

# **Frank Miller's Sin City the Hard Goodbye Study Guide**

**Frank Miller's Sin City the Hard Goodbye by Frank  
Miller (comics)**

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# Plot Summary

Frank Miller's *Sin City: The Hard Goodbye* tells the story of Marv, a psychotic, disfigured, ex-military killer living in a decadent and corrupt city. Marv is framed for the murder of beautiful prostitute Goldie, and feeling a connection with her though they only shared one night together, Marv goes on a search for her killer. Marv is both hunter and hunted as he traces the murder up through Sin City to a corrupt cardinal and a cannibalistic serial killer preying on the city's prostitutes. Marv ekes out retribution, though he pays for it in the electric chair.

As the story begins, Marv wonders to himself why the angelic Goldie would agree to sleep with him. He doesn't want to ask any questions, though, and destroy the little piece of heaven he's found in the hell that is Sin City. He gets drunk with her, makes love with her, and falls asleep with her. Three hours later, he's awake and Goldie is dead. Before Marv has time to process what's happened, he hears sirens in the distance. The cops are on the way. Marv fights his way out and disappears into the streets of Sin City.

Goldie is Marv's angel, the one woman who has been nice to him and given herself to him. He swears revenge on whoever killed her. He goes to his mother's house and retrieves his gun, and there he discovers that some men came around, asking about him. Marv knows that whoever set him up is probably looking for him, so he goes to a bar and spreads the idea that he's been getting drunk and babbling about revenge.

The next thing Marv knows, two assassins come after him. Marv tortures and kills them, getting the name of the person who sent him. They're too sloppy to be the murderer he's after, the one who killed Goldie. Marv finally follows the trail to a priest, and he thinks the name the priest gives him can't be right: Roark, part of the leading family of Sin City, and a cardinal in the church.

Marv follows the trail to a farm outside of the city, where he finds a serial killing cannibal, who eats women and keeps their heads as trophies. This is the man who killed Goldie, but he's also taken Marv's parole officer, Lucille, hostage and eaten her hand. Marv and Lucille escape, but unfortunately the cops come to the scene. Unsuspecting Lucille is killed by the corrupt cops, while Marv escapes.

On the track of more information, Marv finds Goldie's twin sister, another prostitute named Wendy. Together, they burn down the farm, and Marv kills the serial killer. Then, Marv moves on to Cardinal Roark's house. The cardinal confesses to finding a spiritual euphoria in cannibalism, along with the serial killer, and killing Goldie when she found out too much information. Marv tortures and kills the cardinal, but he is arrested, tried, and put to death for his crimes. He is forced to confess to killing not only the cardinal but also Goldie and the other prostitutes. Marv's only comfort before his death is that Wendy comes to him in jail, and he relives his night with Goldie with her sister.



# Chapter 1

## Chapter 1 Summary

Frank Miller's *Sin City: The Hard Goodbye* tells the story of Marv, a psychotic, disfigured, ex-military killer living in a decadent and corrupt city. Marv is framed for the murder of beautiful prostitute Goldie. Feeling a connection with her though they only shared one night together, Marv goes on a search for her killer. Marv is both hunter and hunted as he traces the murder up through Sin City to a corrupt cardinal and a cannibalistic serial killer preying on the city's prostitutes. Marv ekes out retribution, though he pays for it in the electric chair.

As the graphic novel begins, Marv is embracing a beautiful woman. The night is sweltering hot, and Marv is in a room in a dive hotel, drinking and making love on a heart-shaped bed. To Marv, the woman is a goddess, and he wonders why she is with him. She seems to sincerely want him, and Marv hesitates to question his luck. He thinks that she smells like an angel. This night of passion almost makes up for all the horrors of war and fights that are in his past.

Three hours after making love with Goldie, Marv has awoken and dressed. His stomach goes cold, and he realizes that Goldie is dead. There's no indication of how she died. Her body still looks perfect. He knows, though, that she's been murdered. Marv has been in the room all night, but he was drunk. He failed to stop someone from entering the room and murdering Goldie, right next to him in the heart-shaped bed. Marv has nothing but questions. He doesn't know why Goldie chose him to bring to bed with her. She picked him up in a dive saloon. He doesn't know who was after her and wanted her dead.

Marv is pondering his questions when outside the room he hears the sound of sirens. The police are on the way. Their imminent arrival is a clue. No one could know that Goldie is dead, except Marv and the murderer. Clearly, the murderer has sent the cops. There is not time to hide, and Marv is sure that the cops mean to kill him, this time. As the police cars come closer, Marv gets ready to fight.

## Chapter 1 Analysis

*The Hard Goodbye* begins with a short scene that sets up Marv's character and motivation. This is the moment when Marv becomes entangled with a story much bigger than himself that is already going on in the background in Sin City. Marv spends the night with Goldie. He feels that he doesn't deserve her, and he doesn't want to ask any questions. He doesn't want to break the illusion of a perfect angel who seems to really want him. Marv calls Goldie an "angel," (and also a "goddess") one of the first references to religion, which will be a recurring element throughout the story. Marv himself wears a cross on his broad, hard chest. Goldie represents an ideal to him, his



idea of heaven, the ultimate good that he wants to attain. She is kind to him. She sounds like he truly wants him. Still, Marv persists in thinking that he doesn't deserve her. He cannot deserve heaven; Marv thinks that he deserves hell.

When Goldie dies, Marv knows that she's been murdered, even though there's not a mark on her perfect body. He uses his instinct throughout the book. Marv's gut turns cold, and he knows something bad is going on. Instinct, however, is only part of Marv's abilities. Marv constantly calls himself stupid, but when he hears the cop cars coming, he knows that he's being framed. He realizes the implication of what's happening. Marv's self-image is not an accurate one. He believes himself to be both stupider and worse than he actually is.



# Chapter 2

## Chapter 2 Summary

Marv sits by the heart-shaped bed, holding Goldie's hand. He promises her that he'll take revenge on whoever killed her. Meanwhile, the police march up the stairs toward the room. Marv knows that the cops are corrupt, and they obey whomever pays them. He's convinced that someone's paid well to frame him for murder. As the police approach, Marv pops a pill from a prescription drug bottle. Then, he hears them knock on the door and order him to open it.

Marv breaks down the hotel room door, knocking the police out of his way. They shoot him in the shoulder, but it doesn't stop him. Marv jumps over a stair railing, falling past more gunfire. He catches onto one of the stair railings, all the time taking more gunshot wounds. He pulls himself up and over the railing, and then he exits the hotel by jumping out of a window, through the glass. Marv falls past the building's brick wall, shards of glass flying up behind him as he falls. He finally hits the piles of garbage bags that lay in the alleyway next to the building. Passed-out human garbage lines the alley as well.

Marv rises out of the trash bags, but a cop car has already arrived and catches him in its headlights. Without hesitating, Marv jumps up on the hood and smashes the windshield with his boots. He pulls the cops out of the car through shards of glass, and dumps them on the pile of garbage in the alley. Then he takes the car and drives it off a pier, into the water. As Marv exits the sinking car into the water, he thinks of Goldie. Though Marv has never seen Goldie before the previous night, he swears that he will not only kill her murderer, but torture him so that hell will be a relief to him by the time he dies.

