

# Taipei Study Guide

**Taipei by Tao Lin**

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## Plot Summary

Paul is an accomplished author of several novels, though he is relatively young. He also has a drug problem that is clear to everyone, including himself. As a result, relationships around him are continually deteriorating. As the novel opens, his serious relationship with Michelle deteriorates. Paul's life revolves around the relationships he manages to develop with girls, even though they do not last very long. As a result, when he and Michelle split over a vague disagreement stemming from the amount of time he spends paying attention to her at various parties, he wanders aimlessly from social event to social event, eliciting extremely awkward responses from friends and strangers alike.

During this time, Paul's drug intake increases steeply, and he tends to forge strong relationships with others that abuse various substances on a regular basis. He continues in this fashion for some time, as he views his present life as a mere interim before his book tour. During this entire time, Paul makes new friends and loses old ones, neither seeming to make much of an impact on his life. He also begins several minor and insignificant relationships with women, until finally he meets Erin.

Though the reasons that Paul and Erin remain together are never explicitly stated, the two have a lot in common. They meet during Paul's book tour, and despite the fact that she lives in Baltimore while he lives in New York, they begin steadily communicating with one another, despite Paul's feelings that she is losing interest. Eventually, the two grow very close. Their drug usage increases. In fact, Erin admits at one point that she has never done so many drugs in her life. They find themselves in Vegas, where they decide to get married. Shortly thereafter, they travel to Taipei so that Erin can meet Paul's parents, but their relationship suddenly begins to deteriorate. They return, separate for a while, but always seem to wind up back together.

At the end of the novel, Paul feels as though he is dead due to the amount of drugs that he has used. When he realizes that he is still alive, he subsequently understands that he would rather be alive than dead after all, which was not something he'd known beforehand.



# Chapter 1

## Summary

Paul and Michelle attend a magazine release party in Chelsea. Paul, feeling very disconnected from events, makes small talk, then lets Michelle have her space. Michelle seems vaguely upset with him. He asks to leave the party, which she weakly agrees to. Still, they remain at the party. Paul finds Kyle and asks him if he wants to meet Traci. He introduces them to each other and goes back to Michelle. He asks again if she is ready to leave, but he winds up back with Kyle, who says that his girlfriend Gabby claims he doesn't love her or give her enough attention. Paul and Michelle have been having difficulties despite the fact that he feels very close to her. They finally leave the party, but after Michelle says she isn't sleepy Paul stops their walk and asks her what is wrong. Michelle feels like he ignored her all night, but Paul feels as though she walked away from him every time he approached. He says he's been losing interest, which makes Michelle cry. She tells him to go back to the party, but Paul protests. Still, she leaves him, and he waits for her to return. When she does, he asks her to eat dinner with him, but she leaves him again. He returns to the party.

Michelle does not accompany him to Taiwan. Paul's mother and father moved back to Taiwan a few years earlier when they sold their home in Florida. His mother, who has been diagnosed with diabetes but still uses sugar in her coffee, tries to convince him to move there to teach English. Paul rejects the idea because he is a writer and wants to remain in America for the language and connection to ideas.

## Analysis

Paul, the main character, is completely bereft of any goals or ambitions. This is demonstrated in no better place than during the party. The interaction between Paul and his girlfriend and his constant requests that they leave followed by his deliberate wandering off to friends illustrate both his state of mind and nonexistent ambitions. Drug use has scarcely been mentioned yet. Nevertheless, Paul is clearly under the influence. His constant confusion and inability to make or follow through with even the slightest decision reflects this idea. In place of plot and structure are a series of observations and descriptions created by the author that are both semi-autobiographical and meant to reflect experiences many people in the author's generation would share.

## Discussion Question 1

Why does Paul feel disconnected from events?



## Discussion Question 2

Why aren't Paul and Michelle getting along?

## Discussion Question 3

Who is Kyle? What similarities does he seem to share with Paul?

## Vocabulary

Amorphous, antagonistically, extraneous, precariously, conceit, paraphrasing, disjunctively, manifested, nonchalance, ostensibly, preemptively, descend, contrast, misguided, abruptly, idly.



## Chapter 2, Part One

### Summary

Paul wakes up, gradually remembering where and who he is. This proves somewhat difficult for him. It is late March, and he is back in Brooklyn. His bleak situation leads him to feel despair. He leads a discussion panel on self-publishing with his friend Anton. He broke up with Michelle several months ago. Another writer, Juan, joins them, and they eat at Pacifico, a Mexican restaurant. Paul excuses himself weakly. His second novel is to be published the following September, and he is scheduled to go on a two-week book tour. He tries to date Traci, who he introduced Kyle to in the previous chapter, but it never goes anywhere. He has decided to delay romance until after the book tour. He wanders to social gatherings here and there but leaves them quickly due to lack of interest. At his old apartment he meets a girl named Laura and begins flirting. It becomes very clear from Paul's interactions with people that he is socially inept, and he manages mostly to offend and irritate others. Kyle approaches Paul and his friend Daniel at an event and tells Daniel that he needs to leave because of his nose ring, which Gabby dislikes. Daniel wants to gather up people and go to a different party. He and Paul do manage to arrange a large group which begins to wander away from Kyle and Gabby's home, where the party had been, but it takes Daniel almost an hour to find the other party's location and most people have wandered off by then.

Paul wakes up the next afternoon to discover Kyle and Gabby have defriended him on Facebook. He meets Laura for dinner that night, but she seems worried and distracted. Nevertheless, she seems interested in Paul, and he agrees to go to a place called K&M with her. Shortly after, she agrees to go back with him to his room and take drugs, but Paul is so heavily under the influence that he becomes confused after several taxi rides and realizes he is lost. The moment he realizes this, however, he finds himself and Laura out in front of his place. They enter and take pills. Paul has trouble remembering who or where he is when he wakes up the next day. He checks a PDF file that he's created to help him keep track of events.

Paul recalls crying regularly upon starting preschool. He also remembers his early school years, where, after narrowly avoiding a remedial program, he was accepted into the gifted class, where he spent each Friday. Through his childhood he became increasingly self-conscious. This severely limits him socially, and he becomes a loner after suddenly becoming unable to perform as a percussionist. He blames his mother for his social awkwardness, and begins arguing with her for long periods of time. He shouts at her regularly, which causes his lungs to collapse several times. One night while shouting at his mother, he realizes she is crying, and he slowly stops fighting with her.

Paul continues to see Laura, and they continue to do drugs when they meet. They go to a party hosted by a woman named Lucie, but as he and Laura watch the horizon together, Laura tells Paul that she thinks Lucie likes him, and that it was mean of him to



bring her to the party. Later, after Laura gets a foot-massage from a machine at the party, Paul takes her to yet another party. They arrive at friends of Laura's, where they watch a video of overweight people exercising, which Paul dislikes. Paul has become very confused and disoriented through his time with Laura. Outside, he complains about his health and says goodnight to her. He feels that a relationship with her can't be done, because neither of them are interested enough. Still, he continues to see her, and they board a train after an awkward dinner, after which Laura leaves him to go home by herself. He returns home to find apologetic e-mails from her, and they agree to get matching tattoos the next day.

