

Unwind Study Guide

Unwind by Neal Shusterman

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Plot Summary

“Unwind” by Neal Shusterman is the fictional story of life after the Second Civil War which is also known as The Heartland War. The involved three factions include: the Pro-Choice War, the Pro-Life War and what is left of the U.S. Military. The tale obviously takes place in the United States and at a time in the future. During peace talks, the U.S. Military proposes a solution that is designed to satisfy both the Life Army and the Choice Brigade.

The U.S. Military was neutral and served as a buffer between the two warring factions. They proposed the concept of unwinding. It would satisfy the pro-lifers because it does not destroy life on a fundamental basis because every harvested part of an Unwinder had to be used for graphs and transplants. The pro-choice side would be satisfied because unwinding was referred to as retroactive abortion. Parents or legal guardians could decide when their child was thirteen that they basically didn't want him or her and sign a contract committing their child to the process. If a child escaped unwinding by his or her eighteenth birthday, he could continue his life to its natural conclusion.

Unwinders are looked down upon by society. They are marked for a strange ending to their natural state although the authorities and participating parents or relatives delude themselves to believe that the children still “live on.” There is another category of those scheduled for unwinding. Tithes are “special children” who are selected at birth by their parents for tithing. They look upon the future they've chosen for the child as God's way. Their children have a great purpose in life – serving God by perpetuating life for others. Tithes are taught to embrace the concept and look forward to their thirteenth birthday when they will have the honor of being unwound. The concept was accepted by both sides and legislation was passed resulting in the “The Bill of Life” that laid out the requirements and details of the unwinding process. Unwinding became a popular and accepted process.

Connor Lassiter is the protagonist of the story. He is sixteen and has been signed over for unwinding by his parents. He accidentally finds the signed order and decides to run away. He has reached that rebellious age and his parents apparently are finding him difficult to deal with. It is an out for them but a tragedy for Connor. He wants to live undivided. His journey begins as a quest to save his own life, but on the way to that positive eventuality he meets other kids, Unwinders and Tithes, who are also marked for an ending in this macabre process. Connor is a fighter and after he teams up with Risa, another Unwinder, and Lev, a Tithe, he becomes their leader and eludes the Juvey-cops who are after them and pelting them with bullets from their tranq guns. Connor is able to wrestle a tranq gun from one of the Juvey-cops and shoot him in the leg with it. Connor becomes legendary and known as the Akron-AWOL because of the incident.

Survival and helping each other maintain their current life status is the focus of the runaways who are hunted by the authorities. There is a network of safe houses that has been established for Unwinders, and the main characters have hopes to stay under the radar screen until their eighteenth birthday when they can no longer be unwound.



There are conflicts and shifts of perspective along the way. The main characters wind up in the Graveyard which is an operation in the remote desert of Arizona. The graveyard is run by a former U.S. Navy Admiral who is part of the safe house network. The ominous name refers to the old U.S. military jets that wind up there for stripping or resale. The kids just hope that the name doesn't apply to their destiny and that they can survive until their age will make them ineligible for being literally and surgically harvested for their parts.



Part One: Triplicate

Summary

Connor Lassiter's life is being stolen from him at sixteen. Ariana tells him that he's smart and can survive to eighteen. Sitting on the ledge of a freeway overpass atop the rumble of the traffic has been his safe haven. Ariana embraces Connor with tears in her eyes. She says they should run away together and kick AWOL. It would take real commitment on Ariana's part to run away with an Unwind. He tells Ariana that AWOL is an old military term that means "absent without leave." Her parents don't like Connor.

Connor's parents don't know that he knows he's being unwound. He accidentally found the order signed by his parents in his father's desk. At two in the morning, Connor dresses all in black, looks in on his little brother and heads out on the twenty minute walk to Ariana's house. He calls Ariana on his cell phone when he arrives at her darkened house. He senses immediately in the tone of her voice that she's backing out. She can't go. She tells him to call her when he's safe.

Connor's not sure where he will go. He has to lay low for two years. When he's eighteen he can't be unwound. At a truck stop he plans to stow away in a truck. He hides from several police cars patrolling the area. He makes a break for an empty truck and hides in the bedroom behind the cab. The driver, Josias Aldridge, proudly shows Connor that he can do card tricks with a new arm that was grafted on ten years before. Another kid hiding in a truck is arrested by the Juvey-cops. Connor recognizes the kid, Andy Jameson. Josias lets Connor stay in the bed compartment and they take off for parts unknown.

Connor is tracked down by the police and his father through cell phone pings. As Josias is being handcuffed, Connor bolts across the interstate, barely missing being hit by swerving cars. The cops shoot at him with tranq bullets. He feels the impact of a bullet in his backpack. As he climbs across the center divider with the cops right behind him, he lands on a fast-moving Cadillac. In the back seat is a terrified kid staring at him.

Fifteen-year-old Risa is told that she has reached her potential and must leave Ohio State Home 23. They need room for the many unwanted babies born every day. Risa realizes that she's being unwound. The unwound are still alive but in a divided state. She will be taken to Twin Lakes Harvest Camp for the unwinding. She thinks to herself that Mr. Dunkin may see her hands playing in Carnegie Hall one day. On the bus the next day, two kids are racing across the road with police in pursuit. The boys run right in front of the bus causing it to come to a jarring stop; there is blood on the windshield. Risa runs toward the door.

A lavish tithing party is being held for Levi Jedediah Calder. It's a celebration of his turning thirteen. Lev is the youngest; his brother Marcus is twenty-eight and the oldest. Marcus refuses to be part of the celebration. Lev talks privately to Pastor Dan who tells



him it's natural to be frightened. Lev had been identified as a tithe since he was born. He is special and his life had been dedicated to serving God and mankind.

Dressed in all white, Lev crawls in the back of his father's Cadillac. As they drive off Levi's father tells himself that he will never see his home again. On the interstate, his father slams on the brakes. A boy, a little older than Lev, is nearly hit and winds up on the trunk of the car. The boy kidnaps Lev. The boy drags Lev and runs off as bullets fly past them. A bus almost hits them but veers off the road into a large tree. The bus driver's blood is all over the windshield. Pastor Dan opens the back door and screams for Lev to run. Connor sees the girl who got off the bus run into the woods. Connor races back to the kid who was hit by a tranq bullet. Connor throws him over his shoulder and runs for the woods. He stops the girl and tells her that she won't get away unless they work together.

Officer J. T. Nelson has worked in Juvenile for twelve years. He knows that AWOL Unwinds don't give up. He wishes he could use real bullets and take some of them out. He follows the Unwind into the woods and finds the kid in the white garb lying there unconscious. Nelson hears a girl's voice calling for help. He heads toward the sound of the voice and is mugged. The girl and the mugger attack him. The mugger grabs the tranq gun and shoots Nelson in the leg.

Lev wakes up with an ache in his shoulder from the tranq bullet. The last thing he remembers is Pastor Dan telling him to run. He finds himself lying by a small fire across from his kidnapper and a girl.

Connor and Risa move through the woods all day. Connor carries the unconscious boy. Connor knows that their photos will soon be everywhere. Connor doesn't expect to be unwound because they won't catch him. Risa realizes they need help if they are to make it. The three kids move toward a civilized area.

Analysis

Glimpses of challenge, tragedy, victimization and destiny are thrown in the face of the reader in this first section. Sympathy is evoked immediately by the dramatic fate that a teenager, a mere sixteen-year-old child, is facing. It makes one introspective – how would anyone prepare for such a dismal eventuality much less a child? Perhaps he has some remorse that he hadn't gotten along with his parents. They have decided to abort him retroactively. They have decided to erase his existence. How could once loving parents decide to take this route? Is it the money they'll receive for their deed? Is it revenge for the rebellious years? There were the hateful arguments, but is there an equivalency between angry words and the end of a life?

Connor is confronted with a challenge that most adults could not deal with. Yet he has no choice. A glimmer of heroism and leadership arises off the pages as the spark of an idea to battle his destiny begins to formulate. Connor displays a fundamental desire to survive. A vengeance for the actions of his parents or hopes and dreams of



reconciliation do not impinge upon his drive to survive. He is driven by a basic human instinct to live. That which compels him makes him an ordinary boy... but that which he faces will take extraordinary intelligence, resourcefulness and tenacity. Connor is not deterred by tranquil bullets that are fired at him or by Juvey-cops who hunt him down or even by the roar of traffic as he races across a crowded thoroughfare to his freedom. But this part of his story is just the start and is left in a cliffhanger with many questions.

Risa faces the same fate but her betrayers are the State in which she is a ward. Risa has never felt more alone and is initially more accepting of her fate. She sees no out and doesn't possess the vision and confidence of Connor. Risa accepts her impending end but Connor sees a bright light beyond it. It will not be his end. In juxtaposition to both Connor and Risa, Lev has been victimized by the lies of the state and the gullibility of his parents that his end is an honored one that will serve God.

Connor symbolizes hope; Risa symbolizes resolve; and Lev symbolizes innocence.

Discussion Question 1

Describe the feelings Connor must have felt when he accidentally ran across orders signed by his parents dooming him to unwinding. What reasons do his parents have for taking this action?

Discussion Question 2

What are the first hints in the narrative that the unwinding that Connor faces is a horrific prospect? Why didn't Connor stay and fight for his rights instead of running away?

Discussion Question 3

How did Adriana disappoint Connor? Is she sincere when she says she'd really like to run away with him?