## Chapter 2 Analysis

Marv's motivation in the novel is revenge, but his first task is to evade the police. Before the fight, Marv takes a pill. This is foreshadowing of the revelation of Marv's mental illness, another element of Marv's low self-image. The encounter with the police is also the first time that Marv fights, and fighting is the one area in which Marv is confident and in which he excels. Marv enjoys violent outbursts against others, but his conscience limits him to harming people that he perceives as evil. However, he has no limits to his violence against someone evil. He promises that the person responsible for killing Goldie will find hell a relief after Marv gets through with him, and Marv means this literally. He believes there is a hell where evildoers go, and he knows he is capable of horrible tortures, worse than any hell he can imagine.

Marv takes on a large group of heavily armed cops, and he is able to evade them. Part of this is due to Marv's physical prowess. Part of it is also due to Marv's intellect. He



knows where to go and how to react to situations. He makes a plan as he goes and decides how to escape the police force. He clearly knows the city and is able to make smart choices on the fly. Most of chapter two is taken up with Marv's encounter with the police, and there is almost no dialogue or narration. The chapter is mostly visual, not unlike a chase scene in a movie. The scene also gives the reader a first view of Sin City, outside of the hotel room. The streets are littered with unconscious bodies lying with trash bags in alleyways, and the armored police don't hesitate to wrack their target with gunfire.



# Chapter 3

## Chapter 3 Summary

Marv swims through the water and into a sewage pipe under the surface of the water. He thinks of the many cops gathering above the water, waiting for him to surface, while he escapes beneath the water. Marv comes up coughing in the sewer. He knows that he has to get to Lucille in order to get what he needs. He sneaks up through a manhole to the streets, where he hides in the shadows. A cop walks right by him, whistling.

Marv climbs up the side of a building, hanging on to the bricks and grunting as he lifts himself up. He climbs up on a ledge, and leans back against the bricks. Inside, a sleeping woman hears noises in the nighttime. She sits up in bed, wearing only panties, and asks the dark apartment if it's Claire. She gets no response but incoherent noises. She gets out a gun and cocks it, going out to investigate. When she sees the invader, she's relieved that it's only Marv. He asks Lucille for a beer.

Lucille won't give Marv a beer, but she knows that he's really there for medication. She goes to her medicine cabinet and finds him a bottle of pills, and Marv thanks her. Lucille is Marv's parole officer, and he thinks it's a shame that she's a lesbian, with her body. Lucille provides Marv with medication from her psychiatrist girlfriend. Lucille's girlfriend tried to start therapy sessions with Marv, but she got too scared to treat him for his mental problems.

Lucille comments on how beat-up Marv is, and he comments that he got into a fight with the cops. Lucille asks if he killed anyone, and Marv says that he doesn't think so. The cops will be bruised from the fight, though. Marv gets upset and tells her that he's in deep trouble, just where he wants to be. Lucille warns him that it means life in prison, this time, and Marv responds that the only hell he knows is having no purpose in his life. He's had no reason for being until now. Now he knows what he has to do.

Marv leaves Lucille's, traveling across the rooftops. He's on his way to get Gladys. He goes to his blind mother's home and sneaks past her room. His own room is exactly the way he left it. His mother hasn't changed a thing and dusts it every week. The familiar childhood smells make Marv cry each time he's there. From a trunk, he retrieves "Gladys," a gun he stole off a boy he killed in school. He named her after one of the nuns at his school. Marv's mom has heard him, and she comes into the room. She tells him that some men came earlier, looking for him. He hides the gun behind him, lying to her that he's got a new night job. He explains his wounds away by saying he cut himself shaving. She asks if he's getting mixed up again, and he says he's feeling fine and that he's met a girl named Goldie.





## Chapter 3 Analysis

Marv starts out the novel at the depths of Sin City: in the back alleys filled with garbage and in the sewers. Throughout the novel, he will rise up to the heights of Sin City: the towering church steeple and the statue of Cardinal Roark. He will also spread out to the farthest reaches of Sin City: the farm on its outskirts and the inaccessible Roark Fortress. In this extensive exploration, every corner and nook of Sin City is corrupt, dirtier than the sewer Marv crawls out of in chapter three.

When Marv visits Lucille, it gives the reader more information about Sin City. Although Lucille is a professional woman, an average citizen, she sleeps with a gun at the ready to protect herself. She is ready to defend her home with violence, in the pervasively criminal Sin City. Marv's mental illness is also expanded on in this chapter. Lucille is Marv's contact for the medicine he needs to remain sane.

Marv's attitude toward homosexuality is one of complete lack of understanding. His only response to Lucille is that he thinks she's wasting her gorgeous body, since she could have any man that she wanted. He can't seem to conceive of the complexity of human sexuality, part of Marv's simplistic, black-and-white world view. At Marv's home, the reader sees his mother, who seems harmless and merely concerned about her son, unaware of the depth of violence in his life. Marv went to a Catholic school, and he hints that his violence goes back that far. Certainly Marv's black-and-white, good-and-evil worldview (in a world where everything seems black and evil) goes back to his religious upbringing.



# Chapter 4

## Chapter 4 Summary

Marv notes that he was always good at solving jigsaw puzzle, putting the pieces together. In school, he had a friend, Chuck, who was mentally handicapped and loved to watch Marv put together a jigsaw puzzle. Now Marv has a new kind of puzzle to solve. He thinks that if he can attract the people who are after him, he'll find some more pieces. Marv walks down an alley to a blank door in a brick wall. He hears noises from behind the door, and a bouncer kicks out an unconscious man. The bouncer sees Marv's military-looking coat and face and tells him to leave, but Marv grabs his face and pushes in his eyes.

Marv walks into the club and tells the waitress to let Kadie, the transsexual owner, know it's him. Drinking, and everything else worthwhile, according to Marv, is illegal in Sin City, and the cops and politicians make money taking bribes to let nightclub owners like Kadie have their businesses and charge ridiculous prices. Marv's drinks, however, are free, because he does illicit favors for Kadie. Marv likes Kadie's place, which plays old country music. Nancy is the stripper on stage, dancing half naked, wearing boots, chaps, and a cowboy hat, and dancing with a lasso. Marv has often lusted after Nancy, but tonight he's at the club for business, not pleasure.

Marv finds the person he's looking for, a small, hairy man at the bar drinking a beer, who Marv calls Weevil. Marv tells Weevil to spread the word that Marv is out getting drunk, crying over Goldie's death. As Weevil heads off, Marv orders a beer and a shot. Marv watches Nancy dance until he feels a gun in his back. Two hit men have come to get him. Marv complements one on his coat, and lets himself be led out of the bar between the two. Marv thinks to himself how much he likes hit men, because he doesn't feel bad about hurting them.

Outside the club, Marv attacks the two men. Soon, one is dead and the other injured. Marv takes the coat he admired. He knows these men aren't good enough to have killed Goldie, but he tortures them until he learns who sent them out after him. Then he kills them. Marv searches their bodies and finds some money. As he walks off, Marv thinks that he smells Goldie, but he shakes it off as a hallucination. Unseen by him, someone who looks just like Goldie hides in the shadows, watching him, and planning to make him pay for what he's done to her. Marv notes that the sun has come up. He needs to go find a place to sleep.

## Chapter 4 Analysis

Marv's life is entirely immersed in a criminal underground. Part of the reason behind this is that in Sin City, everything is illegal. The tough laws criminalize more and more activities, but just like during Prohibition, the activities go on just the same. People just



pay more, and are thrown in with a criminal element. Then, the police and the corrupted officials are paid to look the other way, creating an economy based on illegality. Marv's life is shaped by this illegality. He has no respect for the law as a code to dictate behavior, because in his world, everything is illegal. He also has no respect for religion as a code to dictate behavior, because he believes he is already damned to hell. There is no external force acting on Marv to influence behavior.

