

Unwind



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF NEAL SHUSTERMAN

Shusterman was born in Brooklyn, New York and spent much of his childhood reading. His parents moved the family to Mexico City when he was 16, something that he credits today for giving him a new perspective on life and confidence that he couldn't have found anywhere else. He graduated from the American School Foundation in Mexico City and then earned bachelor's degrees in psychology and theater. Shusterman worked briefly for a Los Angeles-based talent agency after college, and within a year of his hire, he landed his first book deal and began writing screenplays. Many of his books, most notably his 2015 novel *Challenger Deep*, have received honors and awards, and several are being adapted for film. He lives in Southern California with his children.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Though the fictional Second Civil War in the novel is fought over abortion rights, the problem it solves in practice deals more closely with organ donation than with abortion. In the United States, there are usually over 100,000 people on waiting lists for donated organs at any given time, and around 20 people die per day because they didn't receive an organ in time. However, only a little more than half of the population is registered to donate in the event of their death. Unlike in *Unwind*, in which the wealthy can purchase better organs, the U.S. has strict laws prohibiting the sale of organs specifically so that a similar system doesn't arise. In recent years, there's been a rise in psychological research studying both how people come to terrorism, as well as how to de-radicalize terrorists. Research shows that, like Lev, many who find themselves drawn to terrorism believe both that action (rather than communicating) is the only way to further their cause, and that becoming involved will give them a sense of camaraderie. Terrorists who have been de-radicalized have been extremely helpful to government intelligence agencies, as they can provide insider information into how terrorist groups function and recruit, and how governments can effectively fight back.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

In terms of *Unwind*'s exploration of bodily autonomy and abortion, it shares a number of thematic similarities with novels as varied as Jodi Picoult's *My Sister's Keeper*, which deals with forced organ donation; *Red Clocks* by Leni Zumas, which explores what might happen if abortion became suddenly and entirely illegal; and *The Host* by Stephanie Meyer, which

envisions a futuristic Earth overrun by aliens that take over people's brains—but in some cases end up coexisting with their hosts. The Bill of Life's origin as a satire also aligns it with the 1729 satirical essay *A Modest Proposal*, in which author Jonathan Swift argues that poverty and famine in Ireland could be solved by eating Irish babies. Many of Shusterman's young adult novels deal with similarly dystopian future worlds, as in his *Scythe* trilogy. *Unwind* is the first in a series of five novels that takes *Unwind*'s questions of morality, bodily autonomy, and resistance even further. Shusterman's novels in this vein are part of the growing genre of young adult dystopian fiction, which many believe began with Lois Lowry's *The Giver* and has since given rise to novels like Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* series and Veronica Roth's *Divergent* series.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Unwind*
- **When Written:** 2006
- **Where Written:** California
- **When Published:** 2007
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Young Adult Literature; Dystopian Fiction; Science Fiction
- **Setting:** Ohio, Arizona, and Mississippi, sometime in the near future
- **Climax:** Lev chooses not to clap, saving Happy Jack Harvest Camp from being blown up.
- **Antagonist:** Roland; the Clappers; the Bill of Life; the individuals who legalized Unwinding
- **Point of View:** First Person, narrated by various characters

EXTRA CREDIT

Overtime. While in *Unwind* the unwinding process takes only three hours, organ transplant surgeries today can take up to 16 hours for a single organ. Hearts, lungs, and intestines represent the most complicated and lengthy surgeries.

Paid Gig. Shusterman wanted to be a writer since he was a child, but it only began to feel like a real possibility to him when he was in ninth grade. At that point he was in dire need of extra credit, so his English teacher offered him extra credit to write a story per month.



PLOT SUMMARY

According to **Bill of Life**, a set of constitutional amendments

which govern the alternate version of the U.S. in which the novel takes place, pregnant women cannot get abortions, but they can unwind their child when the child turns 13. Through unwinding, that child will go on living in a divided state as an organ and tissue donor. 16-year-old Connor recently learned that he's going to be unwound. Though he's hurt when his girlfriend, Ariana, won't run away with him to escape his fate, he runs away on his own anyway. At the same time, Risa, a 15-year-old ward of the state and aspiring concert pianist, learns that she's also going to be unwound, and Lev, a 13-year-old tithe (someone raised knowing they will be unwound as a religious offering), attends his tithing party. There, his oldest brother, Marcus, stands up against their parents in opposition to tithing. The next day, the three characters converge: Juveycops chase Connor across an interstate and Connor pulls Lev out of his car, which causes Risa's bus to crash. Pastor Dan, Lev's childhood pastor, tells Lev to run, and all three escape into the woods. Connor shoots a Juvey-cop with his own gun in order to escape. Lev is horrified to find himself in the company of dirty and wild Unwinds, but he vows to act like them and get revenge later.

When the teens reach civilization, they're forced to board a school bus to look inconspicuous—but before they board, Connor rescues a storked baby from a nearby porch. At the school, they hide in a bathroom and Connor explains why he stole the baby. When he was little, his family was storked but didn't want more children, so his parents put the baby on a neighbor's porch. Two weeks later, the baby reappeared after being secretly passed around the neighborhood, and it was so neglected and ill that it died. Lev sneaks out of the bathroom and alerts adults. They call the police and Lev calls Pastor Dan. Lev is shocked when Pastor Dan says that nobody will ask questions about Lev's absence and insists that Lev go on and reinvent himself. Confused but knowing he's done a horrible thing to Connor and Risa, Lev pulls the fire alarm. A kind teacher named Hannah helps smuggle Connor and Risa outside, where they pretend to be clappers to create a panic and escape—while Lev almost foils their plans by yelling for them.

Hannah sends Connor, Risa, and baby Didi to a woman named Sonia. Sonia runs a safe house out of her basement and already has three teens, Roland, Hayden, and Mai, staying with her. Roland is a bully and scares Connor, but Hayden is smart and kind. Hayden introduces Mai to the legend of **Humphrey Dunfee**, a boy who was unwound but whose parents went on a killing spree and killed everyone who got one of Humphrey's parts. The day before the teens leave, Sonia asks them to write letters. If they don't come back for the letters, she'll assume the teens were unwound and mail them. She assures Connor that she's not all good, but she's trying. Before the teens leave Sonia, Hannah takes Didi. From there, Connor and Risa bounce between safe houses and end up in a warehouse run by adults

they call the Fatigues. There, Risa realizes that Roland is dangerous: he manipulates people, supposedly has a weapon, and will no doubt take Connor out the first chance he gets. She tells Connor that under no circumstances should he take Roland's bait. Connor follows Risa's advice and when Roland threatens to rape Risa, Connor pretends not to care. Roland leaves Risa alone, but the experience terrifies Risa.

One morning, the Fatigues tell the teens to get into shipping containers. Connor narrowly avoids ending up in a crate with Roland, and instead is put in a crate with Hayden, a boy named Diego, and an asthmatic named Emby. They discuss the morality of unwinding and Emby suggests it's not entirely bad—as a kid with pulmonary fibrosis, he only survived because he received an Unwind's lung. The teens land in the Arizona desert in an airfield for decommissioned airplanes called the Graveyard. They learn that a crate of five boys suffocated in transit. A group of five teens known as the Goldens get the newcomers settled, and the Admiral, who runs the place, lays down the rules. Connor doesn't like the Admiral, who has a suspiciously bright smile and a piercing stare. However, Connor soon finds his niche as a mechanic, while Risa settles in as a medic. Roland manages to sweet-talk the helicopter pilot, Cleaver, into teaching him to fly. Connor grumbles every time they hold a work call, in which kids volunteer to do jobs in exchange for protection. He believes the Admiral is running a slave operation and to Connor's surprise, Roland agrees with him, and suggests that the Admiral unwinds kids and steals their body parts.

After being separated from Connor and Risa, Lev meets an umber boy named CyFi. CyFi likes to talk and Lev feels like he needs to hear anything but the confusing thoughts in his own head, so he agrees to accompany CyFi to Joplin, Missouri. Lev has no idea why they're going until they reach a town in Illinois. There, CyFi steals a Christmas ornament and has what seems to Lev like a seizure. CyFi explains that he was in an accident as a kid and received the entire temporal lobe of an Unwind—but now, CyFi experiences the thoughts, feelings and impulses of the Unwind, who was a compulsive thief. The Unwind was from Joplin, and CyFi hopes that if he takes the Unwind there, things will improve for him. In Joplin, CyFi and Lev find CyFi's dad at the home of the Unwind's parents, and CyFi learns that the Unwind's name is Tyler. CyFi allows Tyler to take over, digs up a suitcase of stolen jewelry, and begs Tyler's parents to not unwind him. Lev is horrified to see that Tyler doesn't realize he was unwound. After the situation resolves, Lev runs away, forever changed by what he saw.

Not long after, Lev arrives in the Graveyard. One day, the Admiral summons Connor to repair his coffeemaker. The coffeemaker isn't broken, however, and Connor accuses the Admiral of unwinding kids for profit and stealing their teeth. Shocked, the Admiral rips out his teeth—they're dentures. He then takes Connor to see something horrifying: someone

murdered the Goldens by locking them in the same crate in which the five boys died earlier. The Admiral asks Connor to help him figure out who did it. Connor suspects Roland and comes up with projects that allow him to listen in on conversations. He struggles to not give himself away and yet still shut down Roland's attempts to sow fear and distrust of the Admiral by suggesting that the Admiral's is interested in Emby's scalp. Connor later shares his suspicions that Roland killed the Goldens with the Admiral. The Admiral, meanwhile, tells Connor what actually happened in the Heartland War: he was part of the third side of the war and was tasked with brokering peace between the pro-life and pro-choice armies. The Bill of Life, which legalized unwinding, was intended to shock the parties into seeing that they were being ridiculous—but instead, they signed it into law. A few years later, when the Admiral's son Harlan began acting out, the Admiral was pressured to unwind Harlan. Now, the Admiral runs the Graveyard to atone for what he did.

Meanwhile, Lev follows the instructions of a girl he met in a safe house and enters a jet. Inside he finds Cleaver with two kids, Mai and Blaine. Lev insists he wants to be a part of their group and truthfully says he hates everyone who supports unwinding and wants to make them suffer, though he's surprised to learn that Roland isn't a part of the group. Lev, Mai, and Blaine leave on a work call the next day. Not long after, the Admiral summons Emby and sends him away with two men. It takes the kids at the Graveyard two days to realize that Emby is gone and they reason that the Admiral killed him. When they discover that Connor and Roland are gone too, they riot. They're wrong, however: Connor has locked Roland in a shipping container far away from the main camp and is trying to get him to confess to killing the Goldens. Risa protects the Admiral from the rioting teens by locking them in the plane, but Cleaver isn't so lucky. He feels drawn to the chaos and the teens beat him. Hayden finally discovers Connor, and Connor is able to break up the riot and tries to protect Cleaver. He's shocked when Cleaver suggests that dying like this is better than suffocating, which Connor takes as an admission that Cleaver killed the Goldens. When he gets into the Admiral's plane, Risa insists they have to get the Admiral to a hospital, as he's having a heart attack. Connor convinces Roland to fly them, but at the hospital, Roland rats them out. All three are taken to Happy Jack Harvest Camp.

Kids at the harvest camp are thrilled to meet Connor, whose reputation precedes him. Risa is assigned to play with the band, which plays on top of the Chop Shop, the building where unwinding takes place. She feels like it's unethical to watch kids meet their end, but Dalton, a bass player, insists it's the only way to stay alive. Lev is at the harvest camp too, but for a very different reason. After leaving the Graveyard on the "work call," people praised Lev and replaced his blood with explosive liquid. He, Mai, and Blaine are now clappers, and plan to blow up the camp. One evening, Roland tries to strangle Connor, but he

can't go through with it. Counselors take him to be unwound the next afternoon. The experience is horrific: he's awake and terrified the entire time. Word gets out that Connor is slated to go next. Lev insists to Mai and Blaine that they have to act soon so they can save Connor. Lev is late getting to his spot, however, and the Chop Shop explodes just after Connor steps inside. Risa and the band fall when the roof collapses. Though Lev is in excruciating emotional pain, he can't bring himself to clap, and instead stanches Connor's bleeding and leads the rescue effort.