## Analysis

Paul's inability to remember precisely what is going on in his life is a direct result of his extreme drug abuse. By this point in the novel, it is difficult to pass a page, or even a paragraph, where drug use is not mentioned, and the narrator is almost always very specific about the amount and type of drugs being used. The dissolution of his relationship with Michelle was not included, presumably because the narrator felt it was insignificant, or perhaps even happened the very night that she left him and told him to return to the party. Whatever the case, he was fairly direct in the admission that this was the most significant relationship he'd ever had. It disappears from his life, and he does not seem to notice--again, this is because of his drug use.

Michelle is not the only significant person he loses. Kyle was an important friend to Paul, and presumably their friendship was ruined by the presence of Daniel, because Daniel had nose-rings. The subtext here, is that Daniel does drugs heavily just like Paul. Kyle and Gabby distance themselves from Paul because they realize how destructive his behavior is.

An almost humorous characteristic about Paul can be discerned. In the first chapter he decides to leave the party but does not. In this chapter, he decides to delay relationships until after his book tour, but instead frantically (or the severely drug-impaired version of frantically) sets about trying to find another relationship. It is almost as if Paul is the opposite of indecisive--that is to say, whatever Paul decides not to do, he does. Paul remarks about feeling bleak and desperate enough that he is at least this self-conscious, but never seems to pick up on how automatically self-destructive his behavior really is.

His memories of growing up are marked by an extraordinarily odd development. It is when a friend remarks on how cool Paul is that he unravels. Perhaps, this in and of itself is not so unusual, but Paul seems unable to let it go, even though the event occurred over ten years prior to Paul's reflection of it. Situations like these may or may not be common, but Paul is curiously unable to separate his childhood self from the adult. Again, he has drugs to thank.



## **Discussion Question 1**

Why does Paul feel that his situation is bleak?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Why is Paul attracted to Laura?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Describe the character Daniel. Why would Gabby not want him at her party?

## **Vocabulary**

Intrigued, aberrantly, indefinitely, parody, deriving, bewildered, recipient, vigilante, indication, tyrant, underlying, indecision, transitioned, incorporated, intuitively.





## Chapter 2, Part Two

### Summary

Laura meets Paul the next afternoon. She no longer wants a tattoo. Instead, she wants to prepare monster masks for a music video she's working on. They take drugs again, and fall asleep. Paul finds himself with Mitch and Matt the next night. They meet up with more friends but Laura declines to join them. He himself looking for other possible romantic prospects as the night continues. He finds himself with his friends in Lindsay's apartment, and Matt lets him use his MacBook to download songs onto Paul's iPad.

Paul goes to their Cinco de Mayo party three days later. He meets Fran before arriving, and she gives him Klonopin. Lindsay immediately flirts with Paul, who sneaks away from her to talk to Daniel, who admits to reading Paul's books, and says he had a feeling that they would meet each other. Paul tells Daniel he's been going out far more than usual because he's met people he likes, like Mitch, Laura, and Amy. The party goes up to the roof where Paul runs carelessly around in circles then texts Laura to invite her to the party. He awakens to Lindsay shouting at Fran for attempting to steal her shoes, and the group leaves. They are heading to Paul's, but Fran has accidentally stolen a jacket, so they each try it on. It winds up on Paul as they arrive at his place. After a while, Fran returns, though Paul does not remember her leaving. She claims that girls attacked her, but grows confused when questioned. She announces she's going dancing soon, and Paul watches as she takes more pills. She and Daniel say goodbye, agreeing to go to his book party later.

At the book party, Paul has difficulty in establishing who he has met and who he hasn't. Afterwards he and Daniel go to Fran's apartment where they watch a movie, but Paul is too confused and lost to understand it. A week later, Laura appears to have gotten back with an ex-boyfriend, so Paul goes to see a movie with Fran and Daniel. They trade drugs and movie tickets before entering the theatre. They celebrate Fran's birthday at a bar-restaurant afterward. When they finish, Fran leaves to do homework. Paul and Daniel attempt to go watch a movie but instead wind up back at the restaurant because they are so heavily drugged they manage only to walk in a circle. They finally reach Daniel's apartment, but lose consciousness quickly thereafter. Paul goes back to his apartment and showers, but he meets up with Daniel again. Daniel tries to get Paul to visit Fran's family with him, but Paul declines. Daniel admits he doesn't want to go either. They take Adderall in the park and Daniel praises Paul's writing. They discuss their IQ scores, then meet up with Fran. Daniel explains to her that he can't go to Rhode Island to meet her parents anymore because he needs the money to fix his computer. This angers Fran. Paul makes plans to meet Laura, but she comes with her boyfriend. Paul and Walter converse about Detroit, and after a while, Laura announces she's going home.



Paul attends a party that night and grows interested in a girl named Taryn, even though they don't speak to each other. She quickly disappears in the crowd. Paul passes out in a room full of dancers, but none of the take notice.

Over time, he goes to fewer and fewer parties, but continues to take more drugs. Time loses meaning for him in the process, and his memory is completely impaired as a result. This continues to mid-June, when Daniel invites him to hang out because Mitch has bought lots of cocaine. They wind up at Harry's place, and Harry is one of Mitch's friends. They do drugs there and try to go to the Legion, but are thrown out when they do drugs in the open. Daniel stays behind to search for a bag of drugs he lost when they were caught. Paul and Mitch go to Whitecastle to eat. Worried because Daniel has a warrant out for his arrest, Paul decides to go back and look for him. Back at Legion, he gets a text from Daniel, who has left. Paul is directed back outside where Daniel is waiting. As they go back to Whitecastle, Daniel snorts cocaine along the way. After White castle, they go to Paul's place and snort more cocaine in his room. They talk to Paul's roommate Caroline. Then, the others leave, and Paul e-mails Daniel back and forth. They agree to watch a performance at the Museum of Modern Art the next day. They meet the next morning, later than they'd planned, and decided the Museum will be too crowded. Instead, they go to Verb and take Adderall. Paul suggests shoplifting to help Daniel with his money problems, then they decide to sell books on the sidewalk. Both are so under the influence they continually forget what they are trying to do. They stop to eat pizza, and Daniel has to borrow money from Paul because his ATM card has stopped working. Then they return to Paul's apartment, take more cocaine, and gather the Charlie's book. While they are selling the book on the streets, they meet a Chinese girl named Annie, who asks him about his work.

In mid-July, Paul and Daniel find themselves at a party which has moved outside. Daniel begins wrestling with Paul, which is dangerous because they are very high up.

