download procedure? Would he have wanted it knowing what Lia had gone through? Why does he refuse Lia's offer to help him get through whatever is coming? Why does he tell her to leave and never come back? Does he mean it?

Why does Lia finally accept Jude's offer to join the mechs? Why does she finally decide to explore what she is? Does Lia believe Jude when he tells her that she puts any org



she cares about at risk by trying to live in their world? Why does Jude say that the orgs hate the mechs? Is he right?