However, Marv has a strong internal code governing his behavior. Through Marv has a great rage inside him and a desire to inflict harm, he does not want to harm just anyone. Marv likes hit men because he can harm them without his conscience bothering him. In Marv's mind, the hit men have forfeited any right to humane treatment on any level, and no amount of pain or torture against them is wrong. Marv considers his actions to be monstrous and evil, but he also considers the hit men to be deserving of any possible punishment.

At the end of this chapter, a woman who looks like Goldie appears. This character, seen only in the shadows, makes the reader begin to doubt what seems to be true and what Marv believes to be true in the story. Marv also thinks he is hallucinating Goldie's smell, and this gives more information about the nature of Marv's mental illness. His senses are unreliable, and so the reader must also doubt the reliability of the novel itself, narrated from Marv's point of view.



# Chapter 5

## Chapter 5 Summary

Marv has found a place to crash, but he only tosses and turns on the bed. He can't sleep, not because of the noise or the smell, but because he's too excited. There is nothing to watch on television, and nothing to do but sit and wait for the sun to go down. He doesn't go out in the daylight because of all the people looking at him. Finally, the sun begins to go down, and Marv thinks of all the people running home and locking themselves in, trying to ignore the ugly reality of Sin City that exists outside their locked doors at night.

Marv walks out into the nighttime, passing bodies sprawled in the streets. He is stirring with excitement. Marv finds the man the two hit men told him about, and he tortures and kills him. Walking through the streets, Marv finds the next link in the chain, a man named Tommy. He tortures him by holding his head in a toilet, gathering yet another name. Marv follows the lead. The next man, he drags along the road, face-down, aside a moving car. His next stop is a church.

Marv goes into the confessional, and he tells the priest that he's tortured and killed three men tonight. The last man gave him the name of the priest. Marv cocks his pistol, and he tells the priest to give him a name. The priest tells him that the name Marv wants is Roark. Marv doesn't believe him. Roark is too big to be involved in this. The priest gives Marv the location of a farm and tells him to check it out for himself, and he'll find that the priest isn't lying. He also says that Goldie isn't worth dying for, calling her a slut. Marv shoots the priest dead. Goldie isn't just worth dying for. She's worth going to hell for.

Lighting a cigarette, Marv walks out of the church, down the steps, thinking how good a cigarette is after you haven't had one in a while. He's got the priest's car keys to a Mercedes. As he's about to get into the car, the woman who looks like Goldie drives at him in a convertible. He shoots at her, but she runs him down. Then, she turns around and runs into him again. After hitting him a third time, she shoots him with a barrage of bullets and then drives off.

The steeple of the church is visible in the distance as Marv rises off the asphalt of the parking lot and gets into the priest's Mercedes. He drives off, surprised that the modern car handles so well. Marv convinces himself that the woman in the car couldn't have been Goldie. Goldie is dead. He's convinced that he's hallucinating, since he's forgotten to take his medicine. With problems like Marv's, it's bad not to take your medicine.

## Chapter 5 Analysis

Marv sleeps in the daytime, only going out at night. This is another indication of his low self-image and his idea that he doesn't belong in normal society. Marv considers himself to be a monster, something to be hidden from the world and kept in the darkest allies.



What Marv dislikes about the daylight is the eyes watching him. Though Marv is disfigured and might be the object of stares, ultimately, Marv feels judged by others, internally as well as externally, and this is a projection of his internalized self-hate.

During this portion of the novel, Marv goes on a killing spree. He is searching for information, so he is portraying the role of a detective. His primary method of gathering information, though, is torture, and Marv is ruthless. He takes the name the hit men gave him and gets a name out of that person. He follows each name to the next, until Marv ends up at a church.

The priest sees Goldie as worthless, a slut. Throughout the novel, no one treats women as human beings, and the women themselves are drawn with figures more aligned with men's imaginations than with reality. The priest is drawn as a hater of women, who easily dismisses the death of one godless hussy. Marv, on the other hand, sees women as something angelic and unattainable, something that must be guarded and protected. Marv and the priest represent love and hatred toward women, but neither of them think of women as human beings. Still, all the characters, male and female, are drawn in broad, unrealistic strokes, with impossible body images and capabilities, in this world of extremes.



# Chapter 6

## Chapter 6 Summary

Marv is creeping through the woods at night. He's left the car at a diner two miles back from the farm, and he's making his way on foot. Marv hates the woods. Nature, he thinks, is not sweet or friendly or kind. He mentions spending a night, once, tied to a tree in the woods, and says that he's hated nature ever since camp. It's one of the few things that scares him. He hears the sound of the wildlife, hunting in the nighttime. Finally he approaches the farm, where a windmill is cracking as it spins. The coldness comes back to Marv's stomach, and he knows that there's trouble. He feels that the farm is an evil place, where people have died.

A growling wolf approaches Marv. He tells the wolf that he doesn't want to hurt it. The wolf attacks him, and Marv punches it, knocking the wolf out. He doesn't want to shoot the wolf, whose even dumber than Marv. He's after the wolf's owner, not the wolf. Marv smells blood on the wolf's breath, and he thinks it's human blood. Unseen to Marv, a man wearing glasses watches him as Marv searches the ground for human remains. He finds a human bone and a woman's shoe. Suddenly, Marv realizes that there's someone behind him, and he's shocked that someone was able to sneak up on him. Marv and the man wearing the glasses start to fight. The man injures Marv's arm, making him drop his gun. Then, he blinds Marv. Marv realizes that this is the man who killed Goldie, as the man in the glasses picks up a mallet. With a blank expression, the man with the glasses hits Marv in the head with the mallet, sending Marv into darkness.

In the dark emptiness, Marv starts to remember what's happened, chastising himself as a failure. He wonders if he's in hell, but then he starts to feel the pain and see a light. Marv wakes up in a room, where the heads of six women are mounted on the wall. Lucille is there, naked. She tells Marv that the killer cooks and eats women and keeps their heads as trophies. He gives bones to the wolf. Marv gives Lucille his coat and tries to calm her. Then he sees that Lucille's hand has been cut off. She tells Marv that the man cooked it and made her watch him eating it. She becomes hysterical and starts crying. Marv tries to comfort her, while the murderer stands outside the barred window, listening.

Once Lucille stops crying, she slips into Marv's coat. She tells Marv that whoever is involved is powerful. Marv says that he's heard Roark's name, but Lucille also can't believe it's someone that high up. Lucille reveals that she was attracted to Goldie and that Goldie was a hooker. Marv is surprised, but he says it doesn't matter. Lucille says that Goldie was expensive and high-class. Marv asks about the killer, and Lucille tells him that she was walking to her car when she suddenly lost consciousness. She woke up in the killer's kitchen, unable to move. She could smell meat cooking. He had cut off her hand while she was unconscious, and he made her watch him eat it. Marv hears a car coming. Whoever is in the car honks the horn and calls to the killer: Kevin. The man



with the glasses runs over to the car. Now Marv knows his face and his name, and he vows to see Kevin again.

## Chapter 6 Analysis

Marv's encounter with the wolf shows Marv's internal moral code. The wolf is just an animal. It's not smart enough to be evil, even though it's been trained to feed on human flesh. Marv must fight the wolf because it attacks him, but he neither wants to hurt the wolf nor kill it. He knocks it out instead. Marv's desire to injure, torture, and kill is limited by his perception of the sins of the victim. On this level, all of Marv's violence is in service of retribution. In the story, Marv seeks revenge for Goldie's death, but in the bigger picture, Marv himself is constantly seeking revenge for all the wrongs wrought by evildoers.