## Analysis

Paul is unable to form meaningful relationships for various reasons. The strongest of these reasons is his constant drug use. In the same way that his relationship with Michelle simply disappears, so does his connection to Laura. Paul never inwardly examines the reasons this is the case, and meekly cites "lack of interest" as the cause. Still, his drug use appears to increase sharply once this happens, and a large period of time passes without much remark from the narrator. Daniel, seemingly a new acquaintance of Paul's, assumes a great amount of importance here. Details on Daniel's lifestyle and drug use coincide strongly with Paul, but it is already well-known by this time that Paul constantly seeks romantic engagements despite how meaningless he winds up finding them, and when Paul forms these relationships, he stops paying attention to his friends. Daniel is beset by financial and legal problems, and it's no surprise considering his reckless behavior, as evidenced by his open and constant drug use.



Drug abuse itself has assumed primary importance in the narrative. Paul never explains why he takes drugs so habitually. He seems to understand that he has a serious problem. When Daniel wrestles with him on the rooftop, Paul is aware of the danger of the situation, but it is ironically the drug use that keeps him from fully processing the harm he might bring to himself or to others. Still, it seems very safe to conclude from the intensity of Daniel's behavior that he will not remain a major character in the novel for very much longer. Instead, Daniel has served to worsen Paul's various addictions, but did not accomplish this by expending very much effort. Paul's awkward behavior continues through this period, which suggests that the drug use serve only to prevent him from actually dealing with his perceived range of social problems. They may deaden the impact of Paul's negative experience, but they also contribute to them, and he never makes a single effort to end their use.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Why does Paul begin spending so much time with Daniel?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Discuss Paul's perception of time during this passage. Why, if he stops going to so many parties, does his drug use continue to increase?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Describe Paul's self-awareness. Does he make any judgments about what he is doing with his life?

## **Vocabulary**

Neutral, banter, gratuitous, utility, vaguely, unambiguous, telekinesis, discern, inadvertently, adjacent, restraint, endearing, inconstant, interim, earnest.



## Chapter 3

### Summary

Paul rides in a car with seven others, though it only seats five. A cop pulls them over and asks the driver, a girl named Erin, to step out. Paul has been continuing his drug use with Daniel, who is also in the vehicle. The officer lets Erin back into her vehicle despite the fact that her license is expired, and has told her only to be careful. Paul has known Erin through her blog for some time, but the two met very recently. Everyone in Erin's car--Paul, Erin, Daniel, Fran, Mitch, Juan, Jeannie, and Jeremy--has illegal drugs on them. Paul takes a Xanax when they stop at a burger place. He has written up schedules for his drug use during his book tour, and he checks it as more people arrive and join their group. Paul, wishing to avoid social interaction, leaves and goes to his room. He and Erin wind up taking LSD and Mushrooms with high school students named Calvin and Maggie, who are 18 and 17 respectively. Calvin grows nervous about the way Paul and Erin are acting inside a grocery store, but gradually begins to feel the effects and starts screeching. Maggie reaches them in worse condition, and the group is entirely confused. When they leave the store, Maggie goes by herself to her car, but Paul, after having gotten into Calvin's, says he wants to ride with her. Calvin freezes in the parking lot, unable to process the request. Paul changes his mind and they drive away, discussing a documentary about Lil Wayne and his drug problem. They reach Calvin's home and go to his room. Maggie rejoins them, and she and Calvin asks Paul what he wants to do, but Paul is too far gone to reach any decision. Maggie decides that they should go to the hot-tub, where they discuss what their world would be like if they were obese. Paul wants to see what he and Erin are like on mushrooms. After a while, Calvin tells them Maggie left and they can get out of the hot-tub and come inside. After they shower and dress, Calvin explains that he has probably upset Maggie somehow. Paul and Erin go for a walk together, leaving Calvin. Paul asks Erin about UFOs.

Times passes, and Paul finds himself with Erin one night when they meet Erin's friends Cristine and Sally. Cristine sells Paul Ritalin and drugged chocolates. Each of them eats one and they go for a walk, but eventually decide to drive, but Sally gets a flat tire. Paul discovers that Erin accidentally lied about a small detail of her life the day before, and fixates on it. Early the next morning, after he and Erin have left Sally and Cristine, they wander about in downtown Cleveland, trying to find a place to eat. After entering a hotel they wind up at Denny's. They take Adderall while they eat. They, they drive to the airport, where Paul says goodbye to her. They text back and forth, until they gradually lose interest. Paul searches through four years worth of information on her Facebook wall. He then finds himself forgetting about her for long periods of time while on his book tour. He also continues to take drugs, and one day he receives a call from his publisher, but does not answer the call. He sees Taryn at a house party in Los Angeles a few weeks later, and feels the same connection he had to her in Brooklyn, only this time the two talk a great deal. They go to a panel discussion together, at which Paul is heavily drugged and manages to confuse and insult the other panel members. He does not perform well at all on the panel, and is continually distracted by tweets and other social



media on his phone. In fact, Taryn leaves during the Q&A session. After, UCLA students hurry him to the airport, and he discovers he has yet another message from his publishers. He gets an e-mail from his mom which sharply disapproves of his drug use, and they argue about it over the internet.

Back in Brooklyn's Chinatown, he gets an e-mail from Erin saying that she's just ended a difficult relationship, and she'll be at his reading the next day. She comes to the reading with a friend named Gary, who she carefully announces is gay, and they all go to someone's birthday after Paul's reading. Gary leaves them, and the two wind up in Paul's room watching YouTube. They sleep, and afterward Erin goes home, but they meet up the next night. Paul takes her to a nice restaurant for her 25th birthday, but Erin takes a call from her ex-boyfriend, Beau. She talks angrily with him, which surprises Paul. After dinner, Paul agrees to see her again in Baltimore, in three weeks.

Three days later, Paul is in Montreal, Canada. He continues drug use with MDMA. At another discussion panel, heavily under the influence, Paul again embarrasses himself, crashing physically and emotionally at a cafe after. He realizes he has probably damaged his writing career. The next night, he travels to Toronto. During his discussion panel there, he is nervous and claims not to know the answer to most questions asked of him. He winds up at the home of a drug dealer named Rodrigo. He's taken an article-writer named Alethia with him. Paul and Rodrigo take more MDMA, and Alethia talks to Paul for an interview. Paul admits that he is ready to die, which she finds disturbing. He also says that the world is worth living in, because he hasn't tried to kill himself. He tries to make her stay and take MDMA, but she declines quickly and leaves. Over the next few days he loses interest in her. He sees Erin after his tour's last reading and they record themselves on MDMA. Beau calls her, but she passes out shortly after. They next day, they watch the video they recorded. Then, they look for drugs and drive to New York, arriving there at eight-thirty in the morning. They wander the city, continuing their drug-use. Erin eventually returns to Baltimore, but Paul invites her to another event, and she agrees quickly.