Connor wakes up in the hospital and learns that nurses have given him a new identity—that of a member of a wealthy local family—which saves him from unwinding and also made him eligible for emergency transplants for his eye and his arm. To his horror, Connor realizes that he received Roland's arm. He finds Risa and learns that she refused the transplant surgery that would cure the lower body paralysis she sustained in her fall. Now, as a disabled person, she can't be unwound. At the same time, Pastor Dan visits Lev in federal prison. He says that Lev is an anomaly, as clappers never back out. Because of his actions, people, including CyFi, are beginning to speak out about the horrors of unwinding. Connor and Risa return to the Graveyard to run the operation and rescue Unwinds, while on the Admiral's ranch, he holds a birthday party for Harlan. The guests are the hundreds of people who received body parts from Harlan, including Emby, who has Harlan's left lung.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Connor Lassiter – One of the novel's protagonists; a 16-year-old Unwind. Connor is angry and prone to acting out, which is why his parents choose to unwind him. Rather than go quietly, Connor runs away. Within 12 hours, authorities catch up to him and in his escape, Connor causes a deadly pileup on an interstate and shoots a Juvey-cop with the officer's own tranquilizer gun. This earns him the nickname "Akron-AWOL." During this skirmish, Connor also snags Lev out of a car and teams up with Risa. Connor isn't great at thinking through his actions, hence why he grabs Lev, and later why he pulls a storked infant off of someone's front porch. When Connor and Risa get separated from Lev, he begins to follow Risa's lead. He learns that if he can take a moment to think and act accordingly, he has far more control. This allows him to avoid confrontations with Roland, a dangerous bully, as well as to save Risa from sexual violence at Roland's hands. Once at the Graveyard, a safe space for escaped Unwinds, Connor begins to make a name for himself by fixing air conditioners and a peer, Hayden, says that everyone likes Connor because he has integrity. This becomes important after the Goldens are murdered, as the Admiral recruits Connor to his cause and sets him the task of figuring out who killed them. Though Connor understands why

people dislike the Admiral (he doesn't like him much either), he's distraught when he learns that the Unwinds rioted and destroyed much of the Graveyard. Following the Admiral's heart attack, Connor, Risa, and Roland are taken to the Happy Jack Harvest Camp. Connor's reputation gives the other kids hope, which is why they choose to quickly unwind him. However, just as Connor enters the Chop Shop, clappers detonate and blow up the building. Because Connor loses consciousness, he has no choice: doctors choose to give him transplants for his damaged eye and right arm, which comes from Roland. Nurses also give Connor a new identity, which allows him to return to the Graveyard and take over for the Admiral.

Risa Ward – A 15-year-old ward of the state and a budding concert pianist. Risa grew up in a state home and with the help of her piano teacher, Mr. Durkin, worked hard to demonstrate her worth—an attempt that ultimately fails, as the school decides to unwind her thanks to budget cuts. She manages to escape the bus transporting her out of the school when it crashes to avoid hitting Connor and Lev. As Risa joins Connor on his runaway journey, she shows herself to be shrewd and calculating. She's an exceptional planner and is very good at reading people, which allows her to manipulate them to survive. She's incensed when Connor snatches a stolen baby off of a porch, but thanks to the time she spent caring for infants at the state home, she knows how to care for the baby, whom they name Didi. Despite fearing Connor because of the fact that he makes bad decisions, Risa can't bring herself to abandon him and finds herself falling for him. Especially once they enter the safe house system and make it to the warehouse, Risa takes it upon herself to teach Connor some of her skills. She encourages him to carefully watch the kids and take note of who's in charge, and she tries to impress upon Connor the importance of not playing into the hands of Roland, a bully who manipulates everyone. At the Graveyard, Risa begins to find her place as a medic. She feels as though she has purpose and is hopeful for the first time in a long time. Risa also takes her medical training seriously, so when the Admiral has a heart attack, Risa insists that they must get him to a hospital, regardless of the risk to herself, Connor, and Roland. This lands them all at the Happy Jack Harvest Camp when Roland betrays them. There, Risa struggles with the ethics of playing in the band, which keeps her safe from unwinding, while witnessing the atrocities at the camp. She's paralyzed in the clapper attack on the Chop Shop and refuses transplant surgery, as being paralyzed means she's safe from unwinding. She returns to the Graveyard to play piano.

Lev Calder – A 13-year-old tithe. Lev grew up in an intensely religious community and in a family that believed in tithing to the letter—that is, because biblical tithing technically refers to offering up 1/10 of one's earnings, his parents planned to tithe Lev from the beginning, since Lev is their 10th child. This means

that he will be unwound as a teenager so that his organs can be harvested and donated to others. Because of this, Lev grows up believing that he's special and blessed with a purpose. He never worries about high school or anything else, as he knows he'll never get there. Though he loves his parents, he relies heavily on Pastor Dan for emotional and spiritual support as he approaches his tithing. Lev begins to question everything and everyone—especially Pastor Dan. However, Connor rips Lev out of the car Lev is taking to the harvest camp and Pastor Dan tells him to go. Though Lev thinks poorly of Connor and Risa—he believes they're out of control and would be better off unwound—he does find himself beginning to care about them as they hide and try to figure out how to keep themselves safe. Lev turns himself, Connor, and Risa in, but he regrets it immediately when he calls Pastor Dan, and Pastor Dan again tells him to go on and reinvent himself. While separated from Connor and Risa, Lev travels with a boy named CyFi to Joplin, Missouri. Lev joins CyFi mostly because he feels lost, alone, and unsure of what to think, but he ends up bearing witness to the horrors of unwinding when CyFi experiences a meltdown thanks to his temporal lobe, which was transplanted from an Unwind. This experience changes Lev and propels him toward the clappers, a terrorist group. Lev allows his anger to fuel him and agrees to blow up the Happy Jack Harvest Camp in a suicide bombing—until he discovers that Risa and Connor are both there and will die too. Rather than clap and detonate, Lev leads the rescue effort and turns himself in. Lev begins to feel hopeful when Pastor Dan tells him that they can still believe in God, without believing in tithing.

Roland – One of the novel's antagonists. He's a brutish and violent boy who is being unwound because he beat up his stepfather. He did this in retaliation for his stepfather beating his mother, but his mother took the stepfather's side. Roland is the biggest guy in any room and wants everyone to know it. He's skilled at orchestrating power plays that bring other kids to his side and ostracizes others, though many adults don't seem to understand that he's dangerous. Connor doesn't trust him, especially after Roland threatens (or at least pretends to threaten) Risa with sexual violence in an attempt to get a rise out of Connor. At the Graveyard, Roland ingratiates himself to Cleaver and is so successful that Cleaver even teaches him to fly the helicopter—which only further fuels Roland's sense of superiority. Connor suspects that Roland is responsible for killing the Goldens (though he's not actually guilty of this crime), mostly because Roland spends much of his time at the Graveyard trying to get others to distrust and fear the Admiral. When the Admiral has a heart attack, Connor forces Roland to fly the Admiral to a hospital, where Roland's attempt to turn in only Connor and Risa backfires, as the cops who come to speak with him take all three of them. At Happy Jack Harvest Camp, Connor and Roland finally clash, but Roland chooses not to kill Connor for reasons unknown. Soon after, he's unwound. His unwinding is graphic and makes it clear that unwinding is

inhumane, as victims are conscious and terrified for the entire process. Even after the surgeons remove sensory organs like Roland's eyes and his ears, he can still hear them talking about basketball stats. Following the explosion at Happy Jack, Connor receives Roland's arm with his shark tattoo, which Roland got as a child after drawing it on his cast when he broke his arm.

Admiral Dunfee – An elderly war veteran who runs the Graveyard in the Arizona desert. For much of the novel, he's known simply as the Admiral. He's a cunning man with a stare that makes others uncomfortable and a knack for manipulating people and earning their trust. Though his operation to smuggle and save Unwinds from their fate gives some, like Risa, a sense of purpose, many kids don't like the Admiral. Many, including Roland and Connor, suspect that the Admiral is profiting off of the kids whom he sends off on work calls, and possibly that he unwinds kids when he decides he wants one of their body parts. Kids believe this because the Admiral is scarred and has teeth that clearly aren't his own. However, when Connor gets to know the Admiral, he learns that the suspicious teeth are actually dentures and that the Admiral is a far more complex person than Connor gave him credit for. In actuality, the Admiral is driven by grief and guilt over his son, Harlan, whom he unwound about 10 years before the novel begins. He channels his energy into saving Unwinds in order to atone for unwinding Harlan. He does so while looking for the individuals who received Harlan's body parts, ultimately uniting them all at Harlan's birthday party at the end of the novel. After suffering a heart attack, the Admiral turns over operations at the Graveyard to Connor and retires to his ranch in Texas.

Cyrus Finch/CyFi – An umber boy whom Lev meets after being separated from Connor and Risa. CyFi likes to hear himself talk and speaks in Old World UMBER Patois as a way to honor his ancestors. Though he annoys Lev at first by constantly defining everything and invoking God, Lev recognizes that he needs CyFi, as CyFi is skilled at surviving and finding food. CyFi is on a mysterious solo journey to Joplin, Missouri. As he and Lev travel, CyFi shares more about himself and why he's making this journey: he received an entire temporal lobe from an Unwind thanks to his dad's ability to pay off a surgeon, but now, CyFi experiences thoughts and feelings that belong to the Unwind—and for some reason, the Unwind needs to go to Joplin, Missouri. CyFi hopes that after making the journey, the boy in his head will leave him alone. CyFi is a self-professed upstanding citizen, but he must question this because the Unwind in his head was a compulsive thief, and now CyFi has fits and steals too. In Joplin, CyFi discovers that the temporal lobe came from a boy named Tyler, gives in to Tyler's thoughts, and begs Tyler's parents not to unwind him. This seems to calm Tyler, and CyFi is able to go home with his dad. Lev later learns that this experience caused CyFi to speak out against unwinding, and that CyFi has since testified in Congress against the practice.

Emby – An obnoxious asthmatic boy whom Connor meets at the warehouse where Unwinds wait to head to the Graveyard. Nobody but the Admiral knows his real name (Zachary) and Emby allows people to use nicknames. He spends most of his time reading a comic book over and over again. Emby ends up in the same crate with Connor and Hayden for the journey to the Graveyard. In addition to proving himself to be an extremely anxious person, Emby offers a controversial view on unwinding for his companions. He was diagnosed with pulmonary fibrosis as a child, which caused his lungs to start shutting down. The only reason he survived was because he received a lung from an Unwind—albeit an asthmatic one because his parents couldn't afford better. Because of this, Emby insists that he doesn't think unwinding is bad, he just doesn't want it to happen to him. Unfortunately for Emby, his parents died, and his aunt didn't have the money to send her own kids and Emby to college, which is why he's slated to be unwound. Unbeknownst to him, Emby actually received one of Harlan Dunfee's lungs. The Admiral figures this out and removes Emby from the Graveyard so that he can attend a party in Harlan's honor. He also makes sure that Emby gets on the appropriate asthma medication, which improves Emby's quality of life significantly.

Pastor Dan – Lev's pastor. Throughout Lev's childhood, Pastor Dan has been there for him and was an important figure in raising Lev to believe that he's blessed because he's a tithe. Because of their close relationship, Lev asks that Pastor Dan attend his tithing party and accompany him to the harvest camp the next day. Pastor Dan, however, hisses at Lev to run away after Connor drags him out of the car, and later, when Lev calls Pastor Dan, Pastor Dan begins to imply that he doesn't believe in tithing and that he wants Lev to escape and have a real future. Pastor Dan confirms this when he visits Lev in prison at the end of the novel. During the time that Lev was a runaway, Pastor Dan left the church, as he decided he couldn't worship a God who supported human tithing. Despite Lev's mixed emotions, Pastor Dan still has the ability to make Lev feel heard, hopeful, and cared for.

Cleaver – The Admiral's helicopter pilot and right-hand man. He's a greasy man with long hair, and unbeknownst to the Admiral, is a recruiter for the clappers. Indeed, *nobody* suspects him; even though Connor doesn't like him much, Cleaver is nothing more than a background figure in Connor's mind. Cleaver recruits Blaine and Mai and leads them in murdering the Goldens before orchestrating an attack with Lev on the Happy Jack Harvest Camp. Cleaver dies in the riot outside the Admiral's airplane, as he's the only adult around for the teens to direct their anger toward. Rather than being scared or sad, however, he dies insisting that he loves chaos—even if the chaos, in this case, brings about his own demise.