In chapter six, Marv is defeated by Kevin. This sets Kevin up as a villain who is worthy of Marv's prowess. Marv is strong enough, agile enough, solid enough, and smart enough to evade the whole armed police department of Sin City. As a hero, he is overblown in his physical abilities. Kevin is Marv's mirror image, stealthy enough to sneak up on Marv unaware despite Marv's internal warning signals and strong enough to incapacitate Marv and take him captive. A lesser villain would be unworthy, too easily conquered.

Kevin is also Marv's equal in his horrific ruthlessness. Lucille is able to reveal Kevin's activities to Marv, as the lone survivor of his farmhouse activities. Kevin attacks women, who Marv feels the need to protect. Worse than that, he devours them, a taboo far beyond any of the everyday sins in Marv's criminal world. If Marv is unconcerned with how badly he tortures a hit man, he will have absolutely no limits to his retribution against Kevin.



# Chapter 7

## Chapter 7 Summary

At the isolated farmhouse, Marv throws himself against the reinforced and barred iron door in his small, white-tiled cell. The cell is designed for easy cleanup, with shower drains on the white-tiled floor. Lucille watches, leaning against the wall, huddled in Marv's oversized coat, as Marv throws himself at the door again and again. The mounted severed heads hang above them on the wall, as Marv is repelled by the door and falls to the ground. Marv wipes off his chin and runs at the door again. Finally, Marv's assault dislodges the door from the wall with a crash. Lucille is hesitant at first, but she leaves under Marv's protective arm.

As Marv and Lucille leave the farmhouse, they hear the sounds of helicopters overhead. Holding onto Lucille, Marv runs for cover as the helicopters land. He pulls out Gladys, ready for battle. The police come out of the helicopters, guns drawn. First, they check the house. Then, they head over to where Marv is hiding with Lucille. Marv is ready for them, his finger on the trigger, but Lucille lifts up a rock and hits Marv over the head. She's afraid that Marv will get them killed. Lucille walks forward, giving herself up to the police officers and explaining that she's Marv's parole officer. Lucille gives the officers Marv's gun and says that he's unconscious. The police officers ask where Marv is. Meanwhile, Marv has awakened, and he grabs a hatchet that's buried in a tree stump.

Lucille tries to convince the police that they don't have to kill Marv, but the police officer tells him that they do, after they find out who else he's talked to. Lucille is shocked as the police officer opens fire, killing her with a machine pistol. Marv runs at the police officers, ax in hand. Despite the machine pistol fire, Marv takes out the officers, one by one, until only the leader is left. He tells the leader that he's got a fine coat, echoing what Marv said to the first hit man that he killed. The head officer turns and runs, and Marv runs after him with the ax, laughing.

## Chapter 7 Analysis

One of Marv's qualities is that he never gives up. This quality is embodied in his breaking out of the cell in the farmhouse basement. Marv crashes against the solid metal, reinforced and barred, door over and over, seeming at first to make no progress at all. Nonetheless, he throws his whole, solid, disfigured body at it again and again until finally the hinges begin to give way. Marv's doggedness allows him to follow the trail to learn the whole truth and mete out his vengeance.

Lucille is passive in her captivity. She acts in the story as a bearer of information, a dying messenger, who tells Marv what he needs to know about Kevin and then promptly dies. However, Lucille also shows the fate of those who believe in the government, or in the existence of anything not corrupted in Sin City. She distrusts Marv's ability to know



bad from good, and she thinks that his mental illness is responsible for his violent reaction to the police. However, Lucille is wrong. The police shoot her dead for her trust in authority.



# Chapter 8

## Chapter 8 Summary

Marv is left standing, wiping his face, still holding the ax in his hand. Meanwhile, the rain starts. Marv heads back to the city, where the rain is pouring down. It seldom rains in Sin City, and most of the time the rain is just a drizzle. Every once in a while, though, there is a real storm. Most people hate the rain, but Marv loves it when it really starts coming down. Everyone runs off the streets, leaving the city to Marv, and he can walk and think. That's what Marv does now, walk the rain-soaked streets and think.

Marv tries to put together the pieces of the puzzle. He is thinking about the head cop that he killed. He heard the name again: Roark. When the priest mentioned Roark, Marv didn't believe it. Now he knows that it must be true. Because Roark is behind this, Marv knows that he's dead. He's scared of dying, and he wants to run away. Still, Marv knows that he can't stop searching for revenge for Goldie. She won't let him rest, because he knows he let her down. He could have saved her, but he was too drunk. He realizes now why Goldie was with him. She was frightened and knew that someone was trying to kill her. She looked for the biggest, meanest man she could find, and she seduced him, thinking that he could keep her safe.

Marv feels that he owes Goldie because he let her down when she needed him. He's going to go after Roark, even though it means certain death. First, though, he wants more information. Still walking through the rain, Marv goes to the giant statue of Cardinal Patrick Henry Roark that stands in the city. Roark is commonly known as "Saint Patrick." His family has owned Sin City since it was a mining town in the Old West. Roark is the most powerful man in the state and widely known as a hero and a man of good deeds. The nuns at the school Marv went to couldn't stop talking about him. Marv is getting used to the idea of killing him for the sake of a dead prostitute. As the rain pours down, he shoots at the statue.

Marv realizes that he hasn't had his medicine, and he knows that sometimes he gets confused. He wants to make sure that he's after the right man before he goes to kill Cardinal Roark. He suddenly doubts the whole of what's happened, even Goldie's first smile. The rain lets up as Marv makes his way to Old Town, where the prostitutes gather. Sin City's real name is Basin City, but no one calls it that, because of the prostitution. When the Gold Rush was over, Cardinal Roark's great-grandfather brought in the beautiful prostitutes to build up the economy of the town, and they've been an institution in Old Town ever since. Marv starts asking around about Goldie among the hookers.

Suddenly, Marv is attacked by the woman who looks like Goldie. He's knocked unconscious, and when he wakes, he's tied to a chair. He tells the woman that it's his fault that he's seeing things, since he hasn't taken his medicine. The woman hits him in the head with her gun. Marv starts laughing. Several hookers are in the room, and they



think he's either crazy or faking. The woman hits him again. He advises her to hit him with the handle of the gun, so she doesn't ruin the weapon. She takes his advice.

Suddenly, Marv realizes that the other prostitutes called the woman Wendy. She reveals that she's Goldie's twin sister, and she tells Marv that he'd better explain what he's done to Goldie and the other six missing prostitutes. Marv screams at the women, explaining what really happened, and finally they realize that they've got the wrong man. Marv breaks the bonds easily, and the women realize that he could have broken free at any moment.

## Chapter 8 Analysis

Marv's enjoyment of the rain is similar to his hatred of the daylight. Rain sends all the people of Sin City indoors. Marv doesn't mind the rain itself. He minds the other people watching him. The rain is also representative of the change in Marv's position. Marv has found himself in overwhelming trouble, a torrent of danger.

Marv is now convinced that Roark is the man he's looking for, the man rich enough to pay for a complex frame. Just as the woods frighten Marv, Roark's name frightens him. Marv knows the presence of real danger. His mission becomes a suicide mission, and Marv spends his time in deep thought, contemplating a choice to move on and die, or to quit. Marv, however, cannot quit. Even though he's discovered that Goldie is a prostitute, even though (and in part because) he's discovered Goldie seduced him to be her protector, Marv still feels gratitude for her kindness and generosity with her body. The fact that Marv has an inner drive to harm the evil and seek revenge makes it a choice he's inclined toward, as does the fact that Marv has an inner self-hatred that drives him towards self-destruction.