Erin and Paul visit Calvin's place once again. Paul invites her to attend more readings, to which she agrees. He asks if she is sure, because she often agrees to things she doesn't want to do. She assures him she's interested in him a lot. They discover she's supposed to be working during the readings, but she insists she'd rather be with him and tries to change her schedule.

The two reunite at Duke University. She has continued to deflect Beau's interested in restarting their relationship, but his constant attempts to do so have frustrated her, and the previous day she actually yelled at him. Later, Paul attempts to steal a CD from a Best Buy, but gets caught. He steals another CD from Barnes and Noble, and the next afternoon they meet at a Flea Market and continue the movie of them on psilocybin. They begin to drive to New Orleans but Paul nearly rear-ends another vehicle. They get out and walk. Erin says she was scared and Paul apologizes. They return to Baton Rouge and discuss their families. Paul's mom has been growing increasingly upset about his drug use. The two buy tickets to Las Vegas that night.



## Analysis

This chapter details the growing relationship between Paul and Erin. It is important to notice that Daniel all but vanishes in this chapter. As Paul has stated before, when he gets into a relationship he tends to ignore his friends and focus only on the girl of his interest. Unfortunately, Erin seems very conducive to Paul's drug use, and when the two part for the first time, the drugs continue to impair Paul's judgment. He seems to experience emotions that he is unaware of, as he takes note that their conversations grow less and less frequent. He claims to be losing interest in her through this period, but nevertheless goes through her Facebook page, which is very common for people in Paul's generation to do when they are interested romantically in another person.

Paul avoids communicating with his publisher through this period of time, and assumes the reason his publisher needs to speak with him is about his drug use. It is significant to note that Paul is completely aware of the damage he is doing by deliberately going to these readings and discussions on drugs. His social awkwardness has completely dominated his way of thinking; he is so scared to give these talks that he feels unable to do them without being heavily under the influence, and in fact. Paul appears to wish to reduce himself to the status of a sideshow, and there is a strong implication that this is the way he spends his entire life. He feels that he can't be anything of substance or value to anyone, so instead heavily sedates himself with drugs and turns himself into an absolute spectacle. In doing so, he appears to appeal strongly to a small portion of people in his generation who adopt similar attitudes toward drug use and life in general, but he also seems aware that this behavior will eventually lead to his ruin.

Also important to make note of is Paul's sudden desire to film himself and Erin on drugs. Why this would be of interest isn't clear, except that it follows the same guidelines for behavior that Paul has already outlined for himself. These videos represent an acute sense of self-importance Paul possesses, as though the fact that he and Erin are both heavily under the influence of narcotics holds some innate value that needs to be preserved. He approaches these videos with almost professional desire, which is ironic because it is precisely this behavior that has begun to erode his relationship with his publisher, and ultimately threatens his career as a novelist. Paul mentions his shoplifting attempts almost as an afterthought, and in fact it's understood to the careful reader that shoplifting is a large part of Paul's life, as he discussed it earlier in the novel with Daniel as a means of helping him out financially. This behavior is probably present due to drug use in the same way that Paul's entire life focuses around it. In a similar manner, he and Erin begin to take very erratic trips across the east coast, which should strike the reader as incredibly impractical and dangerous in their situation. Still, it reflects the boredom and desperation present in both lives, as the two are literally and physically searching for something they are too drugged to understand.

## Discussion Question 1

What does Paul seem to like about Erin?



## Discussion Question 2

How would you characterize the conversations that Paul has with Erin?

## Discussion Question 3

Why is Paul afraid to talk to his publisher during his book tour?

## Vocabulary

Aristocratic, culminating, eliciting, conducive, noncommittally, desultory, defectively, supine, authentic, obscure, incoherent, embankment, bemoaned, uncanny, reciprocate.



# Chapter 4

## Summary

In Las Vegas, Paul and Erin enter a casino. They record a conversation about their relationship. Paul tells her about how he became obsessive with her Facebook page. They talk about former relationships, especially Beau and Laura. She mentions that he grows close to people then just stops talking to them suddenly. They pass a marriage chapel the next night, and both decide that they should get married. Next afternoon, Erin quits her job, then the two go get married. Paul decides he doesn't want an Elvis wedding. They rent a car then make small jokes about being married, all of which is recorded on Paul's MacBook. They drive to the chapel, where the wedding ceremony is brief.

Two weeks pass. Paul meets Erin's parents and gets in touch with drug dealers on his way back to Brooklyn. He wants to have enough drugs to use with Erin when they go to Taipei. Paul's marriage has made his mother very happy and she has not argued with him as much lately. Paul meets his dealer, named Android. Paul's brother meets up with them when they get back to Paul's, but another dealer named Peanut shows up shortly after he leaves. After Peanut sells Paul more drugs, they decide to stay up all night taking them, because they can sleep on the plane. They wind up using most of the cocaine and decide to do the rest of it on their way to the airport, but they get into a mild argument about how to cut it. They stop at a store and Paul picks up fruit, after which the two joke about their drug fight. While they wait in the check-in line Paul grows nervous about being asked questions. As they continue to wait, Erin uses the restroom and talks to her friend Jennika on the phone, who has a meltdown and is very upset because Erin never told her about her marriage. Erin also admits that she called her mom to say that she was afraid Paul doesn't want her to go to Taiwan with him. He tells her that they are exhausted and shouldn't trust what they feel at the moment. They watch the in-flight movie and Paul recalls his previous trip.

## Analysis

The video recordings Paul makes of his drug use and conversations with Erin have assumed great significance within the course of the novel. It seems as though Paul is attempting to document his life, though for what express purpose, he does not explain. It is ironic that a character so obsessed with self-awareness and understanding of the powerful ways in which social settings can shape a person's reality would undertake such recordings. Paul is terrified of dealing with people, and either avoids them or deals with them while heavily under the influence. And yet, he wishes to communicate through his creation of these videos. It is almost comical that he fails to communicate anything of importance in them.





Paul amasses a huge amount of drugs before his trip back to Taipei, which can be interpreted as a sign that he is extremely nervous about Erin and his parents meeting. Another telltale sign that Paul is starting to grapple with the reality of being in a marriage is the fact that they are clearly encountering difficulties getting along with one another. Erin expresses this most clearly; she has a good handle on who Paul is as a human being, and while she cares about him, she also understands that his interest in anyone has never been permanent.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Why do Paul and Erin decide to get married?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Explain the significance of the appearance of Paul's brother. Has he been in the novel before this point?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Why is Erin worried that the relationship will not last?

## **Vocabulary**

Cyclically, intoxicated, centripetal, apportioning, auspiciousness, bohemian, depletion, rhetorical, feign, irreducible, unsolicited, indefinitely, prolonged.