Hayden – One of the Unwinds whom Connor and Risa meet at Sonia's. He's blond, lanky, and came from a wealthy family, but

his parents chose to unwind him because they couldn't come to a custody agreement after getting a divorce. Hayden becomes good friends with Connor, since Connor recognizes that, like him, Hayden likes to flirt with danger. His preferred form of risk-taking is dangerous thoughts: he often tries to engage others in conversation about what happens during unwinding, when consciousness starts, and the state of the human soul. When the Admiral has a heart attack during the riot at the Graveyard, Connor leaves Hayden in charge while he gets the Admiral to a hospital.

Mai – A girl whom Connor and Risa first meet at Sonia's. She falls deeply in love with a boy during the time she spends in safe houses and at the warehouse, but she's devastated when he dies in transit to the Graveyard. Emotionally distraught and disturbed after losing the boy she believes was her soulmate, Mai confides in Cleaver about her emotions and her anger and he recruits her to join the clappers. She's involved in murdering the Goldens and is surprised by how easy killing is. She's later one of the clappers who bombs the Happy Jack Harvest Camp, though she nervously refuses to be the first to clap and detonate.

The Teacher/Hannah – A kind high school teacher who discovers Connor, Risa, and Didi hiding out in an attempt to evade being noticed or caught by the police. She helps get all three out of the school (though she knows this is illegal) and sends them to Sonia. Later, she returns to adopt Didi, assuring Connor that she's happy to take the baby. Hannah believes that there's not enough compassion in the world and that helping Unwinds is the best way to set an example, even if nobody knows she does it.

Sonia – An older woman who runs an antique shop. Hannah sends Connor and Risa to her, and they discover that Sonia actually maintains a safe house for Unwinds in her basement. Before the Unwinds leave her basement, she asks each one to write a letter to someone important that she promises to mail in the event that the teen doesn't return for their letter once they're too old to be unwound. This earns her Connor's respect.

Harlan Dunfee – The Admiral's son and the real person behind the urban legend of **Humphrey Dunfee**. When Harlan began acting out in the years after the Heartland War, the Admiral was pressured to unwind him to set an example. Harlan is symbolically put back together again at the end of the novel, after the Admiral manages to track down every person who received an organ from Harlan and brings them together for a party in Harlan's honor.

Tyler – A boy who was unwound sometime before the novel begins. CyFi receives Tyler's temporal lobe and is horrified, as this means he has to contend with Tyler's impulses of compulsive theft. Tyler is the reason for CyFi's journey to Joplin, Missouri. Once there, Tyler takes over CyFi's brain and

body, digs up his trove of stolen jewelry, and begs his parents to not unwind him. He has no idea that he was already unwound.

Marcus – Lev's oldest brother; he's 28. He's the only person to make a fuss at Lev's going-away party and implies that tithing is a cruel practice. For this, Lev's parents disown him. Months later, when Lev extricates himself from the clappers, he learns that Marcus is the only one willing to act as a guardian after Lev's failed tithing—Lev's fall from grace, in the eyes of their parents.

Ariana – Connor's girlfriend at the beginning of the novel. She's beautiful, and according to Connor, "a slave to fashion." Though Ariana initially agrees to run away with Connor when they discover he's going to be unwound, she later refuses to go. Connor later realizes that this is a blessing in disguise as Ariana is good at school but is not street smart at all.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Dalton – A kind and sympathetic boy at the Happy Jack Harvest Camp. He becomes friendly with Connor and has a crush on Risa. Dalton has been at Happy Jack for six months because he plays bass in camp's band, but he dies during the clappers' attack on the Chop Shop.

Blaine – An angry Unwind whom Cleaver recruits to join the clappers. He's involved in killing the Goldens and is the first to detonate in the attack on Happy Jack Harvest Camp, but only because a guard shoots him with a tranquilizer bullet.

Didi – A storked infant whom Connor snatches off a porch when he sees the less than ideal reaction of the family who received her. Connor and Risa care for her for a few days, but she ultimately ends up with Hannah and her husband.

The Dads – CyFi's dads; he only ever refers to them collectively. Men cannot get married to each other in the world of the novel, but CyFi notes (with no further explanation) that they got "mmarried."

Josias Aldridge – A long-haul trucker who gives Connor a ride. He shows Connor his transplanted arm, which still has the muscle memory from its original owner and can perform sleight-of-hand tricks.

Mr. Durkin – Risa's piano teacher. Though he's kind and encouraging during the entire time he instructs her, Risa is extremely hurt when he doesn't show up to say goodbye to her.

The Mother – An unnamed young mother who storks her baby, Didi. She's relieved to have the opportunity to stork Didi, as she has neither the means nor the desire to be a parent.

Lev's Dad – An intensely religious man who believes in tithing. Because of this, he offers his tenth child, Lev, as a tithe to be unwound.

Alexis – A friendly teen who has a six-month-old baby named Chase. Risa and Connor meet Alexis and Chase when they

attempt to hide on a school bus.

Chase – Alexis’s six-month-old son. Risa and Connor meet Alexis and Chase when they attempt to hide on a school bus.

The Fatigues – The harried and exhausted adults who care for refugee Unwinds in huge warehouses. They insist that saving Unwinds is a reward in and of itself.

The Goldens – A group of five teens at the Graveyard who serve the Admiral directly. Cleaver and his clapper recruits murder them.

Tina – An umber girl who travels in the same container as Risa on their way to the Graveyard. Her story is much like Risa’s, as they both grew up in state homes.

Connor’s Dad – Connor’s dad. He releases Connor to be unwound but seems to experience some regret as the time approaches.

Connor’s Mom – Connor’s mother. She releases Connor to be unwound.

Diego – A quiet boy who travels to the Graveyard in the same crate as Connor.

The Pawnbroker – A pawnbroker whom Lev steals from.

Andy Jameson – A student at Connor’s school who is also arrested to be unwound.

Headmaster Thomas – The headmaster of the state home where Risa grows up.

TERMS

Clappers – Terrorists who engage in what is essentially suicide bombing against harvest camps that perform the unwinding procedure. Their name comes from the way that their bombers’ blood is replaced with an explosive compound that explodes when the bomber claps.

Juvey-Cops – The special police officers tasked with hunting down runaway Unwinds.

Kicking-AWOL – The term for running from one’s unwinding. Unwinds who run are sometimes called AWOL Unwinds.

Storking – The practice in which mothers can legally abandon their infants on people’s porches. If the mother gets away without getting caught, the residents of the “storked” house have to keep and raise the baby. If the residents catch her, the mother is required to keep her baby.

Tithe – A child raised with the express intent of being unwound when they reach 13. Tithing is most often practiced in religious communities, as the term has biblical origins and, in that sense, refers simply to offering up 1/10 of one’s earnings or crop yields as a sacrifice to God. Tithes are raised to look forward to their unwinding and are treated with the utmost respect by their community and family members.

Umbler – The novel’s proper way to refer to black people.

Unwind – Unwinding is the process by which a teenager’s body is divided up so that 99.44 percent of their body can be used in organ, limb, blood, or brain transplants for other people. Teens slated to be unwound are known as Unwinds. Unwind when used to refer to a person is capitalized; unwind the verb or to refer to the practice is not.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don’t have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



INEQUALITY, INJUSTICE, AND THE LAW

Unwind introduces the reader to a futuristic version of the United States. In the relatively recent past of the novel, the U.S. resolved the debate and subsequent Heartland War over abortion by adopting the **Bill of Life**, which states that after conception, a parent cannot terminate an unwanted pregnancy—but they can, once their child turns 13, begin to unwind the child. Unwinding is a process by which teenagers between the ages of 13 and 18 are essentially harvested for parts, which, according to the Bill of Life, means that the child doesn’t truly die—they continue to exist in a divided state, as they’re still considered alive as long as 99.44 percent of their body is used in other people. Even though the Bill of Life is meant to resolve the debate over abortion, it gives rise to a new debate: to some, unwinding is the greatest public service anyone can perform and is unequivocally good, while to others, unwinding is a horrific practice that robs children of their futures. However, even though *Unwind* leaves room for thought experiments in support of either side of the debate, it still makes it very clear that the laws surrounding unwinding are, without exception, wildly ineffective at creating a truly equal and just society.

Despite being legal and considered normal by many—adults, children, and government officials alike—*Unwind* shows various instances in which the ethics of unwinding, and those of the society that supports this procedure, are actually muddier than people in the novel want to acknowledge. For instance, unwinding renders abortion illegal, meaning that women who may have terminated pregnancies if given the opportunity can instead stork their babies, or legally abandon them on doorsteps. If the woman gets away, she’s free and the homeowner has to care for the baby; if the homeowners catch her, she has to keep her baby. One of the novel’s main characters, an Unwind named Connor, explains that that while this may be a fine idea in theory, in practice, it puts vulnerable

infants at risk. He shares that when he was little, his family was storked—but rather than keep the infant, Connor’s dad put it on a neighbor’s doorstep. Two weeks later, the baby reappeared on Connor’s family’s step, ill, and died days later after being passed from neighbor to neighbor, none of whom wanted another child. This makes the case, first of all, that the unwinding and storking laws aren’t effective in solving what they’re supposed to—unwanted babies still die, just from neglect after birth rather than via abortion. Further, Connor’s horrific story leads Risa, another Unwind and his traveling companion, to wonder if storking is really more humane than abortion was in the past, a question the novel never resolves but one that illustrates how effective the law is at solving the problem it was supposed to, instead perpetuating more cruelty and suffering.

Unwind shows that the injustice of the novel’s society goes far deeper than storking and unwinding, as people with money can also buy the best of the best when it comes to organs—and with enough money, they can even replace their own body parts, such as eyes or teeth, for purely cosmetic reasons. This creates a situation in which the poor in need of transplants or medical attention can’t afford the help they need, while the rich can use these resources to fulfill superficial desires. In a broader sense, the laws governing storking and unwinding prey upon society’s most vulnerable members: infants, teenagers with no legal rights, and in most cases, individuals who come from poverty and therefore have even fewer ways of defending themselves. Again, this asks the reader to consider whether laws and systems like those in the novel (which ostensibly solve widespread societal problems but cause more problems in the process) are truly just when the victims are overwhelmingly innocent and vulnerable populations, and those who benefit are overwhelmingly privileged to begin with.

Unwinding and storking were never intended to be taken literally and put into law—they were only introduced to make a point and solve the national debate surrounding abortion. Admiral Dunfee, a man who runs an underground resistance group that rescues Unwinds, tells Connor that he fought for the U.S. Army in the Heartland War, where his job was to try to keep the carnage at a minimum and, when it came down to it, broker peace between the two sides. He explains that the Bill of Life and the concept of unwinding were originally created as a satire of sorts, and the goal was to calm both sides and impress upon them that they were being ridiculous. But in reality, no one backed down and the Bill of Life inadvertently became the law of the land. The development of the Bill of Life illustrates clearly how nonsensical law is in the world of the novel. In many ways, unwinding is nothing more than abortion dressed up in a different package, as it may solve some issues but consequently introduces a host of other problems, including issues in common with abortion such as access, bodily autonomy, and family planning. Though *Unwind* doesn’t fully resolve any of

these issues, being the first in a series of five novels, the book nevertheless shows clearly that within the world of the novel, the law as the characters know it is wildly ineffective, corrupt, and predatory—a scenario that sets the stage for potential change in later installments.



ANGER, VIOLENCE, AND RADICALIZATION

Every child slated to be unwound has every right to be angry—deciding to unwind one’s child suggests, to kids like Connor who grew up in loving families, that their parents don’t love or care about them anymore, while for kids like Risa who grow up as wards of the state, being unwound reflects the government’s unwillingness to value the lives they’re supposed to care for. In this sense, anger is a natural state in which to find oneself in the world of *Unwind*, but the novel also goes to great lengths to show that there are a variety of different paths available to angry and traumatized teens facing the reality of being unwound. Anger and desperation, the novel suggests, can be productive and cathartic when people develop the tools to deal with their anger—but if individuals never get those tools, their unbridled anger can lead them down a dangerous and destructive path and, in extreme cases, to radicalization and terrorism.