The giant statue of Roark indicates Roark's position. He has political power and wealth. He has respect and religious prestige. He literally towers over the city much like the cross atop the church steeple. In Sin City, Roark is the closest thing there is to a god, and to top it off, he's known as "Saint Patrick." Roark, however, is corrupt, like every other level of life in Sin City. His family is the origin of the prostitution in Old Town, the ultimate origin of the sin in Sin City. The corruption, the story implies, trickles down from the highest points, where it originates. Marv still wears his cross around his neck and still carries with him concepts of heaven and hell, but he is ready to eke out vengeance on the highest representative of the Catholic Church in Sin City.

Marv treats the prostitutes who capture him much as he treated the wolf. He doesn't want to harm them, even though they attack him. At first, he takes the punishment because he feels he deserves it for letting Goldie down. This shows not only Marv's feeling of responsibility toward Goldie, but his general self-loathing. When Marv realizes the woman he's seeing is Wendy, Goldie's twin sister, Marv remains tied up, though he's capable of freeing himself at any moment. He can talk to the women, so he doesn't have to knock them out as he knocked out the wolf. However, on a fundamental level, to him they are all innocents to be protected.



## Chapter 9, pages 149-176

### Chapter 9, pages 149-176 Summary

Marv looks at his disfigured, scarred face in the mirror. He takes time to prepare himself mentally, to experience his fear so that he can get rid of it. He imagines dying, being shot in the head. Then he thinks that he's just as likely to have to go through a trial and be executed in the electric chair. He's ready to be called a psycho killer, if he does what he needs to do right. He throws up, and then he grabs his coat, his gun, and his ax. He gets a pair of handcuffs from one of the prostitutes. Then, he goes out with Wendy in her car, and she drives off, running over a stop sign as she goes. Marv tries not to look at her, because he gets confused and begins seeing Goldie. He tells Wendy that Kevin killed Goldie and that Roark is behind him, but Marv doesn't know the connection. Wendy tells him that many of Goldie's clients were priests.

Wendy lights a cigarette for Marv, and when he takes it, he can taste her lipstick on it. He's suddenly overcome with desire for her, or rather for Goldie, and he has to stop himself from reaching over to touch her. Wendy continues driving wildly down the street, hitting a trashcan and nearly crashing into a jeep. She asks Marv why he's willing to risk his life for her sister, someone he didn't even know. She says that Marv doesn't owe Goldie anything, but Marv says Goldie was nice to him. He could never even buy a prostitute because of his looks.

The sun's coming up, and Marv directs Wendy to a hotel for the day. He lies stiffly on the couch, keenly aware of her body as Wendy lies in the bed. Once, he forgets himself and tries to touch her, calling her Goldie, but he gets slapped away and apologizes. When the sun goes down, Wendy and Marv go to a hardware store. Marv buys a handsaw, twelve two-foot lengths of rubber tubing, razor wire, and gloves that will let him handle the wire. Then, they drive to a gas station, and Marv fills a gallon gas canister. Marv directs Wendy to drive out toward Kevin's farm. Meanwhile, he runs over the list of supplies he's gathered: rubber tubing, gas, a saw, gloves, handcuffs, razor wire, a hatchet, Gladys (his gun), and his two hands.

Marv has Wendy pull over to the side of the road when they near the farm. He tells her to stay in the car, and to take off if he's not back in twenty minutes. When Marv leaves, he calls her Goldie and promises not to let her down. Soon, Marv finds himself running through the woods, ready for the kill. He thinks that the men he's after will assume that Marv has fled. He's counting on Kevin still being at the farmhouse, not expecting an attack. First, Marv runs razor wire around the outside of the house, making a deadly trap for anyone who comes out. As Marv is watching the house, he sees Kevin coming down to the kitchen. Marv sticks a rag in the gas can and lights it. Then, he throws the lit gas can at the house.

The gas can crashes through the window and ignites, and Kevin jumps out of one of the windows as the farmhouse begins to explode behind him. Marv begins shooting behind



his razor-wire trap. Kevin keeps running at him, evading both bullets and razor wire. Meanwhile, Marv prepares the handcuffs. When Kevin jumps at what he thinks is Marv, which is really just Marv's coat hung on a branch, Marv jumps down from above with the hatchet and the handcuffs. The two men struggle, and Marv gets Kevin into the handcuffs so that he can't get away. Finally, Marv knocks Kevin out. Then, he hears Wendy approaching.

## Chapter 9, pages 149-176 Analysis

Marv does not believe he is a hero. He is resolved to get revenge for a murder in a world where there is no justice from the legal system. He believes, though, that a hero would not have any fear, and Marv struggles with fear, first in the woods and then in the beginning of chapter nine, before beginning the climactic encounters that will end Marv's quest. Wendy becomes an ally to Marv, since she seeks the same thing he does, revenge for her sister's death. Wendy, though, takes a passive role, only facilitating Marv's attack by buying him the materials he needs. She is not a partner, and in fact, Marv has difficulty giving her a true identity. To Marv, Wendy is almost an extension of Goldie into the present time, haunting him and pushing him towards revenge. Wendy stays in the car as Marv goes out to find the killer.

Marv is prepared for his second encounter with Kevin. He has been bested once, and he refuses to be bested a second time. Kevin is not defeated easily, however. He is not trapped by fire. He is aggressively jumping out through the window almost the moment the gas can goes in, not waiting for an explosion or hesitating in his reaction. Marv's razor wire trap does not hinder him, as Kevin agilely jumps over the wire, even though he's fleeing a burning building. Kevin blinds Marv, as he did in the previous fight, but Marv has prepared by handcuffing himself to Kevin so that he always knows where Kevin is. Marv is the victor, but it is no small victory.



## Chapter 9, pages 177-200

### Chapter 9, pages 177-200 Summary

Wendy wants to kill Kevin herself, to avenge her sister. Marv won't let her. He knocks her out and carries her back to the car, so she won't see what he does to Kevin. A half hour later, Wendy is still unconscious in the car, while Marv talks to the blank-faced Kevin. Marv has slowly cut off Kevin's arms and legs, which are tied off with rubber tubing, preventing him from bleeding to death. He's spilled some blood in the messy process in order to attract the wolf that Kevin's been feeding on scraps of human flesh. As the wolf approaches, Marv loosens one of the rubber tubes and the wolf comes to feed on Kevin. Kevin remains unresponsive, not screaming or responding as the wolf eats him alive. After the wolf has left, Marv grabs the saw and finally kills Kevin.

Marv drives off with Wendy, stopping to phone Nancy to ask her to meet him at her home. She is happy to help him because he once beat up a college kid who had beaten her. Nancy gives him a couple of beers and he tells her what's going on. He leaves Wendy with Nancy, telling her to let her know everything's okay when she wakes up and then to get Wendy out of town, even though she probably won't want to go. Marv warns Nancy to take Wendy to the next town to get her on a plane since the airport will probably be watched.

When Marv leaves Nancy's, he walks twenty blocks to make sure no one can later trace him to Nancy's place. Then, he steals a taxi and drives to Fortress Roark, the well-secured and heavily guarded home of Patrick Henry Roark. Marv recognizes the guards as part of the same group that killed Lucille. He first kills the guard at the gate. Then, he kills one on the roof. One at a time, he knocks them off. Then, Roark is inside, and heading up the stairs to where Cardinal Roark is.