Vocabulary

carnage, paranoid, hairbreadth, sonata, crescendo, reverberates, tribunal, exemplary, blatantly, inflammatory, tithing, camaraderie, unwittingly, adrenaline



Part Two: Storked

Summary

In the dark, a 19-year-old mother leaves her baby on the porch of a house. She doesn't ring the bell and runs. She might be caught. The Storking initiative requires a mother caught leaving a baby to keep it. If the people in the house open the door and find the baby the law says it's their baby whether they want it or not.

A few streets away, Risa knocks on a door and tells the woman who answers the door that she's collecting clothes and food for her school. The woman gives her a bag full of clothes and canned food. Back in the woods, the boys change into some of clothes. Connor tells Lev that they're AWOLs. Lev reminds him that kicked-AWOL makes them federal criminals.

Risa fears that the cops may not want to harvest them; they may want them dead. They elude a police car that drives toward them. They hear a baby crying. As they start to climb onto a school bus to divert the cop's attention, Connor spots a baby lying on the porch. Connor bolts to the door. Risa follows and claims the baby. The kids sit at the back of the school bus with the baby. Risa suspects that there was an underlying reason why Connor ran to the baby. Lev plans to run away. He is pretending to be one of them. He thinks Connor and Risa are so out of control that they'd be better off in a divided state.

After they get off the bus, they hide in the girls' restroom, each taking a separate stall. When Connor and Risa decide to make their break, Lev's stall is empty. He's gone. Lev makes his way to the office. He tells the receptionist his name and that he'd been kidnapped by two Unwinds. Security is immediately notified. Lev calls Pastor Dan who tells him that he should stay in hiding. Lev insists he wants to be harvested but realizes that Dan wants him to live. Lev sees police cars arriving, slips out of the office, and pulls the fire alarm.

A teacher, Hannah Steinberg, finds a girl, a boy and a baby in the lab. The boy looks desperate and tells Hannah that if she turns them in they'll die. She suspects they are Unwinds and leads them outside. Risa and Connor realize that Lev turned them in. Lev calls out to them. Figuring that Lev's leading the police to them, they take off running. They stop and start clapping. A student is horrified and calls them "Clappers!" The students are in panic and race away from them. Hannah tells them to see Sonia in an antique shop on Fleming Street. Lev nearly gets trampled by the stampeding kids scared of the Clappers. The threat of Clappers is effective because no one knows what they stand for.

Connor and Risa find the antique shop where they meet Sonia who is an old lady. Hannah had called Sonia and told her they were coming. Sonia leads them to a back room where Risa finds milk in an old refrigerator and spoon feeds the baby. Sonia



knows they are Unwinds and that they need help. Underneath a rug is a trap door; they all take the steps down. There are a girl and two boys, also Unwinds, in the hidden room. Sonia announces that she'll be rid of all of them in four days when the ice cream man comes.

One of the boys refers to Sonia as "Dragon Lady." She won't tell them what comes next. The girl, Mai, fears the next step is being cut apart at the harvest camp. The boys are Hayden and Roland. After a day, Connor suffers from claustrophobia. Risa tends to the baby; Mai reads dusty books all day. Roland is a big stocky youngster who sports a tiger shark tattoo on his arm. He is in charge of dividing up the rations. Connor and Roland almost come to blows but their anger is diffused. Connor gets along with Hayden who advises Connor to let Roland think he's in charge. They discuss the actual unwinding – no one knows exactly how it's done.

Hayden tells the story of Humphrey Dunfee whose parents lost it after he's unwound. They tracked down the people who had Humphrey's parts, killed them, and made Humphrey whole.

Each kid is called upstairs to write a letter to a person he or she loves. Connor writes a heartfelt letter to his parents, signing his letter with "love." He dissolves into sobs after he signs the letter. Sonia has him write the date of his eighteenth birthday on it. He has to promise to come back and get the letter if he survives. If he doesn't return, she'll send the letter. Connor realizes that Sonia has helped a lot of kids.

In the dark of night they all leave on an ice-cream truck waiting in the back alley. Hannah is there and takes the baby. Didi, the baby, can't go where they're heading. Sonia tells them it's a long journey but they can make it. Risa thinks of all the babies she had to tend to at the State Home. Greta, one of the nurses always said, "You can't change laws without first changing human nature." She also said to "Love the ones you can and pray for the rest." Connor is sure that Hannah will give Didi a good home. One kid says they'll be stopping at different safe houses until they reach their destination called, "the graveyard."

Analysis

Blatant exploitation is the underpinnings of the "storking" laws that have been enacted in this future time and place. Young women are being exploited by the government in this future state. Unwinding is a successful and profitable venture for the state and they need more body parts. They recognize that young women can produce babies for future harvesting but they also recognize that most young women would struggle to support their babies. To address this dilemma, the state gives the young women a lawful remedy. The babies can be left on random doorsteps. The homeowners who find the babies are legally obligated to raise them. The young women, the homeowners and most importantly the babies are being exploited by the state.



Connor's reaction to the crying baby indicates that he has an emotional connection to its abandonment. Perhaps it symbolizes his own abandonment by his parents. The author has planted a seed and is foreshadowing an emotional time or experience in Connor's life. While Connor is the titular leader of the trio, Risa has shown her wisdom and practical reasoning skills and is the quiet stability behind Connor's louder and more overt control.

Hope springs eternal with the entry of Mrs. Steinberg and Sonia. Their intercession in the youngsters' ordeal gives the kids and the readers hope that they will be able to avoid a macabre end. Remorse is hinted at when one of the other Unwinders tells the story of Humphrey Dunfee whose parents tried to put him together again. The reference to the fairy tale is a reminder that broken things are often not fixable. Ergo, when an Unwinder is surgically reduced to pieces, recovery is not an option. The child may be doomed to an early death, but the parents may be doomed to life-long guilt.

Although Connor has tried to have a cold heart toward his parents, his vulnerability is revealed when he is forced by Sonia to write a letter to his parents. All the hurt and anger and outrage come out in the letter. Although Sonia will keep the letter for him until he turns eighteen, the letter had a dual purpose. It allows Connor to vent his feelings and perhaps leave them behind forever in that heartfelt letter.

Risa's realistic and practical approach to life is contained in her memories of a nurse who told her that, "You can't change laws without first changing human nature," and "Love the ones you can and pray for the rest." This philosophy explains why Risa is more easily accepting of her fate no matter what it is.

Discussion Question 1

What are the rules of "storking?" Why does the government encourage young girls to have babies?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Connor have an emotional reaction when he spots the baby on the doorstep? Why is Risa adept at caring for babies?

Discussion Question 3

Why are Hannah Steinberg and Sonia heroines in this story? Discuss what risks they took in helping Connor, Risa and Lev. How would the story have changed without their help?

Vocabulary

sanctity, mayhem, dismissive, detonate, inconsolable, anarchist, dysfunctional, nihilistic, maniacal, paranoid, solidifies, formidable



Part Three: Transit

Summary

The BBC airs a news story about new mothers in a Ukrainian maternity hospital who claim that the staff took their newborns. The report describes a culture of the trafficking babies to harvest stem cells from their bone marrow.

Lev's new traveling companion is Cyrus Finch, CyFi, who he met at the mall. CyFi is fifteen and black or umber as they call it. Racism is almost non-existent. He claims he's not a runaway but has secrets. He won't tell Lev his destination. CyFi was able to get the hungry Lev some food court fare. Lev worries about Connor and Risa. If they were caught, they're probably unwound. Lev gets annoyed with CyFi and accuses him of putting on a black southern accent. CyFi claims he has two fathers and an IQ of 155. His IQ went down a few points when he hurt his head in an accident. He received a new temporal lobe from an Unwind. Lev tells him that he is a tithe.

Lev and CyFi stay in a railroad switch house each night. CyFi asks Lev why his parents tithed him. CyFi was a storked baby. His parents are two gay men. Lev defends his parents' in tithing him. They loved God more than they did him. From Scottsburg, Indiana they travel south to Joplin, Missouri. Cy is lagging behind and acting strangely. His voice is raspy. They stop by a Christmas store where CyFi steals an ornament. CyFi races from the store and disappears down an alley. Lev finds him hiding in a playground. CyFi looks like he's dying. He screams that he didn't steal the ornament. He smashes it to bits. His hand begins to ooze blood. CyFi tells Lev to look in his pocket where there's a treasure trove of jewelry. CyFi claims he didn't steal it and tells Lev to get rid of it. Lev buries it in the playground sand. Lev keeps one diamond bracelets and slips it in his pocket. They stay in a rundown motel that night. CyFi is upset when Lev shows him the bracelet he kept. He forces him to tell where he got all the jewelry. CyFi attributes the thefts to the prior owner of his temporal lobe. CyFi sympathizes with the original owner of the lobe. He must have been addicted to stealing. CyFi has to deal with the conflict all the time. He can catch a glimpse of the guy once in a while in the mirror. His dads don't know how much it bothers him. CyFi is heading to Joplin to confront the boy. Lev vows to get him there.

For three weeks, Risa and Connor and the others have been shifted from one safe house to another. They land in a huge warehouse where there are already 30 kids. Four men and three women called Fatigues look after them. They look for Lev with every arriving group of kids. The other kids talk about Akron AWOL who turned a cop's own tranq gun on him. No one other than Risa knows that Connor is Akron AWOL. The Fatigues claim they help the kids because it is the right thing to do. Roland shows up one day. Risa worries about Connor who seems emotionally unstable. Connor stays to himself so he doesn't get into fights. Sometimes talk drives him crazy. He asks Risa to keep an eye on Roland, as it seems he's trying to take over the other kids. Risa warns him that Roland wants to draw Connor into a fight so he can kill him. Connor admits that



Risa is right about Roland and was right about Lev. Connor still worries about Lev. He fears that Lev turned himself in and is already unwound.