# Chapter 5

## Summary

Paul thinks about technological progress as he rides a bus through Taipei. He reaches his parent's home with Erin. The next afternoon they walk the streets, then remain in the apartment complex's spa for a long time. Afterwards, Paul's parents announce they plan to leave so Paul and Erin take MDMA, planning to explore a section of Taipei, which after seeing pictures Erin believes looks like Times Square. Eventually, they go, and while they do they film and talk about the fights they've had, as well as other details about their family and past relationships. Paul tells her that his mother is worried about his drug use. He tells Erin that he used to shout as his parents constantly. Paul also explains that he doesn't spend time with friends when he is in a relationship. They continue talking, but Erin eventually complains about being unable to concentrate. They decide to enter a building called Party World, but Paul doesn't feel well and worries that his MDMA isn't working.

They return to his parent's house so that they can do more, and after they leave Paul remarks that his mom probably knows he's doing drugs while he's in Taiwan. During this conversation, Paul jokingly suggests moving there. Erin agrees in jest, and they continue filming with Paul's MacBook. They race towards a McDonalds and conduct a video in which they pretend it just opened in Taiwan recently. Eventually an employee tells them they can't film there, but they lie and say they are Skyping so the employee leaves them alone. They find another McDonald's and continue recording, then return home and go outside when his parents wake up. A few days pass, and Erin admits she's afraid that Paul wants to get rid of her, which disturbs Paul. She begins having paranoid thoughts the next night. She feels like they've run out of things to talk about and they decide to spend time apart every day. They also begin to argue over small things, as when Paul asks her how often she showers, and Paul begins to wonder how to end the marriage. They go to another of Paul's readings. After, they attend a dinner with Paul's extended family. Paul's uncle drives them to a clothing store. At the airport, Paul and Erin check in the luggage, and his mom cries while saying goodbye.

## Analysis

Paul senses that his relationship with Erin is deteriorating, but he can do nothing to stop it. Indeed, the reasons why it would suddenly begin to fall apart are unclear. His relationship with his mother certainly plays a role. As he stated earlier in the book, Paul always desired that his mother would be more strict with him. When she wasn't, it would lead to anger. Of course, Paul also knew that these feelings were so irrational that he had to stop acting on them, which led to feelings of guilt and despair. It could be said that his drug use is a horribly misguided attempt at getting his mother to be harsh with him. After all, he makes horrible decisions as a way of life. His marriage to Erin has relaxed his mother somewhat, who seems to wrongfully assume that Paul's life is



improving just because he has gotten married. Paul seems constantly preoccupied with his mother's emotional state, too, and even seems to care whether or not she knows they are doing drugs. This can be easily interpreted as an attempt to hurt his mom, which he seems to succeed in doing.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Why is Erin afraid that Paul is losing interest?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Name two things that Paul and Erin fight about in this chapter. Why is this significant?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Paul has been recording virtually all of his drug use activities lately. Explain why this would be important to him to do.

## **Vocabulary**

Vicinity, omnidirectional, strategically, default, prolonged, oppressed, sympathetic, austere, encompass, bleating, turnstiles, optimally, aversion, exerting.



# Chapter 6

## Summary

Paul grows anxious about Erin's red backpack, because he's afraid he will see it one day when he returns to his apartment, and that will mean Erin has returned. She has been gone for three weeks because a drunk driver has hit her mother. She finally returns and tells him she'll buy a new backpack. Paul wants to end their relationship, but she is vulnerable at present so he decides not to. He brings up their relationship in a theater a few weeks later. They both feel bad about it, but say nothing else and stay together. On the way home, he explains that they're both depressed. She asks what she can do, but he doesn't answer her. Later, they take Ambien and Xanax and return to Paul's apartment. Paul goes on his MacBook and shows her what kind of fish she ate earlier, which makes her laugh.

Ten days later, Paul upsets Erin and she begins crying, even though she'd been laughing minutes before. They again decide they are worn out from drug use. Paul buys a bus ticket and leaves in the cold.

Months later, in May, Paul buys drugs from Peanut for a reading in Pittsburg. He meets Juan first, accidentally, which makes Peanut nervous. Peanut says he didn't know Paul was a writer. As Paul walks to meet Erin, he tells Juan about the drugs he's just bought. Paul mentions he's bought heroin and Juan warns him that a friend of his died on heroin. They drive to Pittsburg the next morning and meet Calvin and Maggie. Paul and Erin go with Calvin and Maggie to Whole Foods, but then wind up back at Calvin's house where they take more drugs. Paul chats online with Charlie, and tells Erin they talked about how Paul feels depressed. He and Erin begin to argue. That night the group takes more drugs and goes to Target, but finds it closed. They return to Calvin's home.

Erin and Paul drive back to Brooklyn. Erin plans to return to Baltimore, and they get along so poorly at this point Paul admits he doesn't want her to spend the night. Two months later, Calvin and Maggie come to Brooklyn, though they have broken up. Erin is also in town. They all plan to take heroin then watch a movie. Paul vomits several times on their way to the theater. Although they agreed to sit separately, Calvin and Erin sit together. Paul goes to see what's happening, and Calvin says he's just charging his phone. As they watch the movie, which is X-Men First Class, Paul realizes that Erin has left the theater. He goes into the women's restroom and finds her with Maggie. They re-enter the theater and continue watching the movie, but are too confused to follow it. They board the train afterward, feeling sick. At Paul's place, Erin goes outside with Calvin, and both Paul and Maggie feel like they're gone a long time. They talk about their failing and failed relationships. Maggie asks to watch some of the movies Paul and Erin have made. Erin returns and demands to know what they were doing, and Paul returns the question to her. They all go to sleep, and Erin says Paul seems upset about something. They communicate with each other via e-mail, even though they are right



next to each other. Paul admits he no longer cares about the relationship. Erin says she's going to Think Coffee but instead wanders around. Early the next morning they do more mushrooms together. Paul becomes so confused that he asks Erin if he's dead. He believes himself to be in a sort of afterlife, although Erin assures him he's still alive. He wakes up with Erin, pointing at the sky. He thanks her for a tongue scraper she bought him, and goes to the bathroom. When he emerges, he hears himself say he's grateful to be alive.

## Analysis

As expected, Paul and Erin's relationship enters a very rough patch. Of course, Paul recognizes that one of the problems is their intense drug use. Neither of them can feel invested in the relationship if neither of them can feel anything, which is exactly what has begun to happen. Paul is too weak a person to end the relationship, and really the only time that he actively considers doing so is after Erin returns from caring for her mother. The reappearance of Calvin and Maggie signifies that the drug use has little chance of decreasing at this point, even though Paul seems aware it needs to end if they are ever going to recover. That is to say, Paul's awareness of his situation does not contribute to any kind of development for him. He simply knows the end--for him and Erin, anyway--is near. He does nothing to stop it. In the end, Paul grows so confused and sick from drug use he feels as though he is dying. Upon awakening, he realizes that life is still worth living.