Cardinal Roark wakes, at first thinking that Kevin has come to see him. Instead it's Marv, carrying Kevin's severed head. Marv holds his gun on Roark, cautioning him not to scream. Roark is horrified at what Marv's done to Kevin and says that Marv didn't understand Kevin at all. Roark says that Kevin spoke only to him. Marv orders Roark to explain everything.

Roark says that Kevin came to him as a young boy, for confession. Kevin felt guilty but also felt a godly enlightenment from his cannibalism. Roark thought Kevin was insane and tried to help him. As the years went by, Roark began to believe in Kevin and participate in the cannibalism. He says that Kevin ate the women's souls and loved them perfectly. He dismisses the women as whores. Then, Goldie found out what was going on. She fled, and then found Marv for protection. Roark and Kevin decided to frame Marv for the murder. Now, Marv has killed Kevin and is about to kill Roark. Marv tortures Roark, getting all the satisfaction of his screams.



After Roark is dead, the police break in and shoot Marv. However, they don't kill him. He wakes up in the hospital and slowly recovers. As soon as he's well, the cops start trying to beat a confession out of him. Finally, an assistant district attorney tells him that if he doesn't sign the confession, they'll kill his mother. Marv is forced to confess to killing the prostitutes and Lucille as well as Kevin, Roark, and all the cops. He even confesses to killing Goldie. Marv is tried and sentenced to death.

A few hours before Marv's execution, Wendy comes to visit him. Marv calls her Goldie. She says it's okay to call her that, and they make love, a last gift before his death. Marv has a steak and a beer for his last meal, and then he's brought to the electric chair. They pull the switch, but all Marv does is laugh. They electrocute him again, and again, before he finally dies.

## Chapter 9, pages 177-200 Analysis

Wendy attempts to assert herself in the story, to take on the role of avenger, but Marv protects her. He doesn't acknowledge her desire for revenge. Instead, he makes her decisions for her. He literally incapacitates her, unilaterally taking away her free will. Wendy spends most of the rest of the story unconscious, and by proxy through Nancy, Marv whisks her away from Sin City entirely.

Marv's revenge on Kevin mimics Kevin's crimes. He is dissected and eaten. Marv doesn't find this satisfying because Kevin does not scream or cry out. Kevin is beyond reality. He does not communicate through either sounds, words, or expressions. He is blank and inhuman. Marv cannot punish him, because Kevin is immune to the outside world.

When Marv moves on to Roark, as the next evildoer who needs to be punished, he knows that it is a suicide mission, but Marv had prepared himself for death and goes to death without regret. The encounter with Roark also reveals the entirety of the story. Roark himself is mad. In seeking God, Roark has gained only personal pleasure through the destruction of others. This cannibalism is a metaphor for Sin City itself. The rich and powerful feed on the poor, for their own pleasure. Roark's spiritual enlightenment is nothing more than a self-aggrandizement at the expense of a devalued, dehumanized other. To Roark, the victims are inhuman and his own pleasure is spiritual and sublime.



# Characters

## Marv

Marv is a huge, hulking man, with a disfigured face that's nothing but scars, as if it's been severely burned. Always self-deprecating, Marv calls himself stupid, ugly, and macho, someone that no woman would ever want. He also "gets confused." Marv has a mental illness that sometimes causes him to hallucinate. He refers to fighting in war and wears a military-looking coat. He also refers to himself as a two-time loser, which means he's spent a couple of stints in jail. Marv went to a Catholic school as a child, and his problems with violence go back to his youth. He wears a cross around his neck and talks of heaven and hell, though he seems to have no desire to practice his religion.

Marv is involved in the story when Goldie, a high-class prostitute, picks him up at a bar and seduces him. Marv later realizes that Goldie was merely using Marv for protection, but it doesn't matter to Marv. She has given him something he's never had, a night of passion and of deep love, at least on Marv's part. She was kind to him, and to Marv, that was everything. He vows to revenge her after Goldie's death, out of gratitude for what she's done for him and out of guilt for not protecting her.

Marv isn't as dumb as he says he is. He is able to put together the clues that he finds into a clear story, and follow the clues to the culprit. Marv hates to be around other people. He sleeps during the day and prefers the city when it's deserted in a pouring rain. However, Marv has accumulated a group of friends who rely on him and are willing to help him. Though Marv thinks that no woman would ever have him, most of his friends are women: Nancy, Lucille, and eventually Wendy.

## Wendy

Wendy is a high-class prostitute working in Sin City, the twin sister of Goldie, the prostitute who was killed while in a hotel room overnight with Marv. Wendy at first believes that Marv killed her sister. Throughout the story, she is motivated by revenge. Wendy follows Marv, and he detects her scent but believes he's hallucinating. Then, Wendy runs Marv down in a parking lot outside a church, hitting him three times with her showy convertible but not seriously injuring the powerful Marv. Wendy finally catches up with Marv when he comes to Old Town to gather information about Goldie. She knocks him out, and she and her friends tie Marv up.

When Marv awakens, Wendy hits him repeatedly with a pistol, trying to get him to confess to what he's done to Goldie and the six other missing prostitutes from Old Town. Marv convinces her that he's not the killer, and that he, too, wants revenge for Goldie's death. Wendy becomes Marv's ally in his search for vengeance, driving him around in her car and footing the bill for the supplies he needs to kill Kevin. When it





comes time to put an end to Kevin's life, Wendy wants to do the deed herself, to revenge her sister, but Marv stops her.

Marv knocks Wendy out, to keep her out of the more violent parts of his revenge. He leaves her, unconscious, with Nancy, to make sure that Wendy gets out of town and avoids any involvement in the aftermath of Marv's revenge. Wendy reappears when Marv is on death row awaiting execution. She comes to his cell and makes love to him, allowing him to confuse her with her dead sister Goldie. Wendy is giving Marv one last reward for what he's done before he faces death.

## Goldie

Goldie is a high-class prostitute who works the clergy in Sin City. She knows that there's a serial killer murdering prostitutes in the city, and the cops aren't doing anything about it. She learns that high-powered Cardinal Roark and a killer named Kevin are killing prostitutes and eating them, and she goes on the run. She seduces big, mean Marv, thinking that he can protect her, but Kevin sneaks into the room in the middle of the night and murders her. Marv swears to get revenge for Goldie's death.

## Kevin

Kevin is a serial killer, a normal, clean-cut looking young man wearing round spectacles. He never speaks throughout the graphic novel. Kevin picks up prostitutes and eats them, keeping their heads as trophies. Inferentially, he incapacitates his victims and then gives them a drug that paralyzes them. He cuts off pieces of their bodies while they are unconscious, and makes them watch him cook and eat their flesh. Presumably, this goes on until only the head is left, to mount on Kevin's wall.

Kevin lives in a secluded farmhouse, and in the basement he has a reinforced cell, with tiled walls and drains in the floor that would make cleaning up blood easy. Kevin's face is always blank and empty, giving no hint to his internal reality. He is, however, fast and silent and an excellent fighter. Despite Marv's significant strength and large build, small, stealthy Kevin is Marv's equal in hand-to-hand combat. Kevin murdered Goldie, but Marv gets little pleasure out of killing Kevin because of his lack of reaction, as he is hacked to pieces, fed on by his pet wolf that he's fed on scraps of human flesh, and ultimately decapitated.