The Fatigues bring the kids Christmas dinner. Risa visits the bathroom before lining up to eat. Roland follows her and walks in on her. She tells him to get out but he continues to move closer. He wants to have fun and keep her from being unwound for nine months. Connor rushes in when he hears her scream for help. Connor washes his face and hands. He tells Roland that he can do what he wants with Risa. They broke up that morning. Roland is disappointed that Connor doesn't fight and leaves. Connor tells Risa that he didn't take the bait. Roland made sure that Connor saw him follow Risa. She becomes emotional and tells Connor to get out, but she realizes that he is a hero.

Holding his temper was the hardest thing Connor had ever done. He'd love to slug Roland, but he heard that Roland has a little knife he crafted himself. Roland is showing a lot more respect for Risa.

Analysis

The subject of stem-cell research has a slight mention making the story a commentary on current controversial events.

Cyrus Finch, or CyFi as he is called, symbolizes the impact of half-truths, deception and the lust for power. It demonstrates the downside for the recipient of human parts harvested from Unwinds. While the government propaganda is designed to educate the populace and convince them that the process is a good one at least for those in need of a graft or transplant, CyFi's story makes a lie of that distorted message.

Irony plays a role in this episode. CyFi's story confirms as true one of the tenets of the government's claims. Their assurance to parents and Unwinds alike was that unwinding was not death; rather, the individual lived on in the life of the many recipients of its parts. The Unwinder will, in a sense, attain life eternal. Why should the life of an Unwinder end with the death of its recipients? Can't his parts be harvested again and again? While CyFi's story offers proof that a remnant of the donor lives on, it is not at all in a positive way.

In his case, CyFi is in misery because of the strange "presence" that he feels. He senses that the Unwinder who donated his temporal lobe to CyFi thinks he's still alive but doesn't understand exactly where he is and why his own thoughts and memories are confused with someone else's. While this is extremely troubling to CyFi, the donor has another impact on him. The donor was a jewelry thief, and since the transplant, CyFi has had a compulsion to steal. It's not in CyFi's nature to steal yet he cannot help himself because he is being guided by the desires and instincts of another. So what the government is trying to sell is proven in CyFi's case – the donor does live on. What is not said is that the part of the donor that lives on may very well live on in misery.

There is no winner. The government's process is a lucrative one but it has caused damage to both the recipient and donor and neither can be put back together again.



Discussion Question 1

What is bothering CyFi? What actions is he compelled to take that are against his nature? What reality does he need to convey to the kid who donated the temporal lobe?

Discussion Question 2

What does CyFi have Lev bury in the playground and why? What does he contribute his decreased IQ to?

Discussion Question 3

How does this episode show the other side of unwinding? The victims are portrayed as the Unwinders but are there other victims?

Vocabulary

forensic, solace, umber, veneer, Mecca, terrain, contagious, temporal, mesmerized, Spartan, corrugated, predatory

Part Four: Destinations

Summary

There is notice from eBay about a seller's attempt to auction his soul online. eBay states that if the soul exists it is against policy to sell human parts on their site. Therefore, the listing that had been removed would not be reinstated.

The man inherited the pawnshop from his brother. He closely watches Lev who strolls into the shop one day. Lev shows him the diamond bracelet. The old man figures he stole the bracelet and tells him to go home. Lev says he's an Unwind and that the bracelet is stolen but not from around there. Unwinds aren't usually this honest but the old man doesn't deal with minors. All Lev wants is \$500. The pawnbroker lies and says it's a fake not worth \$100. Lev knows he's lying and finally convinces the pawnbroker to give him \$500. When the pawnbroker is opening his safe in the back, someone strikes him on the head and knocks him out. When he comes to, he looks inside the safe and sees the diamond bracelet. The \$1,500 that was in there is gone but the bracelet is worth at least twice that much.

The Fatigues wake everyone up early and herd them out of the warehouse. When the outer doors are opened, the kids realize they were at a cargo depot at the airport. The girls and boys are separated. They will be transported by fours in crates. Hayden winds up in the same crate as Connor. The boys debate the pros and cons of being unwound or being dead. Connor remarks that if there wasn't unwinding, there would be more doctors available for research. Emby received new lungs when he was young. His parents died and his aunt signed the papers for him to be unwound. Diego says that whether you are alive or dead after unwinding depends on where your soul is. A soul cannot be broken up. It's indivisible. Connor wonders what happens to the conscious after unwinding. Some believe that only the soulless can be unwound. Diego thinks a person doesn't have a soul until he is loved.

They hear the landing gear engage. They all discuss who they would want their parts to go to if they wind up in a harvest camp as they land at an unknown destination.

Risa, in a crate with girls, has similar discussions about death and unwinding. She has a lot in common with Tina, another girl from a State. Risa hates that they all have the same name, "Ward" because they're wards of the state. A young kid checks on their welfare. He tells them they'll soon be out and that they're at the graveyard. Risa looks for Connor but doesn't seem him in the crowd of Unwinds. From the terrain, Risa determines that they are in the southwest. One crate of boys suffocated. She prays it wasn't Connor's crate. But she finally spots him.

A military man rides up on a golf cart and tells the kids that the Admiral is going to address them. The Admiral tells them that this will be their homes until they turn eighteen. He is a former admiral in the U.S. Navy. He vows that no one will get



unwound on his watch which brings cheers from the kids. It is a dictatorship and he is the dictator and makes up the rules. It's the best way to keep everyone hidden. Their skills will be assessed the next day. It is the first time in a long time that Risa has any hope.

More than a thousand miles away, Lev and CyFi are about to arrive in Joplin. CyFi is the titular leader of the two but Lev is the real brains. CyFi greatly suffers from the conflict within. CyFi feels near collapse, near losing his mind. He feels the boy in the corner of his mind, silent and sulking and angry. The kid can't find his memories in CyFi's mind. As they walk around Joplin, the boy recognizes an ice cream shop. At the high school, Cyrus senses that the kid was into fencing. He feels the other kid is taking over as they walk toward his house. CyFi says in a voice that's not his that he's going to be late for dinner. Cops and Cyrus' two dads are in front of the kid's house. The cops try to grab CyFi but he insists he must be let go. The parents recognize him and call him Tyler. He makes a beeline for the shed and grabs a shovel. Cy-Ty heads over to the corner of the yard and starts digging. He yanks a water-soaked briefcase out of the ground. Immediately Cy-Ty's brain seizes. He can't move. The briefcase is filled with precious jewels and jewelry. Tyler begs for forgiveness. He offers up the jewelry in exchange for not being unwound. CyFi realizes that Tyler doesn't know he'd already been unwound.

Lev shouts at the parents, "Tell him you won't unwind him." Lev threatens to bash their heads in with the shovel if they don't. The cops approach the angry Lev. Finally, the parents tell Tyler they won't have him unwound. CyFi's parents embrace him and the parents run inside their house. Lev is once again alone. He races off into the dark.

Analysis

Religion becomes an element of the story. The notice from eBay that they will not allow a posting for selling a soul underscores the distastefulness of the unwinding process. Is the seller someone destined for unwinding? In an emotional desperation is he trying to "save" his soul, trying to have some control as to where his soul winds up? A debate in the warehouse about the soul carries on this theme. One of the boys claims that the soul cannot be broken, cannot be unwound. Connor questions the human consciousness. If the body is cut into parts, what happens to the consciousness? Connor and the other boy are talking about the same thing even though they refer to it differently.

The morality of the process is a cogent theme that has a directly link to the previous section which dealt with the consciousness and perhaps the soul of CyFi's donor, Tyler, along with CyFi's inability to deal with the specter of his looming presence. By traveling to Tyler's hometown, he is allowed to embrace old memories. Lev's angry and emotional demands that Tyler's parents tell Tyler that they will not have him unwound is symbolic of Lev's own anguish over his parents selecting him for unwinding. Tyler's parents are proxies for Lev. He unleashes his anger at them and demonstrates that he knows that they were all taken, all deluded and used by the government. Although Tyler has already been unwound, hearing their vow that he won't be unwound gives him



some peace. Perhaps the soul and the consciousness cannot be divided. Where Tyler's soul will wind up is up for speculation.

Lev's angry outburst has freed him over pent up anger that's been building probably for years. He's smart enough to have figured out that being cut to bits has many cons and no pros. Lev has symbolically cut ties with his parents. He feels alone but he is free of the lies and deception that landed him there.

Discussion Question 1

What is the significance of the announcement that eBay makes about removing a posting? What core issue of the unwinding process does it evoke?

Discussion Question 2

What are elements of the philosophical debate that Connor has with other boys at the warehouse? What message is the author conveying through this conversation?

Discussion Question 3

What new characteristics does Lev display in Joplin? Is Lev's anger the result of his feelings for the kid in CyFi's head or is his anger more deeply rooted?

Vocabulary

meanders, collateral, belligerent, inexplicably, cranium, benevolent, undulate



Part Five: Graveyard

Summary

The graveyard is in the dry clear climate of the Arizona. It is a graveyard for airplanes. The government has no interest in the site, making it a perfect place to hide the kids. The Admiral's edicts are scrawled all over including, "My way is the only way," and "Your life is my gift to you. Treat it like one." The Unwinds are tasked with stripping the retired jets. The Admiral keeps his motivation for helping the kids to himself.