Usually, the more profound the change within a character, the more gripping the novel. In this case, the novel concludes and there is absolutely no evidence that Paul has made any such breakthrough. He spends the entire course of the novel doing pretty much the same things he's appeared to always do. Unsurprisingly, when things don't work out, he generally increases his drug use. His relationship with Erin, or where it is going, is entirely unclear. This is also to be expected because Paul almost defiantly refuses to adapt his behavior in any meaningful way.

## Discussion Question 1

Why is Paul afraid of Erin's red backpack?

## Discussion Question 2

Discuss the breakup between Calvin and Maggie. Does that signify anything important for Paul and Erin?

## Discussion Question 3

Why do you think Erin and Paul communicate through e-mail when they are right next to each other?

## Vocabulary

Leveraged, suppress, discerning, mitigate, concurrently, compounded, whimsical, visceral, melodramatic, loitering, undeviating, soporific, deliberately, ordeal, discerned.



# Characters

## Paul

Paul is in his mid-twenties. He is a career novelist and writer who spends much of his time touring and giving readings and panel appearances. Paul tends to be extremely socially withdrawn, and is typically awkward whenever he does go to parties or large groups. He also has a severe drug problem, which he attributes to his drug use. Paul relates that his childhood was filled with situations where he came apart emotionally, and he seems to have followed this pattern into adulthood. Paul seems obsessive about searching for relationships with women. When he begins a relationship, he generally loses interest quickly and then moves on to the next without much thought. During the time he spends in relationships he ignores his friends and spends as much time as possible with the woman he's grown attached to. This behavior seems to cause him to lose track of his friends, though that might also simply be due to drug use. During the course of the novel Paul grows more and more confused under the influence until he has difficulties remembering who he is, and who he knows and does not know. Eventually, he meets and marries Erin, but as with all prior relationships loses interest. Paul also has a very peculiar relationship with his mother. He seems to want her to know what he is doing with respect to self-destructive behavior. He barely mentions his father, and his brother makes a single, extremely brief appearance.

## Erin

Though she is introduced late in the story, Erin winds up marrying Paul when they go together to Las Vegas. They get along well together at first, but Paul seems to lose interest. Erin seems to constantly worry that Paul is going to leave her and end the relationship. When they first meet, she is attempting to end a difficult relationship with a man named Beau, and Paul seems unnerved by this at first, but then seems to enjoy it after a while. Erin is oddly devoted to Paul, and even though their decision to marry is based on a whim, she still quits her job in order to stay with Paul so that they can start a life. Still, by the end of the novel she seems just as ready to end the relationship as Paul, even if she is upset that it is clearly ending.

## Paul's Mom

While Paul's mom is clearly an important character in the novel, he does not interact directly with his father at all. Paul describes his early relationship with his mom, and explains that he used to shout and argue with her constantly because Paul blamed her for the fact that he wasn't social enough. She is diagnosed with diabetes, and Paul is upset to discover she still uses sugar in her tea. Conversely, Paul's mom is very upset over her son's drug use. She pressures him to stop until he marries Erin. At that point, she seems to relax somewhat.



## Michelle

At the beginning of the novel, Paul's relationship with Michelle is ending. Paul does not describe her very much, other than explain that she is upset with him for not paying attention to her the way he used to when they went to parties together. They have a series of very passive-aggressive fights at one such party, and this is essentially when their relationship ends.

## Charles

Charles is another writer that Paul maintains a friendship with. They do not see each other often, but Paul can often be found communicating with Charles through email or other electronic means.

## Daniel

Daniel becomes a friend of Paul's briefly. He is tattooed, has nose rings, and, most importantly, does incredible amounts of drugs. He seems to encourage Paul's own drug abuse. He also suffers from financial problems, and his relationship with Fran appears to deteriorate as a result. Roughly halfway through the novel, Paul stops hanging out with Daniel to spend more time with Erin, though he never mentions it.

## Fran

Fran is Daniel's girlfriend. She becomes upset with Daniel for not being able to afford a trip to meet her parents. This fact seems to cause their relationship to suffer.

## Kyle

At the beginning of the novel, Kyle is close friends with Paul. After a party where Paul behaves rather shamelessly, the two stop speaking.

## Gabby

Gabby is Kyle's girlfriend. She hates nose rings and Daniel (by extension) because he has one. She pressures Kyle to throw Daniel and Paul out of a party.

## Juan

Juan is another writer and a friend of Paul's. Though he does drugs as well, he warns Paul about heroin when he learns Paul has begun using.





## **Laura**

Laura is the name of a girl Paul dates very briefly after his breakup with Michelle. Paul believes that she has gone back to an ex-boyfriend.

## **Taryn**

Taryn is a woman Paul meets and feels an instant connection to, though they never develop anything more than a passing acquaintance.

## **Calvin**

Calvin is an eighteen-year-old boy who spends time with Paul and Erin as they take drugs. He is dating Maggie at first, but they break up before the novel ends.

## **Maggie**

Maggie is Calvin's girlfriend. She spends time with Paul and Erin as they all take drugs as a group. By the end of the novel, she and Calvin have broken up.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## Klonopin

Klonopin is the name of a drug used primarily for the control of seizures and panic disorder, but Paul uses this drug for recreational purposes quite often throughout the novel.

## Adderall

Adderall is a stimulant used to treat narcolepsy and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. Paul uses this drug regularly for his own pleasure.

## Xanax

Xanax is a prescription drug used for the control of various panic disorders. Paul uses Xanax regularly, though not as often as Klonopin or Adderall.

## MDMA

MDMA is generally known as ecstasy, and Paul does copious amounts throughout the novel.

## iPod

Paul brings his iPod most places, and often uses it in social settings as a means whereby he can avoid interacting with people.

## MacBook

Similar in nature to his iPod, Paul takes his MacBook almost everywhere. Eventually, he starts recording his drug trips on it while he is with Erin.

## Whole Foods

Paul and his friends wind up at Whole Foods frequently, especially when they are high on drugs. Aside from its convenience, it is unclear why Paul chooses Whole Foods so often as a place to spend time.



## **Red Backpack**

Erin's red backpack becomes a source of dread for Paul. It comes to symbolize her return, and Paul does not actually want her to return because he wants the relationship to end.

## **PDA File**

Paul creates a PDA file to help him remember who he is and where he is in his life. It is comically sparse, reflecting how little actually goes on in his life.

## **Mango**

Mango is seen a surprising amount of times in the novel. It usually appears, oddly enough, in situations involving drug use, when Paul and other characters decide to get food.