Connor’s parents choose to unwind him because he’s angry, which emphasizes how, within the world of *Unwind*, openly expressing one’s emotions can be a liability. For vulnerable individuals like teenage Connor, anger can literally put them in danger—no matter how reasonable their feelings might be. Though he grows up in a loving and supportive family, once he reaches his teen years, Connor finds that his anger consumes him. He begins to act out at school, get into fights, and take risks such as sitting on a freeway overpass for the thrill of it. It is precisely this reckless, anger-fueled behavior that makes his parents choose to have Connor unwound.

However, Connor begins to reevaluate how he manages his anger and impulsiveness once he’s on the run with Risa, who’s also angry but is far more adept at hiding it. Further, Risa is calculating in how she goes about achieving longer-term goals—primarily staying alive, something that Connor’s anger and impulsiveness jeopardizes at every turn—and she begins to teach these skills to Connor. As the two spend more time together, they spend more time *plotting* for their survival rather than actively *fighting* for it. Over the course of the few months that Connor and Risa are together, Connor transforms entirely from a terrifying, out-of-control boy to a trusted and beloved leader at the Graveyard, a refugee camp of sorts for Unwinds in the Arizona desert. There, his growing love for Risa, coupled with the mentorship that the Admiral, the leader of the Graveyard, shows him, Connor learns to channel his anger to improve conditions at the Graveyard and ultimately, ends up taking the Admiral’s place after the Admiral becomes too ill to

fill the role. Importantly, he says outright that he likes channeling his anger in this way, as it gives him more control over his world and gives him a sense of purpose beyond just surviving to his 18th birthday (at which point he's too old to be unwound and will therefore be safe).

In terms of his relationship to anger, Lev, a 13-year-old who briefly travels with Connor and Risa, is in many ways Connor's exact opposite. Lev grows up in a religious family that believes in offering children as tithes—that is, sacrifices to be unwound, something they believe is called for in the Bible. Because of this, Lev grows up believing that his eventual sacrifice makes him superior to everyone else, as his religious beliefs state that tithes are almost more than human. All of this means that Lev isn't angry about the prospect of being unwound but is unspeakably angry when Connor "ruins" his unwinding by kidnapping him from his parents' car on the way to the harvest camp. Though Lev initially directs his anger at Connor and Risa, his opinions on unwinding and being a tithe begin to change as he sees firsthand the horrifying consequences of unwinding: he watches a traveling companion with an Unwind's temporal lobe, CyFi, fall at the feet of the Unwind's parents begging to not be unwound—this Unwind, Lev sees, has no idea that he's been unwound. This fills Lev with unspeakable anger at the entire establishment that promotes unwinding, as well as his religion which glorifies the practice, and ultimately leads him to get involved with the clappers, a terrorist organization that essentially engages in suicide bombing by replacing participants' blood with explosive liquid.

Unwind takes great care to lay out exactly how and why Lev reaches the point of radicalization. His anger, combined with his yearning for the sense of community he felt as a child in his church, makes him vulnerable to recruiters who offer him community, purpose, and a method of getting revenge. The trajectories of Lev and his clapper companions shows how perfectly normal people have the potential to become clappers when they find themselves angry, disillusioned, and isolated from the kind of mentorship or purpose that Connor receives from the Admiral. However, the novel also forcefully condemns the clappers' actions by making it clear that dying and taking others with them won't fix anything; the thought that it will is, the novel suggests, a "dangerous deception."

Importantly, when it does come time for Lev to "clap" and commit his suicide bombing, Lev chooses not to, and instead turns himself in. While Lev isn't able to fully come to grips with his anger and his choices by the end of the novel, his childhood pastor, Pastor Dan, suggests that Lev's choice to back out and turn himself in was far more meaningful than clapping and dying ever would've been. With this, and through Connor's trajectory of channeling his anger and becoming a major resistance fighter in the process, *Unwind* encourages readers to recognize that violence does nothing to help one's anger or the situation at hand. Rather, channeling one's anger and using it

for good is one of the most meaningful and productive things a person can do.



ACTIVISM, COMPASSION, AND ATONEMENT

Once Connor and Risa find themselves in the hands of sympathetic adults who want to save them from being unwound, the novel begins to pay close attention to the avenues available to individuals who wish to push back against the system and fight for a better future. Specifically, though it does illustrate that turning to terrorism, as Lev does, is one available path, it shows clearly that activism and resistance that are rooted in compassion, kindness, and sacrificing one's own comfort or safety for the greater good are far more meaningful. Further, it also makes the case that a person's past misdeeds can be one of the greatest inspirations to become an activist in the first place, and that centering one's activism on compassion and making the world a better place is a healthy and meaningful way to atone for one's past mistakes.

After being separated from Lev, Connor and Risa are shocked to discover the sheer number of adults willing to help them escape being unwound. A young teacher named Hannah helps get them out of a high school where they were hiding, while an old woman named Sonia inserts Connor and Risa into a complex underground system of safe houses that ultimately lands them in the Graveyard, a site for decommissioned airplanes in Arizona which is secretly a refugee camp that houses more than 400 Unwinds, run by a man known as the Admiral. The very existence of this underground system is a clear indicator that there are many people who don't agree with the policy of unwinding and care deeply about children's right to life and their right to bodily autonomy, even if caring means putting themselves in danger. The novel doesn't go deeply into every resistance fighter's reason for participating in this system, but not offering a reason also creates the sense that these people don't necessarily *need* a reason. Rather, they resist because they know it's the morally right thing to do and they have the power to do so—not necessarily for personal gain. Experiencing the kindness of these adults is ultimately what propels Connor and Risa into jobs at the Graveyard that situate them as helpers and leaders: Risa trains as a medic and provides basic healthcare and first aid, while Connor begins as a mechanic and eventually becomes the Admiral's second in command tasked with discovering who killed the Goldens. This begins to show that kindness, compassion, and the best ways to help others can be taught and learned—especially when considered next to the fact that Lev, who experiences no such kindness before also finding himself in the Graveyard, ultimately turns to terrorism.

For some, most notably the Admiral, being a part of the resistance in this way is more than just a way to do good in the world. For him, it's a way to atone for unwinding his son years

ago. Connor learns that the Admiral's son Harlan was the starting point for the urban legend of **Humphrey Dunfee**, whose parents, according to legend, went on a killing spree after he was unwound and murdered everyone who received a body part from him. In reality, the Admiral was a high-ranking official in government, and when Harlan began acting out, he was pressured to set an example and agreed to unwind his son. Helping other Unwinds, then, is a way for the Admiral to atone for doing an unspeakable thing to his son. The Admiral also sets examples of positive resistance in other ways. Though Unwinds at the Graveyard suspect that he's actually profiting off of the Unwinds and even takes body parts from those he unwinds (there's a great deal of speculation about his perfect teeth), in actuality, the Admiral wears dentures as an act of resistance against the practice of organ harvesting. Later, when he has a heart attack, he refuses a donor heart, and instead demands whatever heart attack treatment doctors practiced before they had a refrigerator full of working hearts to pull from. Through the Admiral, the novel offers a variety of ways that a person can resist by sacrificing his own comfort and making sure he doesn't benefit from the system he's trying to take down—actions inspired by his own horrific choices.

The novel's ending briefly touches on how to be a good activist. Connor, in charge of the Graveyard now that the Admiral isn't well enough to run it, takes the clappers' example as an example of what *not* to do, and instead tells the Unwinds that they'll focus on rescuing teens from harvest camps or from buses headed to camps. He insists that it's extremely important to paint Unwinds as thinking, feeling individuals with a right to their own lives and bodies, rather than playing into the stereotype that Unwinds are violent kids who are better off unwound. In this sense, Connor also uses his own past to inform his activism, as he was one of those boys whose actions made his parents feel as though he'd be more useful to society unwound. Further, Lev hears that CyFi, a boy with a donated temporal lobe that causes him intense grief and suffering (he experiences thoughts and emotions that belong to the original owner of the temporal lobe), is going to testify in Congress in favor of stopping unwinding, or at least decreasing the window of time in which a child can be unwound, thereby making it easier for runaways to survive simply by making it so they don't have to be on the run for as long. Through these examples, *Unwind* suggests that nonviolent activism, undertaken with compassion and respect for everyone's bodily autonomy, is an extremely important and meaningful way through which to change the world—and on a personal level, standing up for what is right and helping others can help a person come to terms with their own horrific and traumatizing mistakes.

curable, since science and medicine are advanced enough to simply replace the ill or defective body part with a brand-new, healthy one—and those with the money and inclination can “upgrade” body parts simply because they want to for aesthetic reasons. To many people in society, this is a perfectly moral and just system. To others, especially the novel's most vulnerable individuals, the world feels more like a dystopia, as many live in fear that their lives will effectively end as soon as they reach their teen years and are unwound in order to have their organs. As Connor finds himself immersed in the underground resistance movement against unwinding and discovers meaning and purpose in unexpected places, *Unwind* encourages readers to understand that within both the novel and the reader's world, utopia versus dystopia, and morality versus immorality are, to some degree, simply a matter of perspective. The book makes the case that it's possible to the exact same situation in a variety of different ways, depending on who a person is and his or her outlook on life.

At first, Connor is convinced that his entire world is horrible and dysfunctional. Kids disappear from school with shocking regularity, presumably to be unwound. As he faces down his own unwinding, he's forced to confront the cruelty and lack of respect that permeates his world. Risa has a similar experience as a ward of the state, as she grows up knowing that she has to do everything in her power to make herself useful so that the state doesn't choose to unwind her. Though both Connor and Risa see their world as a dystopia, Lev, meanwhile, sees his life as more or less utopian. As a tithe, he's spent his entire life being treated better than his nine siblings, and his religion states that unwinding in general and tithing in particular are the best ways to make the world at large just as utopian as it is in Lev's experience. These differences in lifestyle, upbringing, and experience are early indicators that what makes something paradise or not can simply be a matter of differing outlooks on life, something the novel supports further when an asthmatic Unwind named Emby points out that he wouldn't be alive at all had he not received an Unwind's lung as a child. For him, it's impossible to ignore or discredit the fact that the system which now seeks to deprive him of his life—one that others consider inhumane—is also the reason he's alive in the first place. In this sense, it's possible for someone to take either side (or even both sides) of the debate surrounding whether unwinding is positive or inhumane, depending on one's circumstances, experience with unwinding, and how he or she was raised to think about the practice.

Unwind further complicates the idea of utopias and dystopias through its descriptions of the Graveyard and the Happy Jack Harvest Camp. Even though, on the surface, the Graveyard looks like a dystopia and the harvest camp a utopia, it's really the other way around. When Connor first arrives at the Graveyard, he sees it as a desolate and horrific space—it's in the extremely hot Arizona desert and doesn't seem much better



MORALITY AND PERSPECTIVE

In the world of *Unwind*, many seem to think that they live in a utopia. Any injury, disorder, or illness is

than being on the run alone. However, it doesn't take long for Connor to realize that the Graveyard looks like this by design (its desolate appearance makes it less likely that the wrong person will discover it) and that it is actually the safest, happiest, and most meaningful place for an Unwind to live until he or she old enough to be safe from unwinding. Happy Jack, as well as all the other harvest camps, are the exact opposite. Harvest camps are designed to look like resorts, with beautiful landscaping and amenities—but the simple fact that they're the site of unwinding causes even the narrator to insist that the camps are "soulless," and both Connor and Risa pick up on the undercurrent of terror that permeates the beautiful landscape. In short, those who developed the plans for the harvest camps understood that in order to make unwinding more palatable, they needed to create the illusion that a teen's last days are fun, safe, and idyllic.