Five of the Unwinds most trusted by the Admiral are called "the Goldens" and are in charge. The tribunal assigned Risa to the galley. When the tribunal observes ability to stop a boy's bleeding, she is immediately promoted from dishwasher to medic. Risa feels that the Admiral has "given her back her right to exist." Connor is assigned to fixing mechanical and electrical things. Hayden tells Connor that the other kids like him because he has integrity. Connor's been getting into fewer fights. He attributes the change to Risa.

Connor thinks the Admiral is running a slave camp. Another boy points out that he's keeping them in one piece. Roland gets Connor aside and trash talks the Admiral. He heard that the Admiral's teeth came from an Unwind. The seed that Roland planted stays with Connor. He notices the Admiral's sparkling white teeth. Connor is shocked when he spots Lev arrive in a new group. Connor punches Lev in the eye for betraying them then tells him that he's glad he's alive.

The Admiral tells Connor that his name comes up a lot – for being able to fix things and for fighting. The Admiral is aware of Connor's dislike for him. He denies that he's running a slave camp and says he only wants to help the kids. Connor thinks that the Admiral wants the power to pick and choose "parts" he wants. The Admiral rips his teeth out. They are dentures – not some kid's teeth. The Admiral makes no profit from running the camp.

The Admiral shows Connor the dead bodies of his five Goldens sealed in a crate. Whoever killed them wants to dismantle the graveyard's power structure. Connor immediately thinks of Roland. The Admiral wants Connor to find out who killed them. Connor watches Roland who continues to spread rumors about the Admiral.

The Admiral fought in the Heartland War on the U.S. military side. Unwinding was proposed by the U.S. in a peace talk. The choice of terminating the unwanted without killing them appealed to both the Life and Choice factions. It was a success because people wanted parts. Unwinding became big business. The Admiral had his own troubled son, Harlan, unwound to set an example. The impact on the parents was never considered. The Admiral's wife left him. He helps the kids to atone for his mistakes. "Bit by bit" he is making things right.



Lev had survived for a month on his own. He began identifying himself as an Unwind not a tith. He became tough and streetwise. Lev joins a secret group consisting of Cleaver, Mai and Blaine who had messed with the Admiral. Lev must attest to his hatred for those who would unwind him and those who would use his parts. Lev decides he has the will to act on his profound anger. He takes the vow.

Connor tells Risa not to volunteer to be a Golden replacement. He doesn't want her to be a target. Suddenly, they are kissing and kissing again. Risa is worried about Lev; he frightens her. She misses the old Lev. Risa and Connor are surprised when Lev volunteers for a job on a pipeline in Alaska. Risa tries but fails to dissuade him from leaving. That afternoon a van takes Lev, Mai and Blaine away.

Emby is called to meet with the Admiral. Two men in dark suits are present. The Admiral tells him that because he's a very special boy he's going to be leaving the graveyard. He is being sent to be with the Admiral's ex-wife. One of the men refer to the Admiral as Admiral Dunfee. After Emby leaves with the men, the Admiral looks at a photo of his son, Harlan, also known as Humphrey. Roland suggests that the Admiral is having the missing Emby harvested; anyone could be his next victim. Connor thinks Roland killed Emby. Connor sends a note to Roland saying that he knows what he did. When they meet, Connor ambushes Roland, forcing him into the crate where the Golden's were found.

A search party fails to find Emby but discovers the Golden's in five fresh graves. The kids think that the Admiral did it. Roland and Connor are missing. Maybe the Admiral did them in. A mob storms the Admiral's jet. Risa brought aspirins to the Admiral and she's with him. The mob storms the Admiral's jet. Risa seals off the entrance. Someone cuts the power line to the jet. Everything goes dark. Connor accuses Roland of killing the Golden's and Emby. If Roland confesses, Connor will see to it that the Admiral spares his life. Roland says he has nothing to confess.

The commotion draws the attention of Cleaver; the mob turns on him. Connor and Hayden find Cleaver on the ground badly beaten. Before he dies, Cleaver tells Connor that he killed the Golden's and that Roland was not involved. Connor is able to save Risa but the Admiral is having a heart attack. Roland flies the Admiral to the hospital where the Admiral refuses to have a heart transplant. Roland tells the doctor to call the Juvey-cops on Connor and Risa.

Roland makes a deal to turn in 400 Unwinds in exchange for his freedom. To Roland's surprise, the cops have known about the Admiral's operation for over a year. The Admiral does them a favor by getting the Unwinds off the street. Since Connor is the Akron AWOL and Risa is an accomplice they can't let them return to the graveyard. They will be taken to the nearest harvest camp. Roland will share the same fate.



Analysis

Sabotage and manipulation are dominant elements in this portion of the story. Roland who has always liked being in charge of things and pushing his hefty weight around, so he resents the Admiral for selecting the five Goldens to run everything. To the Admiral, those he selected as Goldens were the cream of the crop. When Roland comes onto the scene, he sees an opportunity to elevate himself into what he considers a powerful position, but the Goldens and the Admiral are standing in his way. In order to gain power, Roland realizes that he must convince others that the Admiral is not on their side.

Roland and Connor have never gotten along because Connor is smarter than Roland and isn't intimidated by him. Roland resents that the other kids seem to look to Connor as their leader. One of the kids tells Connor that the kids like him because he has integrity which is something that Roland is completely lacking in. Connor is a symbol of what Roland aspires to be but is not capable of being. If he cannot attain a leadership role that Connor so naturally assumes, then he will achieve his goals by any means necessary.

Connor is a natural leader but he is not above being duped by someone out to manipulate him for their own purposes. Roland approaches Connor and trash talks the Admiral. He tells him to notice his sparkling white teeth. The inference, of course, is that the Admiral is benefit from the unwinding process by taking some young kid's teeth for himself.

Connor is skeptical but Roland keeps after him. Risa sees the Admiral as her savior. She is allowed to work as a medic and feels she has come into her own. Connor is more emotional and is still hurting from the abandonment he suffered as a result of his abandonment by his parents. He is willing to believe the worst of an adult or authority figure and, therefore, is vulnerable to Roland's gossip.

Guilt and remorse plague the Admiral. By confessing his role in creating the unwinding process, the Admiral is admitting his culpability for its evil. It is obvious that the guilt he feels about the process is the driving force behind his risky and unlawful operation that saves Unwinds from their scheduled demises.

Discussion Question 1

How does Risa's experience at the graveyard boost her hopes and dreams for the future? What does she feel the Admiral has given her?

Discussion Question 2

What is Roland saying about the Admiral, and how does it impact Connor? What is Roland's motivation?



Discussion Question 3

What does Connor believe the Admiral's hidden agenda to be? Why does the Admiral seek Connor out, and how does the Admiral prove that he's on the side of the Unwinders?

Vocabulary

fuselage, sequester, implicitly, virtuoso, niche, rancid, impassioned, foolhardy, predatory, dismantle, feigns, immersion, infirmary, redundant, mania, mayhem



Part Six: Unwound

Summary

The harvest camps are located in incredibly scenic areas and the grounds are well-maintained. Happy Jack Harvest Camp in Happy Jack, Arizona, is a model camp. The barbed-wire fence is hidden behind lush hibiscus hedges. The average stay for an Unwind is three weeks. Connor, Risa and Roland arrive with a police escort. When a troublesome Unwind arrives, he is publicly humbled. When the staff announces that Akron AWOL had arrived, he is turned into a legend.

Connor, Risa and Roland are all separated. They had paraded Connor through the grounds and humiliated him and baited him to make a misstep. Risa is assessed as being above average in intelligence and in good physical condition. Exercise is one of the main focuses of the camp. Their parts will be worth more if they're in good shape. The counselor is impressed that Risa can play the piano.

Connor wants to get it over with, but he doesn't want to upset Risa by going early to the Chop Shop. Roland is exploiting Connor's celebrity by spreading lies about how he and Connor stole a helicopter and freed hundreds of Unwinds. A kid named Dalton has been there six months. Band members last longer. Risa just became their new keyboard player. Connor spots a kid that looks like Lev in a group of tithes but figures it's just his imagination. Connor had seen Lev. He has an appointment for unwinding in thirteen days. Risa plays with the band on top of the Chop Shop. She can see the "red carpet" which is the path that the kids take to their unwinding.

Roland and Connor get into a fight. Roland is stronger and overpowers Connor then starts to strangle him. But Roland can't go through with it. The tithes are living in luxury. There are pastors and leaders of all faiths in the tithing house. Lev participates just enough in Bible study not to draw suspicion. Lev, Mai and Blaine had all been captured a few days apart. Lev feels comfort knowing that Connor and Risa are safe at the Graveyard and will go on with their lives.

Lev has a secret meeting with Mai and Blaine to plan their escape. Blaine gives Lev and Mai band-aids that are actually detonators. There had never been a job in Alaska. They were taken to a run-down house where people plotted unthinkable things. It was wrong and twisted but it suited Lev. Connor meets Risa in the girls' bathroom. They kiss and embrace. Connor feels content knowing that if they had the chance in another time and place they would have made it together.

They take Roland away because his rare blood type is in demand. Roland fights and screams all the way. The guard tells Roland that Connor is scheduled for unwinding that afternoon. Once inside the Chop Shop, Roland is secured to the operating table. Roland is given pain killers and won't feel a thing but the law requires that he stay awake. Over the next several hours, a team of surgeons is at work on different parts of his body. The



medical staff maintains communication with Roland. Memories that he hasn't had for years flood his mind. Then it's over.