## Settings

The novel is set in a more or less contemporary world, with very little fictionalized. Due to the style and approach of the author, different towns, cities, and even countries bare very little distinction. Paul spends most of the time he's narrating at events like parties where events are naturally confusing, or at book readings where he is terrified of answering questions. In either case, the narrator's perception of the world is heavily affected by the drugs that he takes. The narrator's world, then, is a place where time barely exists, emotions are recognized but not processed, and events pass by in a haze. Paul's acquaintances--for it is difficult to say for sure if Paul actually has any genuine friends--are all drug users, and some appear to be more heavily into drugs than he is. Paul's world is filled with well-educated people like authors and journalists and poets, all of whom he manages to alienate himself from due to his social awkwardness and his drug use. What connections he does form with people quickly deteriorate because Paul is unwilling or incapable of remaining close to anyone for a significant period of time. Paul is also constantly surrounded by recording and communication devices. Computers, smart phones, and social media are never very far away from him, and he uses them constantly in order to communicate with people who are far away. In some ways, he appears to have more meaningful conversations with others when he does this.



# Themes and Motifs

## Drug Abuse

It is a challenge to find a page, or even a paragraph, where drug use is not mentioned. The author describes their use hundreds of times throughout the novel and uses details like the type of drug and amount constantly. Paul, the main character, seems to go through phases of drug abuse as the novel progresses. Eventually, he starts using heroin, which ends very badly for him. It is important to note that the book does not condone drug use. It does not even seem to suggest that drug use is fun, because Paul leads an incredibly boring life even while he is heavily under the influence. Instead, the author presents their use matter-of-factly, as though it represented an important truth about his generation. Paul even seems aware that he has a serious problem. He tells Erin numerous times that they are feeling depressed because of drug use--although, admittedly, depression is the least of their worries at this point. Still, he uses his own drug abuse as a means of starting an argument with his mother, even though he's aware of how self-destructive he is being. The book itself can easily be seen as one person experiencing his life rapidly deteriorate from the use of drugs.

## Relationships

The main character, Paul, is as obsessive about entering relationships as he is taking drugs, though admittedly he is far from skilled at it. Being generally socially inept, Paul manages to offend people very often, which makes it extremely difficult for him to make lasting ties with anyone. In fact, his friend Kyle ceases to be his friend after a bizarre incident at a party held by Kyle's girlfriend Gabby. Paul continually acts weird and others distance themselves from him as a result, and most of his flirtatious behavior is unsuccessful or even offensive. With that being said, Paul is constantly sizing girls up around him for potential relationships when he is single. He either imagines that certain girls are attracted to him, or keeps looking for anyone who shows signs of attraction. This is contrary to his stated objectives of trying to focus on projects before his book tour. Any reader familiar with Paul's character should not be surprised that he winds up marrying a girl, Erin, on a whim, and subsequently loses interest in their relationship. Why they begin to fail to get along is not absolutely clear, and, in fact, with Paul, the reasons his relationships deteriorate is never clear. He just claims to "lose interest." This is actually extremely immature behavior on behalf of Paul, who could be said to act this way because drug use has kept him from developing into a fully fledged adult.

## Desperation

Paul announces several times throughout the novel that he feels "desperate" or "bleak." He never goes into why. A simple answer is that drugs are interfering with his ability to cope with daily affairs, but it is actually more complicated than just a drug problem. In



fact, Paul's drug problem actually stems from the fact that he is terrified of social interactions. This is made all the worse because he has an obsessive preoccupation with social status, and his awareness that he is inept at making friends or being liked acts as a form of personal torture on him. Paul's psyche reflects a very common generational misconception that being popular is of primary importance--or, in fact, that it is of any importance at all. He cannot separate himself from the way that others perceive him, and as a result he is constantly feeling their disapproval in incredibly harsh ways. Hence, he goes through long periods without much social interaction at all. Paul's desperation stifles much of his life, and the drug use may have evolved to help him cope with this desperation, but it has also begun to contribute to the problem rather heavily. When Paul begins his book tour and goes to discussion panels under the influence, he angers his publishers, but refuses to confront them and continues his behavior, perhaps because it is the only way he can remain on the tour, where personal interaction is a must. Unfortunately, his social awkwardness becomes something of a self-fulfilling prophecy, where his very awareness of it causes it to become worse and worse.



# Styles

## Point of View

The point of view of the novel is third person. The entire novel is told through the point of view of Paul, who, though he does have insightful things to say about people around him, is an utterly unreliable character. The point of view of the novel is important because it is a semi-autobiographical work, and the author is relating experiences that he has had through the character Paul. Thus, all of the reader's knowledge and understanding of Paul's world is filtered through Paul. This can be a drain on the reader from time to time, as the novel does not follow the typical progression of a story. Paul's emotional immaturity and inability to produce meaningful action can become quite heart-wrenching, even, because it becomes clear through his own point of view that he just barely experiences life at all. The story is told mostly through exposition. The author spends large amounts of work and effort describing minor emotional reactions or features of the world that surrounds him. The dialog that does occur generally revolves around the present situation, and rarely do the characters ever discuss their goals. Instead, it is common for Paul to discuss his past, especially with Erin, as though the two are conversing to try and either compare their current relationship to previous ones, or prevent past mistakes from happening again. There is very little action, and in fact when Paul makes up his mind to do something, he very rarely follows through.

## Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is extremely unusual in that things are described indirectly. Many words are simply surrounded by quotations, as if the author is signaling to the reader that he is aware the word he has chosen is not correct, but instead simply the first one to come to mind. The author's vocabulary, fortunately enough, is direct and straightforward, with very little in the way of academic phrasing. The paragraphs are lengthy. The writing may be an intentional reflection on the heavy drug abuse Paul was experiencing at the time of events being described in the novel.

Dialogue does very little to distinguish one character from another. In fact, virtually none of the language of the novel is directed toward describing the people Paul meets. Instead, the language used to describe people originates from their emotional stances and appearances. Most people appear authentic, confused, or vague to Paul, and these adjectives pepper the narration ceaselessly. Paul's narration is so deeply effected by drugs that he has difficulty completing ideas in a simple fashion. As a result, many of his sentences tend to be long and can become confusing.

## Structure

The novel is broken up into six chapters. Chapter 2 is by far the longest, at over fifty pages, while Chapter 1 is just over ten pages. The book itself is very brief, just over two-



hundred pages. There are smaller breaks within the chapters, but none of the chapters are titled, and it very loosely structured overall. The pace of the novel is highly erratic, with small periods of time or even single perceptions taking up large portions, while huge passages of time simply disappear unnoticed by the Paul. This structuring is due to Paul's drug use and makes sense in that context. The novel is primarily linear, except that the author breaks the flow of the story to explain Paul's childhood. This is the sole exception where the novel does not follow chronologically.

The plot of Taipei is nonexistent. Instead, it centers around Paul's experiences as he continues to use drugs before his book tour, during his book tour, and after his marriage to Erin. It is a series of observations that reflect that author's life as a severely addicted drug-user. The novel tends to run very slow as a result of the subject matter. Narration centers around activities that Paul engages in, none of which are inherently interesting, except perhaps for the readings and discussion panels, which Paul spends completely drugged. Instead, the author attempts to present contemporary ideas and problems in a unique and convincing light.