Ultimately, the fate of CyFi is the most compelling condemnation of the supposedly moral system of unwinding. Though he's well aware that he's alive and well because he received a temporal lobe from an Unwind, living with part of another person's brain in his head literally gives him another perspective on unwinding, as he sometimes experiences thoughts, emotions, or memories that belong to the brain's former owner, a boy named Tyler. Lev accompanies CyFi on a journey to Joplin, Missouri, and witnesses CyFi, overwhelmed by the emotions in Tyler's temporal lobe, throw himself at the feet of Tyler's parents and beg to not be unwound. Tyler (and, it's implied, all Unwinds) aren't aware that they've been unwound, and instead spend the rest of their divided existence confused and frustrated by their hosts' control over their minds and, possibly, their other body parts. Though CyFi appears to recover after his breakdown in front of Tyler's parents, his outburst, coupled with the novel's later graphic description of the unwinding process, begins to suggest that while unwinding may represent an ideal in some ways, it only takes a little bit of perspective—like seeing CyFi/Tyler's breakdown and the unwinding process from inside the head of someone being unwound—to understand that unwinding is actually anything but. With this, the novel emphasizes that gaining perspective is the only way to begin to see the underlying truth of any such situation.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



THE BILL OF LIFE

The Bill of Life represents the incompetence of the government in the novel. Admiral Dunfee explains to Connor that he and his fellows in the Army initially

developed the Bill of Life during the Heartland War as a satire, with the intention of impressing upon both the pro-life and the pro-choice sides of the U.S.'s abortion debate that they were being ridiculous and taking the conflict way too far. This backfired, however, when neither side got the joke and the Bill of Life became law—law that is arguably more violent, nonsensical, and unhelpful than even the Heartland War ever was. Because of this, the Bill of Life comes to encapsulate how ill-equipped the government and the law in the world of the novel are to deal with issues of this kind. Moreover, to individuals like Connor and Risa who were born after the Heartland War and know nothing else, the status and seeming normalcy of the Bill of Life in people's everyday lives speaks to the way in which even policies that are cruel and nonsensical can become normalized and accepted by society.



HUMPHREY DUNFEE

Humphrey Dunfee is a symbol of the trauma that unwinding can cause for both direct victims of the procedure and their families. Humphrey's story is an urban legend that holds that when Humphrey was a teen, his parents unwound him—but after the fact, they experienced crushing remorse and went on a killing spree, murdering every person who received a body part from their son. Despite being an urban legend, Humphrey's story speaks to the very real costs and consequences of unwinding teens: it's impossible to reverse, for one thing, and it's traumatizing for adults and teens alike. The novel expands on this idea of trauma when it reveals that the Admiral is actually Admiral *Dunfee*, the father of Harlan Dunfee—the real person who inspired Humphrey's story. The Admiral runs a refugee camp for Unwinds and refuses donor organs exactly because of the remorse and trauma he experiences after unwinding Harlan, showing that embellished trauma and real trauma alike can be powerful motivators for someone to begin to challenge the status quo and change the world for the better.





QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Simon & Schuster edition of *Unwind* published in 2009.

Chapter 2 Quotes

☞ “Please, Miss Ward. It's not dying, and I'm sure everyone here would be more comfortable if you didn't suggest something so blatantly inflammatory. The fact is, 100% of you will still be alive, just in a divided state.”

Related Characters: Risa Ward, Admiral Dunfee, Headmaster Thomas

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 24

Explanation and Analysis


During the meeting in which Risa learns that she's going to be unwound, she suggests that she's going to die—something that the lawyer at the meeting takes issue with. The fact that the lawyer insists that Risa is being inflammatory and offensive shows that within the world of the novel, people in power are working very hard to police how people talk about unwinding. Though the novel doesn't really get into who these people are, they presumably understand that if lots of people thought about unwinding as being akin to dying, they wouldn't support it anymore—it would seem morally wrong. Instead, in order to keep the practice alive and socially acceptable, they need to constantly spout the rhetoric that unwinding is simply a shift to a divided state, something that obscures the fact that kids who undergo unwinding have no say in the matter.


Later, the Admiral tells Connor that soon after unwinding became legal, it became a major business. It's likely that those who profit off of unwinding are the ones who insist on using this kind of language—their financial success depends on keeping unwinding legal, no matter who suffers as a result.

Chapter 9 Quotes

☹☹ The mother is nineteen, but she doesn't feel that old. She feels no wiser, no more capable of dealing with this situation, than a little girl. When, she wonders, did she stop being a child? The law says it was when she turned eighteen, but the law doesn't know her.

Related Characters: Didi, The Mother

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 53

Explanation and Analysis

A young mother prepares to stork her infant, which means that she will leave the baby on the doorstep of a stranger. If the mother does so without being caught, the residents of the house must keep the baby; if she's caught, she will have to keep it instead. The mother considers that the law doesn't seem to do much for her. Recognizing that being

legally an adult doesn't make her one emotionally or in the eyes of many others begins to show that laws aren't the perfect, infallible solutions they're presented to be in the novel. In this case, it's not successful in making the mother feel like an adult with options, even if she's already done something very adult by carrying and giving birth to a baby. This begins to make the case that the law in the world of the novel isn't effective at protecting or guiding the people that it should be.

Chapter 14 Quotes

☹☹ “Anyway, since it was legally ours, we paid for the funeral. It didn't even have a name, and my parents couldn't bear to give it one. It was just ‘Baby Lassiter,’ and even though no one had wanted it, the entire neighborhood came to the funeral. People were crying like it was their baby that had died...And that's when I realized that the people who were crying—they were the ones who had passed that baby around. They were the ones, just like my own parents, who had a hand in killing it.”

Related Characters: Connor Lassiter (speaker), Risa Ward, Lev Calder, Didi, Connor's Dad, Connor's Mom

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 75

Explanation and Analysis

Connor explains to Risa and Lev why he stole Didi: he witnessed the horrific consequences of storking as a child. Hearing Connor explain firsthand how everyone in his neighborhood, including his parents, unwittingly conspired to kill an infant makes it very clear that even if the Storking Initiative was intended to solve the problem of unwanted babies, it's wildly ineffective at doing so—Lev notes at one point that re-storking babies is illegal, but that clearly doesn't stop any of Connor's neighbors from doing it anyway. In short, it doesn't solve the problem of an unwanted baby; rather, it just puts that baby at risk of illness and exposure the longer people refuse to care for it. Further, because it's illegal to pass on a storked infant like this, the people who housed the baby for a night likely felt like they couldn't seek medical care for the baby without getting into trouble for not agreeing to keep it, harming this baby even further.

Connor understands that whatever the law's intention, what happened to this storked baby was unconscionable. This causes him to take what the law says is moral or not with a grain of salt, as he's seen firsthand that the law

doesn't always lead to righteous, just, or moral outcomes.

☞ “People shouldn’t do a lot of things,” says Connor. He knows they’re both right, but it doesn’t make a difference. In a perfect world mothers would all want their babies, and strangers would open up their homes to the unloved. In a perfect world everything would be either black or right, right or wrong, and everyone would know the difference. But this isn’t a perfect world. The problem is people who think it is.

Related Characters: Connor Lassiter (speaker), Risa Ward, Lev Calder, Didi

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 75

Explanation and Analysis

After Lev and Risa suggest that people who receive storked babies shouldn’t pass them on and that mothers shouldn’t stork babies in the first place, Connor recognizes that those sentiments represent an ideal that simply doesn’t exist in the real world. Again, this makes the case that the laws surrounding family planning in the novel’s world don’t effectively account for the reality. While there are families like Lev’s that will take in storked babies without question, there are many more, like Connor’s, that will ignore babies in need until those babies die—and all of this takes place while there are people in Connor’s world who think everything is working just fine. When he insists that those people are the problem, he suggests that the issue lies with the individuals who are only able or willing to think in ideals and refuse to look at the reality before them. If a person ignores both the overfull state homes and the fate of the baby that was storked to Connor’s family, the system works great—but there are those, like Connor, who see that it doesn’t. Because of this, and because Connor feels complicit in the death of the storked baby, he does what he can to make things better for Didi.

Chapter 16 Quotes

☞ *Please what?* the teacher thinks. *Please break the law? Please put myself and the school at risk?* But, no, that’s not it at all. What he’s really saying is: *Please be a human being.* With a life so full of rules and regiments, it’s so easy to forget that’s what they are. She knows—she *sees*—how often compassion takes a back seat to expediency.

Related Characters: The Teacher/Hannah (speaker), Connor Lassiter, Risa Ward, Didi

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 83



Explanation and Analysis

When Connor begs Hannah for help, Hannah realizes that he’s really asking for kindness and compassion. By reframing Connor’s request as one for compassion rather than one to break the law, Hannah makes it clear that there’s an official, legal way to think about what she’s doing. However, it’s more meaningful, and leads her in a better direction, if she thinks about helping him in terms of doing the morally right thing. As a teacher, she likely often notices students disappearing to be unwound, something that, judging by the reasoning of Connor’s parents, represents the “expedient” way to deal with a troubled child that’s much easier than treating that child with compassion and kindness. This also shows that Hannah doesn’t really need an incentive to help Unwinds like Connor and Risa—she knows it’s the right thing to do, and so doing the right thing is its own reward.

Chapter 19 Quotes

☞ There’s nothing keeping them tied to this baby anymore. They could stork it again first thing in the morning [...] And yet the thought makes Connor uncomfortable. They don’t owe this baby anything. It’s theirs by stupidity, not biology. He doesn’t want it, but he can’t stand the thought of someone getting the baby who wants it even less than he does.

Related Characters: Connor Lassiter, Risa Ward, Didi

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 93

Explanation and Analysis

As Connor considers re-storking Didi, he thinks through the morality of doing so. His thought process again shows that while the Storking Initiative may have “solved” the problem of unwanted babies, it doesn’t truly solve the problem—if only because those who receive storked infants (like Connor in this case) are unable or unwilling to follow the rules.

Connor also implies here that he believes babies should be wanted and loved. While he doesn’t want Didi—he


understands that she puts him and Risa at a considerable risk—he also accepts that she’s still a person worthy of love and a caregiver who wants her. This indicates that in many ways, Connor has a sense of morality that surpasses some of those who believe in unwinding, as both storking and unwinding call into question a person’s right to be loved and desired.

☞ “You think this makes me a saint? Let me tell you, I’ve had a considerably long life, and I’ve done some pretty awful things, too.”

“Well, I don’t care. No matter how many times you smack me with that cane, I think you’re decent.”

“Maybe, maybe not. One thing you learn when you’ve lived as long as I have—people aren’t all good, and people aren’t all bad. We move in and out of darkness and light all of our lives. Right now, I’m pleased to be in the light.”

Related Characters: Sonia (speaker), Connor Lassiter

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 111


Explanation and Analysis

When Connor discovers that Sonia has been helping Unwinds for years, he declares that she’s unequivocally decent. Sonia, however, makes it clear that there’s more to being a good person than just advocating for Unwinds for a few years—she suggests that when deciding whether she’s good or not, someone must look at her entire life and see the big picture. This encourages Connor to understand that even good people make mistakes, while people he thinks of as bad guys probably have some good parts to them. Being forced to think this way and accept that Sonia isn’t entirely good forces Connor to expand his ideas regarding what makes someone good or bad, while also suggesting that it’s possible for someone like Sonia to help their case by choosing to do the right thing. While the novel never gets into what Sonia did that was bad, this offers the possibility that she can make up for it by helping Unwinds in her old age.

Chapter 21 Quotes

☞ Lev had agreed to go with him because he knew the two filled a need in each other. CyFi was like a preacher with no flock. He couldn’t exist without an audience, and Lev needed someone who could fill his head with ideas, to replace the lifetime of ideas that had been taken from him.

Related Characters: Lev Calder, Cyrus Finch/CyFi

Related Themes:  


Page Number: 124

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator explains why Lev agrees to travel with CyFi, a boy on a mysterious journey to Joplin, Missouri. This passage is important because it makes it clear that Lev is in a very vulnerable state at this point. After feeling betrayed by Pastor Dan and conflicted about how he treated Risa and Connor, Lev is struggling to figure out what he’s supposed to think—and CyFi is someone to listen to, someone who can guide Lev. However, it’s also important to note that it’s only by chance that Lev falls in with CyFi; he could’ve joined up with anyone willing to have him, with any number of ideas along the novel’s political spectrum. Because Lev simply feels the need to take in someone else’s beliefs, this means that he is still at risk of absorbing harmful ideas—which he eventually does when he falls in with the clappers, who prey on his vulnerability and his anger.

☞ “He’s not a bad kid. He’s just hurting. Hurting real bad.” The way Cy’s talking, it’s like the kid is still there, right in the room with them. “He’s got this urge about him to grab things—like an addiction, y’know? Shiny things mostly. It’s not like he really wants them, it’s just that he kind of needs to snap ‘em up. I figure he’s a kleptomaniac.”

Related Characters: Cyrus Finch/CyFi (speaker), Lev Calder, Tyler

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 138

Explanation and Analysis

CyFi describes the Unwind, Tyler, whose temporal lobe CyFi now has. The way that CyFi talks about Tyler makes it clear that within CyFi’s head, Tyler is a very real presence, even if he’s unwound and now exists in pieces. He’s not entirely benign, either, since CyFi now has to deal with Tyler’s


compulsions.