Lev runs into Connor. A pastor tells him that Connor is being unwound that afternoon. Lev silently vows to stop it. He tells Blaine they must make their break right away. The administration knows that there are clappers but don't know who they are yet. Blaine will find Mai and meet that afternoon. Lev grabs the detonators and a sock from his cubby. He's detained in the counselor's office. Mai and Blaine trick a guard and get into the Chop Shop. He didn't notice the band-aids on their palms. Guards come to pick up Connor for unwinding. He tells the guards that he'll walk by himself. He is going to appreciate his last minutes on earth with dignity.

Mai is a clapper who is driven by vengeance from lost love. He was one of the boys who smothered on the way to the camp. The Goldens had buried those boys and made jokes about them. Mai convinced Cleaver and Blaine to kill them. She is in the storage room of the Chop Shop. Blaine is in the north wing. Lev finally is allowed to leave the counselor's office and races to the Chop Shop. He sees Connor walking down the red carpet and breaks through the crowd that has gathered. Lev tries to catch up with Connor but he's too late. Connor steps inside the Chop Shop.

A guard spots Blaine and shoots him with his tranq gun. Blaine and the guard are instantly incinerated when the tranq bullet hits the six quarts of liquid explosive coursing through Blaine's body. It shakes the building like an earthquake. She claps three times and sets off the detonators. The building collapses. Risa and the band plunge into the smoky abyss. Lev, standing in front of the shop, tries but he can't clap. Connor tumbles out of the building. He lost an eye and his arm is crushed but he's alive. The kids rebel against the guards and by sheer number overwhelm them. Lev rushes to Connor and uses his white shirt to make tourniquets to stop the bleeding. Then Lev races back toward the shop.

Analysis

Defeat and the acceptance of death are the focuses of this segment of the story. Despite all their efforts and the efforts of those in the safe house network, Connor and Risa are captured and sent to a harvest camp. Fatalism is the overarching sentiment that looms over the Happy Jack Harvest Camp. Their dreams are dashed and their nightmares have come true. Tragedy and sadness envelop the Unwinds as they wait for an end that is all too near. Risa is made the new keyboard player in the band that plays on top of the Chop Shop. As the Unwinds are led to their unwinding, the band plays loudly to distract the others who will share the same fate in the days and weeks to come. It's reminiscent of the band playing on the Titanic as it was sinking in the Atlantic.

Still, there is a survivalist instinct in some of the kids. Dalton who plays in the band feels there is still hope for him. His plan is to outsmart the camp administrators by jumping off the roof when he's nearly eighteen. If he lives, his recovery will not be complete until he's eighteen and therefore ineligible for unwinding. Dalton is deluding himself. The



camp administrators can count, too. Their goal and task is to harvest as many young parts as possible. Dalton will not win that psychological chess game.

Revenge and hatred drive Mai and Blaine in their plans to blow up the Chop Shop. But when Lev sees that Connor is severely injured in the blast, it is real friendship and selflessness that compels him to rush to his side and save his life. Like the others, the road for Lev has been a tortuous one but he has matured and developed into a strong youngster with valorous characteristics. There probably could have been a less precarious pathway for him to achieve those advancements.

Discussion Question 1

How does Lev delude the counselor's at Camp Happy Jack? What are his real plans and who will help him pull them off? How has Lev changed?

Discussion Question 2

Why do the guards take Roland before they take Connor who presents more of a problem to them? What reason does the counselor give Roland for not allowing him to see a priest?

Discussion Question 3

Describe the macabre unwinding procedure. Why must Roland stay awake during the process but feels no pain? Why do the medical professionals seem cavalier about their despicable tasks?

Vocabulary

hibiscus, imbecile, vantage, prodigal, detonators, kinship, commune, stigmata

Part Seven: Consciousness

Summary

Connor comes to in a hospital room. He's in pain and there's a huge bandage over one eye. A nurse tells him that he's been in a medically induced coma for two weeks. She calls him Mr. Mullard. He thinks he might be in someone else's brain. The nurse tells him that the ID belongs to a guard named Elvis Mullard. Connor gets it. They weren't able to save his arm so he had a graft. He also received a new eye. He looks at his hand and sees that the knuckles are thicker than his own. The sense of touch is normal. The arm has a tattoo of a tiger shark.

Risa had been pinned under a large beam and is in a contraption in the hospital. Connor visits her. He tells her that Lev saved his life by stopping the bleeding. She can tell he doesn't know that Lev was one of the clappers – the one that didn't explode. Risa is paralyzed from the waist down. The disabled aren't unwound. She is refusing the transplant of a new spine. She recalls how Roland tried to molest her with Connor's new arm. But Roland no longer controls the arm.

Not far away, Lev is in a padded cell with a thick steel blast door. The room is kept cool to keep his body temperature down. He's wrapped in layers of fire-proof insulation. His hands are tied away from one another. All these precautions are taken so he can't detonate himself. He's had four transfusions. He'll need more before the explosives are gone. Pastor Dan visits him. He tells Lev that CyFi is making a lot of noise about unwinding. Anti-unwinding protests are being held in Washington. CyFi testified before Congress. Dan shows him a magazine; Lev is on the cover because he's a hero who pulled people out from the burning building and a clapper who didn't clap. He won't be unwound but may have to spend a few years in juvenile detention and house arrest. Whose house will he be in, he asks. His parents rejected custody but his brother Marcus is petitioning for guardianship. Dan quit the church. He still believes in God but not one that tolerates human tithing. That's the God that Lev wants to believe in.

Harlan Dunfee lived on a sprawling Texas ranch until he was sixteen. He got into trouble and his parents ultimately signed him over for unwinding. On Harlan's twenty-sixth birthday, there is a party attended by hundreds. Zachary, also known as Emby, is there. He has Harlan's left lung. In Arizona a plane has just arrived at the Graveyard. There are four kids per crate. Hayden opens the crate and the Unwinds step out. A boy with a scarred face, E. Robert Mullard, addresses them. He tells them everyone calls him Connor.

The Admiral never recovered enough to return to the Graveyard. He's on the Texas farm in the care of his wife who left him years before. Emby is there, too. Connor tells the new arrivals that they will live there until they're seventeen – a new law reduced the aged from eighteen. Their movement is dedicated to infiltrating harvest camps and uniting Unwinds all across the country. They have a right to live. His words are met with



cheers. The Admiral looks at the crowd and weakly says the name of his son. A man touches his throat and says, “Dad?” His wife says, “Welcome home,” to all of them.

Back in the desert, Risa plays the grand piano sitting in her wheelchair. She is happy that the music lifts the spirits of the new arrivals. Connor has a lot to do – changing the world and all. But at last he has hope.

Analysis

The author uses a good dose of irony in this last section. Connor loses an eye and suffers a severely crushed arm in the explosion of the Chop Shop which was perpetrated by the Clappers. He is rendered unconscious and is kept in a medically-induced coma for two weeks. During those two weeks, he has an eye transplant and his arm, which had to be amputated, was replaced with a new arm. The new arm is bigger than his other arm and has a familiar tattoo on it. As Connor flexes his new hand it appears that Roland did indeed survive the unwinding. The very process that Connor had been fighting against has benefited him. Surely he has to struggle with that result.

Risa was trapped under a beam and refuses to have a spinal implant. She is too principled to have the spine of an Unwind heal her broken back. She'd prefer to be in a wheelchair. It wasn't a matter of principle for Connor. He was unconscious and had no say in having the new eye and arm. He wasn't awake to give permission but in this story of cutting people to bits that would probably be the last thing on the mind of the medical staff.

It took one of the Unwinds to save the Admiral as it turned out. Emby reminded the Admiral of his son Harlan, or Humphrey as he became known. In a sense, Emby made Harlan live on after his unwinding. It was the remorse for having Harlan unwound that drove the Admiral to run the graveyard operation. Emby has been a healing force in the Admiral's family. His wife returned to him and now, in a sense, they have their son back.

Discussion Question 1

What is ironic about the injuries Connor sustained in the explosion and the treatment he received? Why don't the authorities give Risa a transplant for her injury?

Discussion Question 2

What is the story of Harlan Dunfee? How has the Admiral's family begun to heal itself? What was Emby's role in that recovery?



Discussion Question 3

What are the outcomes for Connor, Risa and Lev? How did their experience impact and change each of them?

Vocabulary

mummify, volatile, purgatory, coalesces, sonata



Characters

Connor Lassiter

Connor Lassiter is the main character in this futuristic story of a new way to live and a new way to die. As the story unfolds, Connor is frantic because he accidentally found orders signed by his parents for his unwinding. He has reached that rebellious time in life when he and his parents argue all the time. When he discovers that they have taken the easy way out and signed him over to the government for unwinding, he has but one option which is to run away. He knows the Juvey-cops will be after him because he now belongs to the government. But it's better than facing the unwinding process when he will be surgically cut to pieces, his parts harvested and used by others in need of transplants and grafts. If he can stay hidden for two years, he will be free to carry on his life. Individuals eighteen and older are not eligible for unwinding.

Connor is smart, resourceful and physically fit enough to elude the cops and even overpower one of them. After he is chased by a Juvey-cop and pelted with bullets from his tranq gun, Connor ambushes the cop, takes his tranq gun and shoots him with it. Connor becomes a legend among Unwinders and is known as the Akron AWOL. Connor becomes a leader among the hunted and teams up with two others marked for this strange ritual – Risa, another Unwinder, and Lev, a Tithe.