## Cardinal Patrick Henry Roark

Cardinal Patrick Henry Roark is a member of the most prominent and powerful family in Sin City. His family founded the city and saved it from disappearing by establishing the illicit prostitution that pervades Old Town. Roark is known as a philanthropist and a war hero, and according to his reputation, he could have become president. However, Roark chose to join the Church and became a cardinal. He's commonly known as "Saint Patrick." A huge statue of Roark stands in Sin City, representing Roark's power in the



town. Roark maintains political power, doing favors for politicians and making or breaking them, and he lives in a fortress guarded by armed men.

Roark is a friend of Kevin's and has come to believe that Kevin reaches true enlightenment through eating human flesh and that he is filled with love for his victims. Roark at first thought Kevin was mad, but over time he began to believe in him and desire the ecstatic, godly experience of eating human flesh. Roark participated in Kevin's murders, and he demeans the victims, calling them whores. He gives no value to their lives. Marv finds a satisfaction in killing Roark that was lacking in his murder of Kevin, since Roark screams and suffers satisfactorily in response to Marv's torture.

## Lucille

Lucille is Marv's parole officer, a beautiful lesbian. Marv thinks that her gorgeous body is wasted. Lucille gives Marv medicine for his mental condition, provided by her lover who is a psychiatrist. Lucille is taken captive by Kevin, who forces her to watch while he eats her hand, which he has cut off while she was unconscious. Lucille is at first hysterical when Marv joins her in captivity, but after a crying fit, she calms down and is able to escape with him. Lucille, however, doesn't realize the depth of corruption in Sin City. When the police land in helicopters, she hits Marv on the head with a rock and goes to the officers, trying to turn Marv in peacefully. Instead, the corrupt police shoot her dead for her knowledge of Kevin's activities and her involvement with Marv. When Marv is arrested, he is forced to confess to killing Lucille.

## Mother

Marv's mother is a blind old woman with good ears who keeps Marv's room exactly as it was before he moved out, dusting it every week.

## Kadie

Kadie is the transsexual owner of an underground, illicit nightclub that plays country music. Marv does Kadie favors and is always welcome at his club.

## Nancy

Nancy is a nude dancer at Kadie's club. She is friends with Marv, ever since he beat up someone who was harassing her. Marv leaves Wendy with Nancy after he's killed Kevin and before he goes after Cardinal Roark.

## Weevil

Weevil is a stool-pigeon who Marv uses to get the word out that he's wandering the bars, getting drunk.



## Objects/Places

### Sin City

Basin City is known as Sin City because of its thriving prostitution business. In this desert city, the police and authorities are all corrupt, and a thriving underground industry sells illegal pleasures.

### The Heart-Shaped Bed

Marv and Goldie go to a sleazy hotel room after meeting in a bar, and they make love on a heart-shaped bed.

### Marv's Childhood Room

Marv's mother keeps his childhood room exactly how it was when he left it, and she dusts it every week. Marv cries when he stays there, as the smells bring back childhood memories.

### Gladys

Gladys is Marv's gun, which he took off a dead bully that he tangled with in school. The gun is named after a nun at Marv's school.

### Kadie's Club

Marv hangs out at Kadie's underground nightclub, where they play old-fashioned country music.

### The Hit-Man's Coat

When a hit man comes to get Marv and kill him, Marv complements him on the coat and takes it when the hit man is shot and bleeding.

### The Farm

Kevin lives on a farm, where he kills and eats prostitutes, feeding scraps of human flesh to a wolf. Kevin keeps his victim in a white tiled, fortified basement room with drains in the floor.



## **The Women's Heads**

Kevin stuffs and mounts the heads of the women he murders and eats, and their mounted heads are on the wall of the cell where he keeps his victims.

## **Old Town**

Old Town is the district of Sin City where the prostitutes operate.

## **Fortress Roark**

Fortress Roark is the well-guarded, highly secure estate where Cardinal Patrick Henry Roark lives.

## **The Statue of Roark**

The town of Sin City has a towering statue of Cardinal Patrick Henry Roark, where Marv goes to mentally prepare himself to kill Roark.



# Themes

## Revenge

Marv's motivation throughout the graphic novel is revenge. He doesn't just want to remove evil people from the world. He wants to make them suffer for what they've done. In Sin City, where the police and the people behind them, like the powerful Roarks, are corrupt, there is no substitute for brute revenge. There is no justice. The problem with revenge, for Marv, is that it ruins him as well as the evildoer. Marv himself is damned by the vengeance he takes out on others. He ends up in the electric chair, and he believes he deserves to be there. More than that, Marv believes that the people he's killed are in hell, the ultimate revenge against them for their sins. Marv also believes that he, himself, is going to hell, where the revenge against his soul will be complete.

Although Marv wants revenge against the people responsible for Goldie's death, revenge is an integral part of Marv's character. Marv is driven to violence. His violence, though, is highly selective. Marv will not hurt women, but when a frat boy roughs up Nancy, Marv goes after him ruthlessly. Marv enjoys hit men, because he knows he can do anything he wants to them, conscience-free. The hit men are by virtue of their profession guilty, and they are deserving of punishment. Marv's violence is always punishment. In Sin City, there are many crimes to be avenged, and Marv isn't selective. The reader might infer that Marv himself is a victim of crimes against him dating back to his childhood, ones he seeks vengeance for over and over.

## Corruption

Corruption is pervasive in Sin City and integral to *The Hard Goodbye*. Every part of society is corrupt. On the individual level, the people are vulnerable to vice: drugs, alcohol, prostitution. The afterhours, illicit clubs are full, and the street is littered with unconscious bodies, heaped on the trash. Hit men and peddlers of information, violent bouncers and strippers are the occupations of the city. On the level of commerce, the economy of the city runs on the same vices. Prostitution was established to save the town economically, while now the economy runs on all kinds of illegal commodities. The corruption affects not only the government and police, but also the city's religion. The parts of society that are supposed to save the people from corruption and evil are corrupt themselves.

Marv is a reaction to corruption. He exists within a religion that is corrupt. He believes in heaven and hell, protecting the weak and punishing evildoers. However, he is quick to believe that the evildoers are the same as the religious leaders and that both he and they are bound for hell. He wears the cross around his neck at the same time as he tortures men to death. Marv knows that there is no justice where there is corruption, and he substitutes revenge for justice. Because everything in his society is corrupted, Marv is also corrupted. He takes over for the justice of a civilized society, damning himself. All



his good instincts of protecting victims are twisted, corrupted, into instincts of torture and vengeance.

## Women

Most of the women in the graphic novel are thin, big-breasted ideals. Marv considers Lucille's life as a lesbian a waste, because women seem to him to be made for the service of men. The natural thing is for a woman to want a man. Only a woman who couldn't get a man would want to be a lesbian. Marv considers women as needing protection and as angels who give him gifts of kindness and pleasure. He controls Wendy, knocking her out to prevent her from taking an active role in revenge. He goes on his rampage because he feels obliged to Goldie, someone who seems helpless in comparison to Marv.

The exception to the body type of most women in the novel is Marv's mom. Just as the other women are the archetype of the sexual object, Marv's mother is the archetype of the mother. Marv's attitude toward his mother is also one of protection. First, he tries to avoid her entirely, and then he lies to her about what is going on in his life. In the end of the novel, he protects his mother's life by signing the false confession that leads him to the electric chair.

Both the first priest Marv interrogates and Roark himself consider Goldie as worthless because Goldie is promiscuous, whether for money or not. Though the clergy functions as Goldie's clients, they damn her for fulfilling their desires. Roark's family is responsible for bringing prostitutes to Sin City. Still, Roark condemns prostitutes as inhuman. Like his family before him, he uses prostitutes only as tools for his own empowerment. Women are brought to Sin City to create money for those in power; women are used by the men of Sin City for their own pleasure. Women are ultimately eaten by Kevin and Roark for their own "enlightenment," at the price of more than demeaning and dehumanizing, a price involving torturing and murdering. Marv may put women on pedestals, protect them at the cost of their empowerment, and see them as objects of sex, but women are nothing at all to Roark and Kevin, despite his claim to perfect love for their victims.