## Quotes

Paul couldn't find Kyle, 19, or Kyle's girlfriend, Gabby, 28--his suite mates in an apartment off the Graham L train stop in Brooklyn--and was returning to Michelle when he realized he'd walked past Kyle, standing drunkenly alone in a dense area of people, as if at a concert.

-- N/A (Chapter 1 paragraph 18)

**Importance:** This quote is significant because it serves as a strong representation of how the author introduces ideas in a complicated and jumbled fashion. More importantly, the reader can pick up on the fact that there is something wrong with Paul.

Outside, on the sidewalk, Michelle walked quickly ahead with her hands in her jacket pockets, as if to better escape Paul with a more streamlined form, though also it was raining. Paul asked what she wanted to do. "I don't know," she said. "I'm not hungry anymore.

-- Michelle (Chapter 1 paragraph 32)

**Importance:** This signifies that Paul's relationship with Michelle is over. It also suggests that Michelle feels the way Paul acted at the party was directed at her, and Paul, in his typical fashion, does not discuss this likelihood with her.

The next two weeks Paul gradually began to view the five months until September, when his second novel would be published and he would go on a two-month book tour, as an 'interim period,' during which he would mostly be alone, 'calmly organizing things,' he said in an email to his mother.

-- N/A (Chapter 2 paragraph 24)

**Importance:** This quote serves as an excellent representation for the way in which Paul views his time, while also drawing attention to the fact that Paul is terrible at sticking to decisions he has made. Notice also the numerous and seemingly unnecessary quotes the author makes use of. These "quotes" are common occurrences, and seem to happen in places where the author cannot find the words he means to use.

Paul's first grade teacher recommended he be placed in the English-as-second-language program, widely, viewed as for 'impaired' students, but Paul's mother kept him in the normal class. His second grade teacher recommended he be tested for the 'gifted' program and he was admitted and began going every Friday to gifted, in which most of the twenty-five to thirty students, having begun first grade, were already friends.

-- N/A (Chapter 2 paragraph 88)

**Importance:** This describes an important piece of Paul's history. Note also that his memory of these events seems much clearer than events that have just recently occurred to him. The notion that he is either brilliant or remedial seems to have stuck with him into adulthood.



Erin, back in her car, said the officer had looked at her two-months expired, out-of-state driver's license an abnormally long time, like he'd forgotten what he was doing, before quietly saying 'be careful' and allowing her to continue driving, in what seemed to be an egregious oversight, without a ticket or decreasing passengers.

-- N/A (Chapter 5 paragraph 2)

**Importance:** This is the second passage which details Erin. It establishes her drug use and her willingness to break the law in petty ways, and is also rather typical of how Paul and his associates manage to escape criminal charges. It is revealed not much longer after this passage that all the characters are carrying illegal drugs.

In the parking lot Maggie went alone to her car. Calvin was backing out of his parking space when Paul, leaning forward from the back-seat, said he wanted to be in Maggie's car. Calvin braked and asked what to do, alternately looking at Paul and Erin with a helpless, besieged expression.

-- N/A (Chapter 3 paragraph 25)

**Importance:** This is typical activity for Paul and those around them when they are on drugs. Not only is it unclear why Paul suddenly wants to change vehicles, Calvin has no idea about coping with a very simple situation.

This is what the universe created, after whatever billion years," said Paul gesturing at MGM Grand and Excalibur and Luxor, around 9:30 p.m., on a walkway above the main street of casinos in Las Vegas, which was as cold or colder than New York City, they'd learned, with some amusement, upon arriving four hours ago.

-- Paul (Chapter 4 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** This quote provides insight into the way that Paul characterizes things. They are filming this particular conversation, as they film most things. It is not clear if Paul is being sarcastic, or simply stating matter-of-factly that the Las Vegas hotels are part of the organized universe. It does demonstrate that Paul often globalizes very specific instances--after all, the hotels are only a very, very small part of the universe.

I was kind of seeing Beau still then," said Erin, and as the MDMA took effect Paul began using "the voice" sometimes, including when Erin asked him which of his previous girlfriends he felt closest to and he said "I'm not really sure" in an extreme parody of a stereotypical romantic comedy, and they laughed for maybe ten seconds.

-- Erin (Chapter 4 paragraph 42)

**Importance:** This characterizes the way Paul and Erin interact with each other while each is still interested in the relationship. Note their obsession with previous relationships. Erin explains what happened with Beau, then asks about Paul's former girlfriends by way of comparison.

In the mirror-walled elevator they stared at themselves on the screen of Paul's MacBook, which Erin held waist-level. Paul moved in a parody of a robot and lightly slapped Erin twice. Erin slapped Paul once and, after exiting the elevator, yawned



audibly, as they approached an atrium of spiral staircases and a gigantic Christmas tree.

-- N/A (Chapter 5 paragraph 32)

**Importance:** This demonstrates the way that Paul and Erin act when they are together. The image of them examining their appearances in the MacBook while they are in a mirrored elevator also provides evidence of how self-centered they are, through the fact that they are so focused on their own images.

Erin said she'd noticed that Paul sometimes sounded "really angry" when talking to his mother in Mandarin. Paul said he didn't feel angry, that he had gotten into the habit, from being a spoiled child, of talking to her like that and that it used to be "way worse." Until he was 7 or 8 his voice, incomprehensible to anyone outside his family, had been a harmonica-like, almost electronic, squealing-bleating noise, which wholly outsourced the task of articulation, in the form of deciphering, to the listener.

-- N/A (Chapter 5 paragraph 91)

**Importance:** Notice how this sentence manages to hold several major ideas without actually expressing anything specific. The reader will, upon trying to imagine the noise the author is actually trying to describe, find it exceedingly difficult, if not impossible. Many physical descriptions the author tries to include wind up being similarly opaque.

He sensed his vicinity to a worldview--or a temporary configuration of preferences, two or three ideas introduced to a mood--in which double suicide would be as difficult, as illogical, to resist as a new sushi restaurant to a couple that likes sushi and trying new restaurants.

-- N/A (Chapter 6 paragraph 20)

**Importance:** Another perfect example of how the author likes to characterize things an abstruse ways. This quote also examines their potential suicide, even though the character has stated plainly that he doesn't want to commit suicide previously.

Ten days later they were on Erin's bed in Baltimore, around 3:45 a.m., watching a Japanese movie about a woman who tortures and murders men. The past two nights they'd ingested large doses of MDMA and low- to-medium doses of Percocet, Adderall, Xanax, and today they'd only used a little Adderall.

-- N/A (Chapter 6 paragraph 58)

**Importance:** The drug use in the novel is constant, but increases sharply in amount toward the end of the novel. This is what keeps Paul and Erin together, despite the fact that Paul really wants the relationship to end and contemplates suicide as an alternative.