Although Connor is ultimately captured and is within minutes of being unwound, the strong bond he established with his cohorts pays off. Although hurt and damaged, Connor lives as an undivided and takes over the operation of one of the Unwinder safe houses and is dedicated to saving as many Unwinders as possible while others work at having the despicable laws changed to allow everyone to live out their natural lives.

Risa Ward

Risa Ward is a “ward” of the state. All wards of the state have the same last name which fittingly is “Ward.” She is an excellent piano player who worries over the relatively few mistakes she made during a performance. She knows she will pay for it. A few weeks later, she is called into the administrative office to appear before a tribunal. She is told that she has reached her potential at the State House and must... move on. The thirteen-year-old orphan is very bright and knows what that means. She is being scheduled for unwinding at a harvesting camp. Life as she knows it will soon be ending.

During the bus ride to the harvesting camp she is able to escape when the bus has an accident. It is caused by two young boys who dart across the interstate. She hides in the woods and is discovered by one of the boys on the interstate. He recognizes her as an Unwind because he's an Unwind, too. They are both on the run. He convinces her that their chances are better if they join forces. Another young boy, Lev, is also running away with them.



One of Risa's tasks at the State House was taking care of infants. When the youngsters find a storked baby on a doorstep they take it with them. Risa cares for the baby like it's her own. She must part with the baby when the Unwinds are given the chance to hide from authorities in a series of safe houses. Ultimately, their travels lead them to the graveyard which is a large safe house run by a former Navy Admiral who is devoted to saving Unwinds and allowing them to survive to their eighteenth birthday when they can claim their freedom. She is made a medic there and has found her purpose in life. She is grateful to the graveyard and the Admiral for giving her the first glint of hope for a bright future that she ever possessed.

The kids are found out, however, and are taken to Happy Jack Harvesting Camp. The "Happy" in the name is an oxymoron when considering that the purpose of the camp is to dice Unwinds up in little parts and harvest them for others in need of transplants or grafts. Risa is able to elude her unwinding and she survives the camp in a way that she would have never expected.

Levi Calder

Levi "Lev" Calder is thirteen and is celebrating his impending unwinding. He is a tithes – a child marked for unwinding since birth. Tithes are considered an elite group. They are special children whose purpose in life is to serve God. Lev, like all tithes, has been taught all his life that it is an honor to be tithed and he looks forward to it. However, when he comes into contact with Connor and Risa, his point of view begins to change drastically. Ultimately, he comes to the determination that he has a right to live and that the God he wants to worship does not believe in human tithing.

Roland

Roland is an Unwind and meets Connor and Risa at a safe house ran by Sonia, an old antique dealer. Roland is big and aggressive and likes to be in charge. To show his toughness, he has a tiger shark tattoo on his arm. He envies Connor who the other kids look up to as a leader.

The Admiral

The Admiral runs the Graveyard. It is ostensibly a "graveyard" for old jets that is located in a remote location in the Arizona desert. His covert operation is to try to save the lives of Unwinds and keep them safe until they turn eighteen and have passed the age for unwinding.



Emby

Emby is an Unwind who suffers from asthma. He was a recipient of a part from an unwind when he was born. He reminds the Admiral of his son and plays an important role in the Admiral's personal life.

Cleaver

Cleaver is an adult and the helicopter pilot at the graveyard. He also keeps an eye on the kids. He is an anarchist who loves chaos and "messing" with people and rebels against the unwinding ritual as well as the Admiral's operation. When he is suspected of betraying the kids he is beaten to death. Just before he dies, he admits to having killed the Admiral's five Golden's.

Mai

Mai is a pink-haired Asian girl with a chip on her shoulder. The chip may be justified because she is an Unwinder who doesn't want to be unwound. She plots with Cleaver and Blaine and ultimately with Lev to put a stop to the unwinding process and escape with their lives. She is transformed into a Clapper.

Blaine

Blaine is in league with Lev and Mai who abort the scheduled unwinding of camp hero, Connor Lassiter. Blaine tries to warn a cop not to shoot his tranq gun at him but the cop ignores him. When the tranq bullet hits Blaine it causes a huge explosion. Blaine is a Clapper who has liquid explosives coursing through his body.

Hannah Steinberg

Hanna Steinberg is the teacher at the school where Connor, Risa and Lev went into hiding. When she realizes that they are Unwinders, she helps them elude the Juveycops who are after them so that they can escape.

Dalton

Dalton is the leader of the band at the Happy Jack Harvest Camp. He plans to jump off the roof of the Chop Shop when he's near his eighteenth birthday. If he doesn't die, he'll have to recover from serious injuries. While he's recovering, he'll turn eighteen and will no longer be eligible for unwinding.



Marcus

Marcus is Lev's older brother. Marcus gets drunk at Lev's posh party celebrating his thirteenth birthday and his impending unwinding. Marcus refuses to celebrate the awful destiny that awaits his little brother. When Lev is found and freed from his unwinding, Marcus begins the process of becoming his legal guardian.

Cyrus Finch

Cyrus Finch, or CyFi as it is called, is Lev's traveling companion after Lev is separated from Connor and Risa. The temporal lobe of another kid was transplanted in CyFi's brain. He suffers from sensing the presence and unrest of the original owner of the lobe. It also compels him to cheat and steal things he never did before. Lev and CyFi travel to Joplin, Missouri, where he is able to confront this boy by returning to his hometown.



Symbols and Symbolism

Bill of Life

The Bill of Life was passed in a peace settle of the Second Civil War which is also known as the Heartland War. It was a battle fought over a single issue. The new law satisfied both the pro-choice and pro-life armies. This law led to a popular process known as unwinding.

Unwinders

Unwinders are kids between the ages of thirteen and eighteen whose parents have agreed to retroactively abort them in a process called unwinding. Unwinders are taken into custody by governmental authorities for their unwinding. Life as they know it ends for the Unwinders during the process although the authorities claim they “live on” because their parts are harvested for others in need of transplants. Unwinding has become a popular and accepted practice.

Human Tithing

Some children are selected by their parents at birth to be tithes. They are considered very special children, the chosen, whose life is dedicated to God. A tithe is a member of an elite group who is catered to during his or her entire life. He is taught how special he is and that the culmination of his purposeful life is to undergo unwinding at the age of thirteen.

Clappers

Clappers are feared by everyone. When wild-eyed kids start clapping everyone scatters. There are four types of Clappers: those who feel their acts of violence are smiled upon by God; those who believe they can change the world; Clappers who want to share their misery with the world; and, finally Clappers who are driven by vengeance. Clappers have been injected with liquid explosives which run through their blood streams. They secrete detonators in the palms of their hands and when they clap once, twice, three times... they and everyone and everything around them are blown to bits.

The Fatigues

Adults called “Fatigues” are in charge of the network of safe houses that has been established to try to save the lives of teenagers who have been marked for unwinding. These individuals are called Fatigues because they wear khaki military clothing and because they always seem exhausted. In the scheme of things, they are good guys



even though they are harsh and militaristic. They are risking their lives by helping Unwinders.

The Safe Houses

Connor, Risa and Lev are protected by being sent to a series of safe houses that exist in a secretive network dedicated to helping Unwinds survive their curse and live to their eighteenth birthday. The antique shop is a safe house as is the warehouse and the graveyard. The protagonists in this story would not have made it without them.

Storking

The “storking” laws require that an individual who finds a newborn baby on their doorstep must take it in and raise it. If the person who is “storking” their baby is caught in the act, that individual must keep and raise the baby. The government is encouraging young girls to have babies to keep their inventory of harvested parts robust.

The Band

The band at the Happy Jack Harvest Camp plays on the roof of the Chop Shop where the unwinding take place. The administrators of the camp reason that the spirits of those awaiting unwinding will be lifted as the band plays loudly during unwinding processes. Risa is chosen to be the band’s new keyboard player.

The Chop Shop

The Chop Shop is where the Unwinds are unwound. The Unwind is taken into the shop and secured to an operating table as a team of twelve surgeons; nine surgical assistants and four nurses go to work to take the “patient” apart piece by piece. The Unwind is given a strong pain killer but per the law must remain away during the process.

The Goldens

The five Goldens are the favorites of the Admiral and are tasked with interviewing new arrivals, assigning them tasks and generally running the operation. The Admiral is aghast when he finds all five of the Goldens suffocated to death and crammed into a cargo crate. He recruits Connor to figure out who did it.



Settings

The Antique Shop

Hannah Steinberg, a teacher at the school where the Unwinds had been hiding, tells them to see Sonia at an antique shop on Fleming Street in a small town where Connor, Risa and Lev find themselves after eluding the Juvey-police. The antique shop is in an older part of town on a tree-lined street. The streets in the area are strewn with hundreds of leaves but the residents want to keep the trees because they form a shady canopy over the street.

The antique shop appears to be an antique itself. The white paint is peeling off the front door. A bell rings announcing their presence when Connor pushes open the door. While the kids wait for Sonia, they look around at the displays. There are antiques and gadgets from their grandparents' eras including iPods and a plasma TV.

The antique shop is a cover for the Unwinder safe house that is located in the basement. Sonia has Connor move a trunk off a large rug. Under the rug is a trapdoor that leads downstairs. The steps down are rickety. There are canned goods on the shelves and one bathroom. Sonia tells them they will stay in the cramped basement area where other kids are already holed up until the ice cream man comes to take them away.