# Style

## Point of View

*Sin City: The Hard Goodbye* is a graphic novel, so its point of view is visual. Instead of being described, the action is shown, and it is shown in a gritty, noir-inspired style that's echoed in the main character's method of speech. The text of the novel is all from the point of view of Marv, the main character. The reader is privy to Marv's thoughts, as well as the dialogue that he participates in, and gets background on Marv and *Sin City* from Marv's point of view. Marv's viewpoint as a narrator is unreliable, though. Marv is mentally ill, and he is unsure himself at times whether the events of the story are really happening or whether he has rounded the bend into complete psychosis, experiencing a delusion as he rampages violently through the city.

The visual presentation of *The Hard Goodbye*, however, implies that the events of the novel are real and not mad imaginings of Marv. At several moments throughout the graphic novel, the reader sees something in the world of the novel that Marv is not aware of. When Marv has just killed two hit men, as he walks off, he thinks he hallucinates Goldie's scent. In actuality, he is smelling Wendy, hiding behind a wall and watching Marv's every move. Later, when Marv goes to Kevin's farmhouse, the reader is aware of Kevin quietly stalking Marv long before Marv is. Still later, Kevin stands listening outside the cell where Marv and Lucille are being held, while Marv is unaware. The indication is that, despite Marv's doubts, the story is objectively true, merely filtered through Marv's worldview.

## Setting

The graphic novel's setting is *Sin City*, a corrupt desert town with the official name of Basin City. The setting is modern to the 1990s, when the graphic novel was written, neither futuristic nor set in the past, but *The Hard Goodbye* evokes the past with its stark black and white imagery and a style that borrows heavily from film noir. Marv himself constantly refers to the past, sticking to his idea that the best things (coats, cars) were all made in the past, the forties and fifties. This is the time period of film noir, the setting in which Marv most comfortably belongs. He is a character displaced in time.

*Sin City*, as the popular name implies, is marked by corruption. The city's industries are underground clubs, for-hire corrupt police, and prostitution. The desert setting adds to the film noir feeling, creating a luridly hot environment, where the characters roam at night and sleep through the day. *Sin City*'s dryness also functions as an objective correlative, a physical manifestation of the character of the city itself, morally desiccated. When there is a rain, it is a downpour. The setting is high in contrast: either arid or pouring, black or white.





Marv travels the city throughout the story, going under the water and into the sewers, up the walls and on the rooftops, to the towering churches and overpowering statue of Roark, to the prostitute-lined streets of Old Town, and finally to the outskirts of Kevin's secluded farm and Roark's enclosed fortress. The corruption invades every portion of the city, from the lowest back alley, strewn with the unconscious victims of last night's vices, to the highest and most honored steeple, hypocritically pointing to heaven.

## Language and Meaning

The language in the graphic novel includes two elements, narration and dialogue. The narration of *Sin City: The Hard Goodbye* is in Marv's words, and Marv's language is simple, consisting of short but poetic sentences, filled with slang and metaphor. His narration is evocative of the hard-boiled detective of a Mickey Spillane novel. He uses archaic slang like "joint" to describe Kadie's nightclub and calls bars "saloons." Marv is rooted in the past, and in simple, black-and-white ideas of good and bad, heaven and the hell he's certain he's bound for.

In dialogue, Marv's minimalist, gruff style is similar to his narration. When he is angry or overwrought, his dialogue is italicized, reflecting the rush of excitable words that escapes from him in those moments. Other characters' language reflects their characteristics. Stolid Kevin, removed almost entirely from reality, does not speak at all. The high-powered, educated Roark speaks more fluently than Marv, with a higher level of vocabulary and a lack of slang.

The graphic novel's language is primarily visual. During long sequences, the story is told in nothing but images, a story of action instead of words. Marv fights with Kevin for pages on end, speaking only in grunts, and Nancy dances on stage for full-page after full-page. The images are black and white, a high contrast style that emphasizes negative space and dramatic perspectives. The story is one of extreme evil, and the art is a style of extremes as well.

## Structure

The graphic novel is divided into nine chapters, which tend to get longer as the story goes on, becomes more complex, and nears its climax. The final chapter is a full quarter of the book and includes several climactic encounters as Marv completes the task that he's started. The effect of the structure is an impression that Marv's quest snowballs into something much bigger than he at first imagines it to be.

The story begins with an instigating incident, the death of Goldie. Marv starts out at the highest point in his life, the sexual encounter that ultimately leads to his death. Goldie's death not only puts him in danger from the police, but more than that, it starts him on a moral quest to learn the truth and punish the killers of Goldie. The novel then proceeds as a detective story, where Marv investigates the events that have occurred and traces them from the dirty criminal underbelly of Sin City up the ranks to the supposedly good force of the Catholic Church.

The final phase of the story is Marv's revenge, once he understands the breadth of the events. With the help of an ally, Wendy, Marv takes his revenge out on first Kevin and then Cardinal Roark. Marv knows that this is a suicide mission, and he accepts it. Marv is a reversal of a tragic hero, a flawed man living in a flawed society with a soft spot for women and a desire to seek vengeful justice. Marv's need for vengeance is his flaw, which leads to his death, the necessary end of the graphic novel.



## Quotes

"I'm not going to waste one more second wondering how it is I've gotten so lucky."  
Chap. 1, p. 10

"I don't know why and I don't know how and hell I never even met you before tonight but you were a friend and more when I needed one and when I find out who did it it won't be quick or quiet like it was with you." Chap. 2, p. 28

"Hell is waking up every god damn morning and not knowing why you're even here."  
Chap. 3, p. 39

"I love hit men. No matter what you do to them, you don't feel bad. Fact is, the worse you do, the better it gets." Chap. 4, p. 59

"Worth dying for. Worth killing for. Worth going to hell for. Amen." Chap. 5, p. 74

"When you've got a condition it's bad to forget your medicine." Chap. 5, p. 83

"Why didn't he finish the job? Or is this the hell I've spent my whole life earning, falling, forever falling, never knowing?" Chap. 6, p. 96

"But I know Gladys will be cold, colder than the wind, cold and ready and begging for it."  
Chap. 7, p. 114

"I'm not real smart, but I feel a whole lot smarter when everything goes slick and everybody skitters off the streets and gets out of my way." Chap. 8, p. 129

"But they didn't get me and I been killing my way to the truth ever since and I'm getting damn close to it." Chap. 8, p. 147

"Even the woods don't scare me anymore because I'm just one more predator and I'm bigger and meaner than the rest." Chap. 9, p. 164

"And when his eyes go dead the hell I send him to must seem like heaven after what I've done to him." Chap. 9, p. 193

## Topics for Discussion

How reliable is Marv as a narrator? At one point, he questions the reality of everything that's happened to him. Is it possible that the objective reality of events is different from Marv's perception?

What is Marv's relationship with his mother like?

What clues does the novel provide to Marv's past? How has Marv's personality and self-perception been shaped by his past?

How does the novel portray religion? How does Marv perceive religion and the afterlife?

What redeeming qualities does Marv have?

How does the graphic novel portray women? How do the male characters treat women? What are the female characters like?

Why does the author choose to have Marv die in the electric chair at the end? What other endings would be possible for this story?