The things that CyFi has to deal with as a consequence of receiving Tyler's temporal lobe begin to show that even if it's possible to argue for unwinding and organ or tissue donation in some cases—the novel offers several positive instances, from Josias Aldridge's new arm to Lev's sister's "brain bits" that cure her epilepsy—the issue can be more complicated. Tyler's very real presence in CyFi's brain shows that unwinding still doesn't account for the fact that, at least in the case of brains, unwound teens are still very much alive and aware, even if they're not in their own body anymore. This presents a moral quandary for Lev and for the reader: is it moral and humane for CyFi or for Tyler to exist like this?

Chapter 25 Quotes

☞ The fighter in him screams foul, but another side of him, a side that's growing steadily stronger, enjoys this exercise of silent power—and it *is* power, because Roland now behaves exactly the way he and Risa want him to.

Related Characters: Connor Lassiter, Risa Ward, Roland

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 153

Explanation and Analysis

As the weeks go on, Connor comes to realize that Risa is right: it's better to think, plan, and manipulate than it is to fight. This represents a major turning point for Connor, as up until this point, he's been at the mercy of his out of control anger much of the time. Because of his anger, Connor made a number of poor decisions that he could've avoided if he'd thought for a moment for acting on his emotions. Now, however, he begins to see that he has a better chance of success and of survival if he learns to channel his anger into plotting and manipulation. This is easier for him to see in part because Roland, while not as cunning as Connor and Risa, is doing the exact same thing, which allows him to build alliances with kids and eventually incite a riot at the Graveyard. At this point, however, Connor is still on top—which impresses upon him the necessity of being smarter and better at manipulation than Roland.

Chapter 27 Quotes

☞ "You might think I'm stupid, but I got a good reason for the way I feel," Emby says. "When I was little, I was diagnosed with pulmonary fibrosis. Both my lungs were shutting down. I was gonna die. So they took out both my dying lungs and gave me a single lung from an Unwind. The only reason I'm alive is because that kid got unwound."

"So," says Connor, "Your life is more important than his?"

"He was already unwound—it's not like I did it to him. If I didn't get that lung, someone else would have."

Related Characters: Connor Lassiter, Emby (speaker), Hayden, Harlan Dunfee, Diego

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 168-69

Explanation and Analysis

In the shipping crate from the warehouse to the Graveyard, Emby offers a controversial opinion: unwinding isn't entirely bad, since he's alive thanks to organs he received from an Unwind. This makes it clear that even among those slated to be unwound—and those Unwinds who are fighting to not be unwound—there are still a number of differing opinions on the relative morality of unwinding.

While Connor makes a very valid point about bodily autonomy (that is, he asks the question of who, the Unwind or Emby, has more of a right to the Unwind's body), because of Emby's personal experience with unwinding, he's unable to write it off as entirely inhumane. However, his attempt to deflect blame and insist that if he hadn't taken the lung someone else would've, suggests that whatever Emby's thoughts on the matter, he doesn't feel he has the power to push for any change to the way things are. In this way, Emby is complicit in the system of unwinding, even as he's potentially a victim of that very system.



☞ "The unborn have souls. They have their souls from the moment they get made—the law says."


Connor doesn't want to get into it again with Emby, but he can't help himself. "Just because the law says it, that doesn't make it true."

"Yeah, well, just because the law says it, that doesn't make it false, either. It's only the law because a whole lot of people thought about it, and decided it made sense."

Related Characters: Connor Lassiter, Emby (speaker),

Hayden, Diego

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 168-69

Explanation and Analysis

As the boys in Connor's crate debate when fetuses get souls, Connor and Emby argue over whether a law has the power to make something right or true. Connor's insistence that it doesn't reflects his own experiences with the law. He likely remembers the storked baby that his family was complicit in killing because they didn't follow the rules and take it in, and he's also likely considering the fact that unwinding feels like a gross violation of his privacy, bodily autonomy, and right to life—something that the Bill of Life would sweep under the rug.

Meanwhile, Emby's assertion that laws become laws because many people decide they make sense reflects a decidedly idealistic view of government, especially when later, the Admiral explains that the Bill of Life originated as a joke. The very thing that Emby is defending, unbeknownst to him, made no moral or logical sense to the people who came up with it—and yet, it still became law. Again, this speaks to the way in which laws in Connor's world are wildly ineffective at solving any of society's problems and, in this case, are shown to not even come to fruition because of honest, good intentions.

Chapter 30 Quotes

☹☹ And all at once Cy realizes that Tyler doesn't know. The part of that boy which comprehends time and place isn't here, and never will be. Tyler can't understand that he's already gone, and nothing Cy can do will ever make him understand. So he goes on wailing.

Related Characters: Lev Calder, Cyrus Finch/CyFi, Tyler

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 191

Explanation and Analysis



As CyFi allows Tyler, the original owner of his temporal lobe, take over, he realizes that Tyler has no conception of the fact that he's been unwound. This raises an important moral question about the ethics of unwinding: is it humane to unwind teens when parts of them, such as their temporal

lobes, are incapable of understanding that they're unwound—and because of this, experience emotional anguish and cause their new hosts to experience the same? In particular, Tyler's role in CyFi's head is an angry one, since he cannot make himself understood or regain the control he was used to having as his own person. In this sense, Tyler also demonstrates a time when anger is ineffective and damaging for all, though there is eventually a bright side when CyFi testifies against unwinding in front of Congress. In that sense, Tyler's anger has tangible and useful results, especially since at the end of the novel, Connor implies that the government did lower the legal age of adulthood to 17, something that CyFi and Tyler likely helped make happen.

Chapter 33 Quotes

☹☹ The days begin to pass quickly, and before she realizes it, she's been there a month. Each day that goes by adds to her sense of security. The Admiral was an odd bird, but he'd done something no one else had been able to do for her since she'd left StaHo. He'd given her back her right to exist.

Related Characters: Risa Ward, Admiral Dunfee

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 202


Explanation and Analysis

After finding her place as a medic at the Graveyard, Risa begins to gain a sense of dignity and purpose like she never really experienced as a ward of the state, and definitely didn't experience as a runaway. Risa's sense of security speaks to the power of the kind of activism the Admiral espouses. Because he makes her feel safe, secure, and needed in her community, Risa then feels even more compelled to support that community and give back to it. In that sense, it's possible to say that the counselor who insisted that Risa had reached her potential at the state home was wrong—Risa clearly has more to give and could've given it anywhere if someone had given her the opportunity to do so. This also betrays a fundamental flaw of unwinding, in that unwinding a child is a declaration that that child doesn't have any use in a whole form or any right to exist—when Risa shows here that this isn't true.

Chapter 34 Quotes

“The Admiral’s out of touch,” he would say. “He doesn’t know what it’s like to be one of us. He can’t possibly understand who we are and what we need.” And in groups of kids he’s already won over, he whispers his theories about the Admiral’s teeth, and his scars, and his diabolical plans for all of them. He spreads fear and distrust, using it to unite as many kids as he can.

Related Characters: Roland (speaker), Connor Lassiter, Admiral Dunfee, The Teacher/Hannah, Sonia

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 219

Explanation and Analysis



Connor watches with disgust as Roland gains followers and spreads rumors that the Admiral has plans to unwind them all and profit off of it. Connor recognizes that Roland is engaging in exactly the same kind of power plays as Risa taught Connor to orchestrate—but in this case, Roland is far more successful in channeling what Connor knows is anger into action than Connor is at this point.


It’s also unclear exactly what Roland hopes to achieve by spreading these rumors and turning kids against the Admiral. The Admiral is the reason that these kids are safe from unwinding in the first place and destroying the Admiral’s operation will surely put these kids at risk. This suggests that even if Roland is skilled at manipulating others, he hasn’t fully thought through the implications of his actions and is therefore not rooting his activism in compassion or kindness. By making this connection, it’s implied that Roland will fail in his endeavor, as the novel overwhelmingly holds up instances of activism that *are* rooted in compassion, like that of the Admiral, Sonia, and Hannah, as far superior to what Roland is doing.

“Then we proposed the idea of unwinding, which would terminate unwanteds without actually ending their lives. We thought it would shock both sides into seeing reason—that they would stare at each other across the table and someone would blink. But nobody blinked. The choice to terminate without ending life—it satisfied the needs of both sides. The Bill of Life was signed, the Unwind Accord went into effect, and the war was over. Everyone was so happy to end the war, no one cared about the consequences.”

Related Characters: Admiral Dunfee (speaker), Connor

Lassiter, Emby

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 224

Explanation and Analysis

The Admiral explains to Connor that he was one of the people who came up with the Bill of Life—but it was intended as a satire of sorts, not as a real solution to the violent Heartland War raging at the time. The fact that the Bill of Life went on to become law in spite of these origins makes it very clear that laws and the lawmaking process in the world of the novel are fundamentally flawed—lawmakers don’t undertake the creation of new laws with any interest in the implications of what they come up with for the general population. This also goes against Emby’s earlier suggestion that laws become law when people collectively decide they make sense. The Admiral here insists that the Bill of Life doesn’t make sense; it was never supposed to. The general population, in other words, puts its trust in a government that comes up with quick solutions to simply make problems go away, not actually solve them.

“Of course, if more people had been organ donors, unwinding never would have happened...but people like to keep what’s theirs, even after they’re dead. It didn’t take long for ethics to be crushed by greed. Unwinding became big business, and people let it happen.”

Related Characters: Admiral Dunfee (speaker), Connor Lassiter

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 224

Explanation and Analysis

The Admiral explains to Connor how, after the Bill of Life was passed, unwinding became a moneymaking business for many. He suggests in particular that this happened because, prior to the Bill of Life and the Heartland War, there wasn’t enough activism in support of organ donation to fill the need.

Further, the Admiral implies that the big businesses that grew up to carry out unwinding are corrupt and unethical. The novel repeatedly supports this point when characters mention that they can't afford a transplant or can't afford a fully healthy organ or tissue. This means that there's a wide swath of the population without the purchasing power to participate in the new economy of organs, something that not only puts them at a disadvantage but also puts them at risk of illness or death. The novel also shows that the system is unjust simply through its very premise: teenage Unwinds have no say in whether or not they're unwound, while being an organ donor is something people can choose to do voluntarily. In this sense, those with money to gain from this system are profiting off of one of the most vulnerable populations in the world of the novel: young people with no legal way to protect themselves or advocate for their right to donate—or not donate—organs voluntarily.

“It's only because of his unwinding that you're all here. Afterward, my wife left me and formed a foundation in Harlan's memory. I left the military, spent several years more drunk than I am now, and then, three years ago, I had The Big Idea. This place, these kids, are the result of it. To date I've saved more than a thousand kids from unwinding.”

Related Characters: Admiral Dunfee (speaker), Connor Lassiter, Harlan Dunfee

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 225

Explanation and Analysis

To finish his conversation with Connor, the Admiral shares the story of how he came to unwind his son, Harlan, and used his grief and guilt to eventually come up with the idea for the Graveyard. With this, the Admiral shows clearly how a person can turn to activism that's rooted in compassion and helping others in order to atone for past misdeeds. Further, when he mentions that his wife also turned to activism after Harlan was unwound, the Admiral shows clearly that this isn't an isolated incident; many people experience this kind of guilt that spurs them to action. For Connor, this impresses upon him that he can use everything that he's learned and all the bad things he's done throughout his life and channel it to help other kids like him.

Chapter 35 Quotes

“He could join them just out of spite, but that's not enough—not this time. There must be more. Yet, as he stands there, Lev realizes that there *is* more. It's invisible, but it's there, like the deadly charge lurking in a downed power line. Anger, but not just anger: a will to act on it as well.

“All right, I'm in.” Back at home Lev always felt part of something larger than himself. Until now, he hadn't realized how much he missed that feeling.

Related Characters: Lev Calder (speaker), Cyrus Finch/CyFi, Cleaver, Mai, Blaine

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 230

Explanation and Analysis

Lev thinks over his reasons for joining the clappers, a terrorist organization that engages in what's essentially suicide bombing. Whereas Lev used to be a tithe and viewed himself as chosen by God to be unwound, it's clear that escaping his strict religious upbringing has allowed him to come to his own conclusions. Following Lev's whirlwind transformation from willing tithe to witness to CyFi's pain in Joplin, Missouri, Lev finds himself angry and alone—and after leaving CyFi, whose influence on Lev was relatively benign, Lev is still vulnerable to other ideas. This is why he falls in with the clappers: he's angry, he's unmoored, and these new emotions make Lev feel out of control. The clappers give him a way to deal with those emotions by engaging in suicide bombing, while also making him feel like part of a community.