The Graveyard

After the kids are taken from the warehouse safe house warehouse they arrive at what everyone refers to as "the graveyard." It naturally has an ominous connotation especially given the devastating future that the Unwinds face. Connor, Risa and Lev and the other Unwinds are welcomed to the graveyard by the Admiral who operates what is actually another safe house located in the Arizona desert. They quickly learn that the graveyard is actually a repository for decommissioned military aircraft.

The Admiral's goal is to hide Unwinds until their eighteenth birthdays when the threat of unwinding no longer exists. The kids are tasked with stripping the large planes as well as other chores around the graveyard. The official business of the graveyard is a thriving one. Old planes are used for various purposes in the graveyard. The Admiral has made his residence in an old Air-Force One jet. The only structure that is not a plane or part of one is Work Call where the kids gather to hear opportunities for jobs they can volunteer for in other areas of the country.

The graveyard is in a remote area of the Arizona desert and is surrounded on all sides by miles and miles of desert. It is a perfect place to hide Unwinds.



Happy Jack Harvest Camp

The Happy Jack Harvest Camp is located in Happy Jack, Arizona. It is a perfect model for what a human harvesting camp should be. It is located in northern Arizona where there are pine-covered ridges and breathtaking views of the Sedona Mountains. Lumberjacks had founded the town which is reflected in the town's name.

The boys' dormitory is painted light blue and the girls' is painted in pink and purple. The barbed-wire fence to keep the kids there is hidden behind a lush hibiscus hedge. They are first taken to the welcome center. There are sports fields and dormitory buildings nearby. Since Risa is a pianist she is made the keyboard player for the camp's band. The band plays on top of the Chop Shop which is where the kids are unwound by a team of surgeons. The tithes at the camp are treated like first-class passengers... on the Titanic. They are kept separate from the lowly Unwinds and enjoy plush accommodations, a movie theater, a pool and gourmet food.

The path that the Unwinds are brought down on the way to their scheduled unwinding is referred to as the "red carpet." The band plays loudly as the unwinding take place in a pathetic effort to raise the spirits of those who await the same fate.

The Warehouse

After the kids are transported from the antique store, they are placed in a large warehouse that has no windows or exits. They are guarded by Fatigues who carefully monitor their activities. The warehouse is already crowded with dozens of Unwinds. When it is time to leave the warehouse, the doors are opened to reveal that the warehouse is on the cargo dock of an airport.

Joplin, Missouri

CyFi and Lev walk hundreds of miles to Joplin, Missouri. CyFi was given the temporal lobe of another kid. The other kid has a presence in his mind. He senses that the kid doesn't know he's dead and is confused about being in someone else's mind. CyFi is struggling with the ordeal himself and wants to confront the kid with his hometown and parents in hopes of freeing the kid by recognizing that he's dead.

Themes and Motifs

Choice v. Life

An underlying theme in the story of the Unwinds is the modern-day issue of pro-life versus pro-choice sentiments. The concept of unwinding had arisen during what was termed “The Second Civil War” or the Heartland War. This war was fought on one overarching issue much as the first civil war was. The issue was different, of course. The first civil war was fought over slavery although there were other minor issues involved. The second civil war was fought over abortion.

The controversial subject of abortion is one that rages today in the hearts and minds of certain sectors of the population and in the halls of Congress. The options of choice or life are so disparate that the possibility of any compromise seems impossible. It proved to be impossible in the place and time that “Unwind” takes place. However, a bizarre proposal by the U.S. Military to establish the unwinding process that is designed to satisfy both pro-life and pro-choice factions is accepted by both sides and thus ends the war.

“Unwind” not only tells the story of doomed teenagers in some future time and place, it points up the impossibility of ever finding common ground between those who advocate abortion and those who abhor and detest it. The “unwinding” solution that ends the Second Civil War confirms the impossibility of compromise in today’s abortion debate. “Unwinding” surely would never be a solution in the real world and the message to the reader and to those who advocate the right to choose and the pro-choice segment of society is that there is no solution – no compromise. The fight will rage on forever. The chances that it ends in the Second Civil War in some sense seems remotely possible. But retroactive abortion and duping the population into believing that harvesting their young is in some warped sense keeping them alive will never emerge as a viable ending to the abortion controversy. Perhaps “Unwinding” is a warning against over-zealousness on both sides of the debate.

Selflessness

One of the major themes that emerges from “Unwind” is that of selflessness. The Unwinds are marked for death although the authorities try to delude the unfortunate youngsters insisting that they will not die when they are unwound. Rather, they are told that they will be alive but in a “divided state.” Connor and Risa are too smart to buy that faulty reasoning. They understand that for all intents and purposes, they will be dead. Throughout the tale, the main characters who are destined for this ritualistic demise tend to display more care and concern for the other victims of this cruel law that takes place in an undetermined place and time. These youngsters are not fatalistic; they would rather live and continue on in their current state. Neither are they naturally nihilistic but overwhelming circumstances can generate great change. Their concern



tends to focus largely on the others who share the same fate. Perhaps it's a way of distracting themselves from their own dire futures.

This overarching element of the story provides a positive message for the good in humankind especially as it is juxtaposed against the evil that has emerged in the government in the form of the unwinding laws. While Connor is virtually and literally running for his life, he risks capture when he spots Lev who he immediately recognizes is in jeopardy and snatches him from a non-existent future. Perhaps Connor feels compelled to help Lev who is a few years younger than he is. When Connor encounters Risa, he also comes to her rescue. He tells her emphatically that she cannot make it alone. Later, when his unwinding is only weeks away he considers getting it over with sooner but doesn't want to upset Risa by going before he has to go.

When Lev matures and realizes that he had been duped about unwinding, his whole focus is on saving Connor. He realizes that Connor rescued him from certain death and now that he has a different perspective on the entire unwinding process, he is determined to save Connor. He is even willing to blow himself up to do so. The bond that these characters had with one another was borne from fear and desperation but it ultimately transformed into real emotional connections. If they can't live perhaps they can do something so that their friends can survive.

Exploitation

Exploitation is a strong theme in "Unwind." The concept of unwinding was presented in peace talks during the Second Civil War. It was proposed because it would ostensibly satisfy the beliefs of both the pro-life and the pro-choice warring factions. It was sold to the pro-life proponents as a way to accept abortion as not the end of life but as a way to perpetuate life by unwinding or cutting into parts youngsters who were selected for the process. These young people would live on in many ways and even give new life to the ailing and injured.

The pro-choice advocates were convinced that the process was actually a retroactive abortion. It would virtually wipe the life away. That person would be non-existent in its natural state; rather, it would still live but in a divided state. While it's difficult to believe that anyone would buy into this macabre process, the story is sci-fi fiction and the reader must suspend disbelief in order to get the most from it. What is not difficult to believe is that the process was lucrative for the government and wanted to perpetuate and expand it.

Other than the government, no one was spared from being exploited in "Unwinding." The parents were duped and convinced that the process was a just, fair and philanthropic. Mankind was the benefactor. The parents were also compensated for their "sacrifices" and were given an excuse to get rid their lives of difficult teens. Young women were exploited by being encouraged to have babies so that the government could have a robust inventory of bodies to harvest when they turned thirteen. Storking laws were enacted so that young single mothers who couldn't afford to take care of their



babies could continue to have babies and leave them on the doorstep of unsuspecting citizens. Those who found a bundle on their doorsteps by law had to care for them and thus were exploited by the government to fulfill their goals.

Abandonment

Abandonment is a theme in this story of Unwinders who are youngsters destined to live in a divided state and become parts for those in needs of transplants and grafts. Connor is abandoned by his parents who fundamentally give up on the sixteen-year-old. He is argumentative and goes off for hours to parts unknown. They have the option of making a nice fee and getting rid of their problem teen. They sign the order that will make Connor an Unwind and turn him over to the government for his unwinding prior to his eighteenth birthday.

He is hurt when he happens upon the paperwork. Although it was difficult to read, it was the warning that saved his life. He ran away from his heartless parents never to see them again. When Sonia forces Connor to write a letter to his parents, all the hurt, anguish and outrage spill out of him. He is able to vent his feelings in writing but the damage that abandonment does to him will last perhaps even for a lifetime.

Lev was taught all his life that he was a chosen one that his purpose in life was to serve God. The way he was to serve God was to undergo an unwinding when he was thirteen. God would smile upon him because he would be responsible for saving the lives of the dying and curing the sick and injured. His parents may have been gullible when they chose Lev for this “honor” when he was born but what happened to their basic parental instincts? Those instincts abandoned them and they abandoned Lev as parents.

Fear

Fear is part of this story from beginning to the end. The story begins with Connor Lassiter running away from home because he’s accidentally discovered that his parents are turning him over to the government for an unwinding. He is naturally fearful of this turn of events because it means the end of life... at least as he knows it. As he runs, he must look over his shoulder ever fearful that the Juvey-cops or his parents or other authorities may be at his back ready to nab him.

Connor is terrified when confronted with a Juvey-cop in the forest who is preparing to arrest him. He’s a resourceful boy and finds the courage to grab the tranq gun from the cop and blast him. Now he has more to fear. Not only is he fleeing from his date with death the Juvey-cops will be after him for shooting one of their own. Surely he’ll get it one way or the other.