Chapter 52 Quotes

“In her mind's eye she always pictured harvest camps as human cattle stockades: dead-eyed crowds of malnourished kids in small gray cells—a nightmare of dehumanization. Yet somehow this picturesque nightmare is worse. Just as the airplane graveyard was Heaven disguised as Hell, harvest camp is Hell masquerading as Heaven.

Related Characters: Risa Ward

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 267-68

Explanation and Analysis

While Risa sits in her meeting with a counselor at Happy Jack Harvest Camp, the narrator draws out the differences between the Graveyard and Happy Jack. In doing so, the novel again makes the point that what one sees as Heaven or Hell, utopia or dystopia, depends on one's perspective. To the counselor speaking to Risa, she's probably in the middle of Heaven, as she's engaging in what she probably believes is work that benefits her community in every way. For Risa, however, the harvest camp represents the entity that wants to deprive of her life as she knows it and is therefore wholly evil.

The fact that the harvest camp is a gorgeous place also suggests that those who conceived of the camps understood that in order to make unwinding palatable to people, it was necessary to create the appearance that Unwinds spend their last days happy and safe. In reality, however, the beautiful landscape isn't able to change the fact that all the kids at the camp are terrified, and the landscape certainly doesn't do what it's supposed to do.



☞ “What do you do with the club feet, and the deaf ears? Do you use those in transplants?”

“You don't have either of those, do you?”

“No—but I do have an appendix. What happens to that?”

“Well,” says the counselor with near infinite patience, “a deaf ear is better than no ear at all, and sometimes it's all people can afford. And as for your appendix, nobody really needs that anyway.”

Related Characters: Risa Ward (speaker), Emby

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 269

Explanation and Analysis

In her counseling session, Risa asks the counselor what they do with the harvested body parts that aren't typical, that might not be considered healthy, or that are simply unnecessary, like an appendix. The counselor's explanation that some people can only afford deaf ears offers insight into one of the ways those in charge of the harvest camps make money: by putting a value on every part they harvest from an Unwind, and creating a system in which those with more money can purchase “better” or healthier parts. In this sense, even though unwinding was supposed to create a society that was fairer and more just than it was before the practice became legal, in reality, unwinding as it functions now only heightens the sense of inequality and likely hurts

many people. Emby is the novel's best example of this, as his parents could only afford an asthmatic lung when he was diagnosed with pulmonary fibrosis. Because of this economic system, Emby then goes through life experiencing a much lower quality of life than his peers thanks to the severe asthma his lung came with.

Chapter 55 Quotes

☞ “How can you do this?” she asks during one of their breaks. “How can you watch them day after day, going in and never coming out?”

“You get used to it,” the drummer tells her, taking a swig of water. “You'll see.”

“I won't! I can't!” She thinks about Connor. He doesn't have this same reprieve from unwinding. He doesn't stand a chance. “I can't be an accomplice to what they're doing!”

Related Characters: Risa Ward (speaker), Connor Lassiter, Dalton

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 274

Explanation and Analysis

A few days after Risa is assigned to play in the harvest camp band, she asks the others how they can stand to spend their days watching their peers enter the Chop Shop to meet their end. Risa's question asks, essentially, if it's ethical to stand by and do nothing, especially since, as a member of the band, Risa is more or less safe from being unwound herself. Dalton goes on to insist to Risa that their survival depends on their complicity. Any pushback from the band would result in them being unwound immediately. While this doesn't excuse the questionable ethics of standing by and doing nothing, it does suggest that in a situation like this, where everyone is trying to survive, it's far more difficult to willingly put oneself at risk just to make a point. In a perfect world, Risa, Dalton, and the band would stand up—but they recognize that given the way things stand, it won't garner attention from anyone else with the power to do anything about it.

Chapter 57 Quotes

☞☞ Lev was terrified of these people, and yet he felt a kinship with them. They understood the misery of being betrayed by life. They understood what it felt like to have less than nothing inside you. And when they told Lev how important he was in the scheme of things, Lev felt, for the first time in a long time, truly important.

Related Characters: Lev Calder, Cleaver, Mai, Blaine

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 284

Explanation and Analysis



The narrator explains Lev's journey to becoming an official clapper. Importantly, the novel again makes the case that Lev is willing to go along with the clappers because they fill his gaping need for community, as well as give him something to do with his overflowing anger. They're able to do this, in part, by making Lev feel important, which he likely hasn't felt since he was a tithe, and which was central to his conception of self as a child and prior to his kidnapping.

By their very nature, the clappers also insist to Lev that it's not enough to simply talk about the changes they want to see—and interestingly, the clappers take the same side as Connor, Risa, and even the narrator do in that they don't support unwinding. However, rather than engaging in nonviolent activism, the clappers believe that violence is the only way to further their goals, corrupting and damaging kids like Lev, Mai, and Blaine in the process.

Chapter 65 Quotes

☞☞ It is only when a clapper brings his hands together that the lie reveals itself, abandoning the clapper in that final instant so that he exits this world utterly alone, without so much as a lie to accompany him into oblivion.

Related Characters: Connor Lassiter, Lev Calder, Mai, Blaine

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 305

Explanation and Analysis

In the minutes before Blaine and Mai detonate, the narrator offers the various reasons why people might become clappers and suggests that at the moment they clap, those reasons reveal themselves as lies. With this, the narrator

suggests that the entire premise of the clappers—that they must commit violent acts in order to make their point—is faulty and serves no one. Instead, the idea that one must die in order to speak out against unwinding only results in people, who may have been sympathetic to someone like Connor the Admiral in different circumstances, dying needlessly and taking countless others with them. Characters like Connor, on the other hand, show that it's possible to stand up against injustice calmly and rationally rather than jumping straight to radical acts of violence. In making this connection, the novel comes down forcefully against violent acts of terrorism like this and violent forms of protest in general.

Chapter 68 Quotes

☞☞ “You may be responsible for your actions,” Pastor Dan says, “but it's not your fault you weren't emotionally prepared for life out there in the real world. This was *my* fault—and the fault of everyone who raised you to be a tithe. We're as guilty as the people who pumped that poison into your blood.”

Related Characters: Pastor Dan (speaker), Lev Calder, Lev's Dad

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 328

Explanation and Analysis

When Pastor Dan visits Lev in prison, he suggests that he, Lev's parents, and their entire church community are complicit in Lev's choice to become a clapper. With this, Pastor Dan condemns tithing generally, and specifically condemns a system that, in his understanding, brainwashes young tithes into believing that unwinding is all they're good for. As a consequence, there's no way to prepare someone like Lev, who gets out of being unwound, for how to handle life without this belief system to guide him. Admitting this also shows that Pastor Dan recognizes that the clappers were attractive to Lev exactly because they offered him all the same things his church community did—purpose, camaraderie, an escape from a confusing world. Essentially, he recognizes that the way that Lev was raised to believe so fully in the church left him vulnerable to sympathizing with and joining groups that may push some of the same basic ideas, but in a way that runs counter to what the religious community promotes. This is ultimately why Pastor Dan leaves the church as well: he recognizes his complicity in creating Lev and sending countless others to their unwindings as tithes, and he doesn't believe that he can

continue to participate in that system in good conscience.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

THE BILL OF LIFE

The Second Civil War, or “The Heartland War,” was fought over abortion. In order to settle the conflict between Pro-life and Pro-choice armies, **The Bill of Life** was passed. These constitutional amendments made abortion illegal but legalized a process called unwinding, in which parents can choose to “retroactively ‘abort’” a child between the ages of 13 and 18. Since the bill was passed, unwinding has become “a common and accepted practice in society.”

This short prologue of sorts introduces the reader to the moral conundrum at the center of the novel: whether or not unwinding is a logical or ethical alternative to abortion. Although the Bill of Life is generally seen as normal and acceptable in the world of the novel, the fraught nature of the abortion debate—and the fact that a war was fought over this issue—makes it clear that the reader will have to come to their own conclusions about the morality of this practice.



CHAPTER 1

Ariana tells Connor that he’s smart enough to survive to age 18. Connor isn’t sure about this, but Ariana makes him feel more confident. She begins to cry, which makes Connor feel momentarily invincible, but soon he once again feels like a kid marked for unwinding in one week. He focuses on the traffic rushing below them and thinks that being in such a dangerous spot makes him feel alive. Ariana suggests that they run away, since she’s fed up with life too. Connor latches on, as kicking-AWOL alone is terrifying. He asks Ariana to go with him and kisses her. She agrees.

What comes through most strongly in the novel’s opening lines is how powerless Connor is. His relationship with Ariana can make him momentarily feel like he’s in control, but in reality, Connor is alone in the world and vulnerable since he’s going to be unwound. Sitting on the overpass also suggests that Connor is a thrill seeker, and later, the novel will link this to Connor’s anger—another reason he’s vulnerable and in danger.



Connor gets home and greets his dad, who’s watching the news. The clappers blew up an Old Navy. Connor makes a joke about this, but Connor’s dad doesn’t laugh. Connor thinks that his parents don’t know he knows he’s being unwound. A few weeks ago, Connor found three tickets to the Bahamas. More sleuthing revealed the Unwind order for Connor, which they scheduled for the day before leaving for the Bahamas. Connor managed to control his anger and has spent the last few weeks being especially kind and doing well in school, so they feel horrible. It hasn’t made him feel any better, and now he feels sorry for them.

Connor and his parents’ emotional roller coaster after he finds the Unwind order speaks to the difficult situation unwinding puts everyone in. For Connor’s parents, this is an irreversible decision, while for Connor, this is the ultimate betrayal and impresses upon him that his parents both don’t love him and don’t value his bodily autonomy. That he can feel sorry for them in spite of this indicates that Connor is a compassionate person, even if he’s angry.



At two a.m., Connor gets up and packs. He heads to Ariana’s house and dials her number. He hears it ring inside and thinks she was supposed to leave her phone on vibrate. He sneaks around to the front porch and Ariana opens the door. She’s wearing pajamas and says that it’s a bad time—her sister’s getting married, and she has to go to school. Connor points out that running away is the only way to save his life, since he’s going to be unwound. Ariana points out that *she’s* not going to be unwound and closes the door.

Ariana’s betrayal introduces the idea that it is, at times, very easy to stand by and do nothing, especially when one isn’t in danger themselves. Though the novel certainly condemns this kind of inaction and suggests that it is selfish and short-sighted, it also offers insight into why unwinding has been allowed to go on for so long: those who aren’t at risk see no reason to fight it.



Connor knows that being cautious is the only way to survive to 18, at which point they can't unwind him. He heads down to a rest stop by the interstate, thinking that he could sneak into a semitruck. He waits until he sees a few cop cars arrive and circle the lot. He dives under a truck, notices a trucker leaving the door to his sleeping compartment open, and races across the lot and into the truck. There's not much space to hide, and the trucker returns for a jacket and catches Connor. Connor begs for help, and inexplicably the trucker grabs a deck of cards and begins doing tricks. He tells Connor that after an accident, the arm—which came from an unwound kid who knew card tricks—was grafted on at the elbow.

The trucker introduces himself as Josias Aldridge and agrees to let Connor ride with him until morning. Connor nods and wakes to shouting police. He thinks that Josias rattled him out, but the Juvey-cops point their weapons at Connor's classmate, Andy Jameson, in another truck. Andy catches Connor's eye and his look of despair turns to triumph. He leads the cops away from Connor and Connor cries as Josias begins to drive away. Connor wakes up from a good dream about his dad caring for him when his phone rings. It's his dad. A voice tells Connor to get out of the truck, and Connor crawls out to see Juvey-cops and his dad. Connor's dad calls him "son," which fills Connor with rage.

Connor bolts across the interstate. Juvey-cops shoot tranquilizer bullets at him as he climbs over the median. A Cadillac almost hits him, but it swerves and stops. Connor sees a terrified kid dressed in white in the backseat. He reaches in through the window and opens the door.