When Lev turns Connor and Risa in to the cops, Connor and Risa hide in fear until they get help from an unexpected source who gives them information about an underground contact who can help hide them. Although they find support and are placed into a network that shelters Unwinders from being unwound, at every turn there is uncertainty,

doubt and, of course, fear. The fear for Connor is never greater than when he is taken toward his unwinding. That fear is finally abated when he is rescued by a surprising source.

Styles

Point of View

“Unwinding” by Neal Shusterman is a work of fiction that is told in third person omniscient. Using this narrative, the author provides the thoughts, intentions and motivations of most of the characters which gives the reader insight into the story and plot. The main focus is on the protagonist, Connor Lassiter, and the other two main characters, Risa Ward and Lev Calder. Since these three characters are in a dire situation, having the vantage point of their reactions to their ordeal as well as their hopes and dreams for their future is a way the author elicits interest and empathy for them and thus engages the reader.

The reader feels for the main characters and develops an emotional connection to them. This link will compel the reader to stay with the story because he wants to learn the fate of these characters. The reader is also provided with the thoughts and motivations of even minor characters such as a teacher and a guard who both appear only in limited episodes. The role of these minor characters could have been conveyed through a limited omniscient narrative; however, the author’s approach works. Using this narrative also allows for expository writing which is necessary in a science-fiction tale because the reader is naturally not familiar with the new world created by the writer.

Shusterman is the author of many other novels for young adults including “The Skinjacker Trilogy.” His novel “Downsiders” was nominated for multiple reading awards. He is also a screenwriter and is known for his scripts for “Animorphs” and “Goosebumps.” As the father of four, he undoubtedly has intimate knowledge of what kids like to read.

Language and Meaning

“Unwinding” by Neal Shusterman takes place in a future world that is marked by new words, new laws, new classifications of individuals and societal mores. The title, “Unwinding” refers to the process that surgically harvests parts of youngsters between thirteen and eighteen. The parents of these kids, known as “Unwinders” have agreed to retroactively abort their children in this macabre process known as unwinding.

Unwinders are taken into custody by governmental authorities for their scheduled unwinding. Although parents ease their consciences with the government’s propaganda that their children will live on in a divided state, in reality they are sending their children to their deaths. Their parts will be harvested to be used by others who are in need of grafts or transplants.

The legislation passed in The Bill of Life resulted from peace talks during The Second Civil War also known as the Heartland War. U.S. military officials proposed a compromise between the two warring factions – the Pro-Life Army and the Pro-Choice



Brigade. Unwinding would diminish their differences, they were told. Pro-lifers would be satisfied because the process would allow life to endure. Pro-choice proponents would be satisfied because children could be retroactively aborted. And best of all, there would be a plethora of organs and body parts that could be used by the sick and injured. Unwinding became a common and accepted practice.

“Tithes” were children chosen at birth for unwinding. They were considered elite and special and dedicated to serving God. They were convinced to look forward to their unwinding when they turned thirteen. Clappers were youngsters who had liquid explosives coursing through their bodies. They placed detonators in their palms and when they clapped enthusiastically, they blew themselves up and everyone and everything around them.

Goldens were the five Unwinders chosen by the Admiral to run the graveyard. They were in charge of assigning tasks to newly arrivals and monitoring their movements and activities. Fatigues served as managers at Unwinder safe houses. They were called “Fatigues” for two reasons: they wore military garb and they were tired all the time. Police who hunted down runaway Unwinders were known as Juvey-cops. They brought down fleeing Unwinders with bullets from their tranq guns.

Structure

“Unwinding” by Neal Shusterman is separated into seven main sections. In Part One, Triplicate, explains why the three protagonists – Connor, Risa and Lev –face unwinding and how they react to it. In Part Two, Storked, a young girl leaves her infant on the doorstep of a stranger who by law must keep and raise the baby. Part Three, Transit describes the difficulties the teenagers face as they elude the police and runaway from their gruesome destinies.

Part Four, Destinations, explains the different destinations that the main characters reach and what their prospects for survival are. Part Five, The Graveyard, is the ultimate safe house where Unwinds are kept until their eighteenth birthday. It is the first episode that gives real hope for the survival of the youngsters. Part Six, Unwound, describes the macabre unwinding process that Roland undergoes. Connor, Risa and Lev all attain their own brand of freedom in this section. Although things don’t work out exactly as they would have planned, they survive and are free to live out their natural lives.

The story is told in a basically chronological order with very few references to previous times or experiences. The author often writes without naming the characters he is writing about. For example, instead of writing that the teacher where the kids are hiding spots Connor and Risa with the baby, the section is written with references to her finding “a boy and a girl” instead of using their names. This approach is used throughout the story although it is not a dominant motif. The reason the author writes in this manner is because he is writing from the perspective of the teacher who does not know the names of the children. The purpose of this format is to maintain some level of mystique.



Quotes

He tries not to think about the fact that he'll never see the summer again. At least not as Connor Lassiter. He still can't believe that his life is being stolen from him at sixteen.

-- Narrator (Part 1, Chapter 1 paragraph 1)

Importance: This passage captures the premise of this adventure story which features Connor Lassiter as the protagonist.

He's had his entire life to prepare for this – it should have been enough. He knew he was a tithe from the time he was little. 'You're special,' his parents had always told him. 'Your life will be to serve God, and mankind.'

-- Narrator (Part 1, Chapter 3 paragraph 42)

Importance: Lev was destined to be unwound from the time he was born. He was a tithe. Even though he knew it all along, he is not prepared when the time comes. He's only thirteen and he knows that his parts will be harvested.

What if they don't want to take us to be unwound. What if they want us dead?

-- Risa (Part 2, Chapter 11 paragraph 21)

Importance: Risa fears that the police are not publishing their photos because they don't want to track them down for harvesting. They want to kill them. It is the first hint that the kids are running for their lives in more than one way.

You got it in your heart to run from unwinding, ain't no one can tell you it's the wrong thing to do, even if it is against the law. The good Lord wouldn't have put it in your heart if it wasn't right.

-- Cyrus Finch (Part 3, Chapter 21 paragraph 3)

Importance: While Lev's separated from Connor and Risa, he travels with Cyrus Finch while he's searching for them. Cyrus tries to assure him that it's okay to not want to be unwound.

It's what everyone thinks about, but no one ever dares to ask out loud. 'So, then,' says Hayden, 'if every part of you is alive but inside someone else... are you alive or dead.'

-- Narrator/Hayden (Chapter 27 paragraph Part 4, Chapter 29)

Importance: This passage is the essence of this story of life or death. Is being technically alive because your parts live on in someone else the same as being alive in the normal sense? No one wants to face this question because they know that once they are unwound they will be dead.

The boy in the corner of his head doesn't talk to him in words. He feels. He emotes. He doesn't understand that he's only a part of another kid.

-- Narrator (Part Three, Chapter 30 paragraph 3)



Importance: CyFi suffers from having the temporal lobe of another kid. He feels the presence of the original owner of the lobe and that the kid suffers just as CyFi is. Part of the kid is alive in a section of CyFi's brain. That part of him does not accept his death.

They are filled with an insatiable fury, and beneath it is a strange joy that the anger can finally be released. And beneath the joy is more fury.

-- Narrator (Part Five, Chapter 45 paragraph 2)

Importance: The Unwinds at the graveyard believe that the Admiral has betrayed them and plans to harvest them for his own purposes. They are taking out all the anger and hurt they have harbored for being made into Unwinds on him.

Nice socks,' Connor says. The cop does not glance down at his socks. No show of weakness there. 'Nice ears,' he says to Connor. 'Mind if I try them on sometime?'

-- Connor/Juvey-cop (Part Five, Chapter 48 paragraph 6)

Importance: Connor often used the ploy of saying "Nice socks" to someone to divert their attention. But it doesn't work with the Juvey-cop who arrested him and Risa. The cop makes a reference to trying on Connor's ears. Now that Connor has been captured, he will soon be unwound and his parts will be used by others.

C'mon, son, do we have to spell it out for you? You're a problem here. Too many of the other kids look up to you, and that's never a good thing at a harvest camp. So the administration decided to take care of the problem.

-- Guard (Part Six, Chapter 64 paragraph 11)

Importance: The guards have come to take Connor to his unwinding. Connor is looked up to as a hero by the other kids because he fought off a Juvey-cop. Connor using his natural leadership skills could cause a rebellion.

A human being is part of a whole, called by us the Universe, a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separated from the rest – a kind of optical illusion of his consciousness.

-- Albert Einstein (Part 7 paragraph 1)

Importance: Einstein captures man's view of himself in the universe. He exists in his own consciousness but must expand to embrace all of nature. Connor, Risa and Lev have all lived this concept in that they have cared more what happened to each other than to themselves.

Priests give last rites,' says the counselor, putting a gentle hand on his shoulder. 'That's for people who are dying. You're not dying – you'll still be alive, just in a different way.'

-- Counselor (Part Seven, Chapter 59 paragraph 10)

Importance: Even near the end when Roland is being prepared for his unwinding, the counselor still tries to convince him that he will actually "live" although in hundreds of

pieces. The counselor may be trying to convince himself as much as he is trying to convince Roland.

I've seen the eye – don't worry, it's a decent match. As for the arm, well, the new one is a little more muscular than your left one, but some good physical therapy can even that out in no time.

-- Nurse (Part Seven, Chapter 66 paragraph 23)

Importance: When Connor is hurt in the Clappers explosion, he loses an eye and suffers a crushed arm. When he wakes from a medically-induced coma, the nurse tells him that he has had an eye transplant and an arm graft. It's ironic that the process that Connor's been fighting against has benefited him.