CHAPTER 2

Risa waits for her turn at the piano. Onstage, she sits and thinks of Mr. Durkin, her teacher, in the audience. As a resident of Ohio State Home 23, Risa is lucky to have a teacher she likes. She begins to play. She makes a few mistakes and begins to cry, thinking that Mr. Durkin would tell her that no one is judging her. She thinks that he can believe this since he's not 15 and a ward of the state. Everyone congratulates her warmly after the concert, but a week later, Risa finds herself in Headmaster Thomas's office. There are two other adults there. A woman identifies herself as Risa's caseworker, reads through Risa's file, and says that Risa has "reached [her] potential here."

The trucker begins to add more nuance to the novel's premise by showing that the existence of unwinding means that someone like him doesn't have to live without an arm, something that allows him to keep his job and not have to adjust to life with a serious disability. However, the idea that his new arm maintains the muscle memory to perform card tricks suggests that unwinding is a complex procedure, as seems that receiving the Unwind's arm has somehow imbued the truck driver with the Unwind's consciousness.



Pay attention to the fact that Connor's dad's appearance fills Connor with rage, as his following actions will show how Connor's problems with anger management lead him to make dangerous and poor decisions. However, it's also perfectly understandable that Connor would have this kind of reaction. Connor trusted his dad to care for him and unwinding still feels like the ultimate betrayal in Connor's mind.



Racing across a freeway is both extremely dangerous and surprisingly effective, which makes it clear that as Connor goes on and tries to survive, danger is going to be a fact of life.



Risa's aside that Mr. Durkin has the privilege to believe that nobody is judging him drives home that because of who and where Risa is, she's in constant danger of being unwound. Further, the idea that a 15-year-old has already reached her potential is patently ridiculous: 15-year-olds are still children, legally and developmentally. This shows that there's another reason why the state is presumably choosing to unwind Risa, one that has nothing to do with her potential.



Risa asks why she's here. The adults talk over each other about how wards of the state are only guaranteed care until age 13, that they have to make room for unwanted babies, and that they've experienced budget cuts. The adults are silent when Risa asks if she's being unwound. Risa spits that she's going to die, which the lawyer deems inflammatory and unnecessary. The lawyer assures her she'll still be alive, just in a divided state. Risa asks if she has a choice, but she knows she doesn't.

Risa is a victim of budget cuts and of being an unwanted cog in a machine; unwinding her is, to these adults, a reasonable way to accommodate other babies and get rid of kids they no longer care about. The lawyer's comment about Risa's tone suggests that there's likely a major attempt to police how people speak about unwinding intended to preserve the idea that unwinding is good and just—when clearly, it's anything but.



Risa goes immediately to the transportation center. A few of her friends gather to say goodbye, but Mr. Durkin's absence stings. The next morning, Risa boards a bus with many other kids. A military boeuf flirts with her until another boy points out that Risa is an Unwind. The boy says he's being unwound because he did nothing, and now, there's a chance that a part of him will go on to greatness elsewhere. Risa angrily moves seats and ponders how she might escape. Ahead, she sees a commotion up the road: one boy has another young boy in a chokehold and drags him across traffic, right in front of the bus. The driver slams on the brakes and Risa flies forward. She takes stock of the situation and then exits the bus.

The way that the other Unwind on the bus talks about possibly going onto greatness through someone else speaks to the success of the efforts of people like Risa's lawyer, who insist on speaking about unwinding in positive terms—they even have victims convinced that this is their best option. The fact that Risa doesn't agree with him makes it clear that there are a vast number of opinions on the matter, all of which have their merits. The fact remains, however, that the practice as it stands preys on society's most vulnerable members.



CHAPTER 3

Lev is determined to enjoy his party. The 200 guests are relatives, family friends, and all of Lev's friends. Every girl whom Lev asks to dance agrees, and it seems that dinner comes too soon. His family members give toasts. They bring out the cake and Lev's oldest brother, Marcus, rises to make a toast. Marcus came from across the country to attend, but he's been quiet and withdrawn the entire night. Lev suspects he's drunk. Marcus points out that this party is amazing and addresses Lev's dad, saying that they have to get all the major life events taken care of in one party. Lev's parents look uncomfortable, and Marcus points out that their parents have always done the "appropriate" thing by giving 10 percent of everything to charity, but that he refuses to be involved. He throws his champagne glass and leaves. Lev realizes Marcus isn't drunk.

The fact that Marcus is taking this stand entirely sober impresses upon Lev that Marcus has thought about his position and is willing to embarrass Lev and his parents in order to voice it. Marcus objects to raising children to be unwound, and his refusal to play along anymore places him opposite Ariana in that even though Marcus has nothing to fear from unwinding (as he's too old to be unwound himself), he still sees that it's fundamentally wrong and is willing to use his power as an adult to say so. He therefore sets an example for how to effectively use one's voice and privilege for good.



Lev seeks out Pastor Dan, his wise and trusted childhood pastor. He admits that he's afraid, even though he's known he's a tithe his entire life. He wonders if he feels isolated because of this, or if there's something wrong with him. Lev admits that he's jealous that his friends and family get to go on, even if being a tithe is an honor. Pastor Dan assures Lev that he did nothing wrong and points out that choosing to tithe a child is a big decision—Lev's parents waited until they had nine other children to have Lev, their "true tithe." With tears in his eyes, Pastor Dan says that God asks for the best fruit, not the first fruit, and Lev is the best.

Pastor Dan's emotion makes it clear that even if their religion calls for tithing, it's still something that's emotionally difficult for those involved. Lev's thought process, meanwhile, reveals that he's been raised to not think of his life or his body as his own—instead, they belong to a higher purpose. His jealousy and nervousness are the first indications that Lev may not be as deeply sold on tithing as he'd like to think he is.



The next morning, Lev eats breakfast with all his family members except for Marcus. He takes care to not spill on his white clothes. The goodbyes are drawn-out until Pastor Dan arrives and they all get in the Cadillac. On the interstate, Lev rolls down the window and tells himself that he's blessed and happy. He opens his eyes when Lev's dad slams on the brakes. A dangerous-looking teen (Connor) rips Lev out of the car and begins to pull him across the freeway. Lev begs to not be taken since he's a tithe. Connor incredulously asks if Lev is an Unwind, which offends Lev. They cause a bus to crash and watch a girl (Risa) race off the bus. Lev bites Connor's arm, Connor lets go, and Pastor Dan opens a door. He hisses for Lev to run as everything goes dark.

The exchange between Lev and Connor regarding the language they use to describe themselves and their fate speaks to the variety of perspectives that people in this world have regarding unwinding: there are those for whom unwinding is an honor (tithes) and those for whom unwinding is a punishment for bad behavior (Unwinds). Meanwhile, Pastor Dan's inexplicable behavior here suggests that while he may have outwardly supported Lev's tithing, a part of him doesn't believe it's right—and he's going to take this opportunity to secretly advocate for Lev's life.



CHAPTER 4

Connor meets Risa's eyes as she races into the woods. He sees Lev try to return to his car and thinks that he's caused enough damage by kicking-AWOL and causing the accident. He makes what he knows is a stupid decision and turns back for Lev. A tranquilizer bullet hits Lev, so Connor throws him over his shoulder and follows Risa into the woods. When he catches up to her, he says they need to work together if they want to get away.

Despite being angry and desperate, Connor's choice to return for Lev shows that he is deeply compassionate and cares for everyone's right to live, not just those who believe the same as he does. This echoes too in his guilt over causing the accident and hurting others; an unfeeling person wouldn't care like he does.



CHAPTER 5

A Juvey-cop races after Connor and Lev. He wishes he had real bullets instead of tranquilizer bullets; he thinks that Unwinds are wastes of life and killing them wouldn't be a great loss. He discovers Lev, who is out cold and muddy. He hears Risa ask for help. She explains that she was afraid that the bus would explode and that her arm is broken. He turns, but Connor, the "AWOL Unwind," drops on him and shoots him with his own tranquilizer gun.

Getting inside the Juvey-cop's head offers another perspective into unwinding: the idea that unwinding represents a kind of eugenics that to many, like this cop, is socially acceptable. Because this cop is part of the system that carries out unwinding, it suggests that the system itself is morally corrupt.



CHAPTER 6

Lev wakes up, remembers that he was kidnapped, and flashes on Pastor Dan telling him to run. It doesn't make sense; Pastor Dan wouldn't do that. He opens his eyes and sees Connor and Risa sitting by a fire. Lev struggles against the residual tranquilizer and vines securing him, and he jumps when Risa says that at least Lev is safe. Lev believes that his kidnappers want to lull him into a false sense of security and wonders again what Pastor Dan meant. He asks what Connor set his ransom for. Confused, Connor says he saved Lev's life. Lev decides to not explain to these people that tithing is the ultimate blessing. He bites back his anger and revulsion and thanks them for saving him. He'll get revenge later.

As far as Lev is concerned, Connor took away his very reason for living by "saving" him from his tithing, hence Lev's anger and desire for revenge. While given Lev's upbringing this anger makes sense, it's also telling that Lev's thoughts go straight to getting revenge, something destructive and negative. In this way, the novel begins to lay the groundwork for Lev's tendency toward radicalism and violence, as it shows that when Lev is angry, he turns first to making others hurt too.



CHAPTER 7

Connor has nothing now; he didn't think to take the Juvey-cop's gun and abandoned his backpack on the interstate. He and Risa walked all day and took turns keeping watch all night. Connor knows he can't trust Lev or Risa and thinks of the headlines that will be everywhere soon. He thinks it's funny that he spent time trying to convince others he's dangerous and now, he thinks he's only a danger to himself. He watches Lev's cold, calculating eyes and feels angry when Lev asks why Connor is being unwound. Connor points out that he's not going to be unwound now and asks what it's like to grow up knowing you're a sacrifice. Lev insists it's better than not knowing his purpose, which makes Connor squirm.

Connor reasons that they could've ended up like **Humphrey Dunfee**. Lev is surprised that Connor knows the story, but Risa insists it's made up. She says they need to move and disguise themselves, suggesting that she could dress as a boy. Connor thinks she's too pretty for that and touches her hair, but Risa spins him around and threatens to rip his arm off if he touches her. She reminds Connor that she lived in a state home, where things are rough. Connor and Risa untie Lev and he doesn't run. Connor wonders if Lev has gotten over his duty of being tithed.

Importantly, Connor recognizes that his anger and the way he expresses it is a liability—at this point, he's certain that his actions by the interstate will put them all in danger. Recognizing that this is the case gives Connor the ability to go on and learn how to more appropriately handle his anger. The fact that Lev can make Connor squirm with his answer shows again that it's possible to argue both sides of the unwinding debate.



When Connor wonders if Lev has given up on tithing, he underestimates the power of Lev's community and of the sticking power of the way Lev was raised to think. As Lev sees it, Connor tore him from his purpose, which makes Connor a degenerate who doesn't deserve to live. While a reasonable misunderstanding on Connor's part, it indicates that he hasn't yet gotten to know Lev well enough to understand where Lev is coming from.



CHAPTER 8

Getting close to civilization unsettles Risa, but she also knows that they need help. Connor insists they don't, and storms away from their argument. Risa notices Lev watching and thinks that this is a good time to test to see if Lev is going to take the chance to run. She menacingly tells Connor to come back and insults his intelligence. He grabs her wrist, and though Risa feels violated, his grip is also gentle. They establish that they could hurt each other, but Risa knows Connor won't harm her. They step away and Lev points out that fighting won't help. When Lev later steps away to relieve himself, Connor praises Risa's plan to test Lev. This surprises Risa, but she realizes that Connor makes her feel safe.

In this exchange, Connor and Risa both show that they understand that in certain circumstances, anger and violence can be tools that they can use to gain valuable information. This begins to make the case that anger and violence aren't exclusively bad, but Shusterman is very careful to show that trying to get information by using one's anger is something that a person must do very carefully. Had Connor not seen what Risa was doing, for instance, they may have lost Lev and put themselves in more danger.



CHAPTER 9

The mother is 19, but she feels like a child. She cradles her newborn and navigates back alleys just after dawn. She passes a dumpster and thinks that just after the **Bill of Life** was passed, girls like her left so many infants in dumpsters that it stopped making the news. The mother wryly laughs that the Bill of Life was supposed to protect life, but it just made it cheap. She's thankful for the Storking Initiative, which gives her an alternative. She chooses a home on a nice street and settles her baby on the welcome mat. The mother has always known she'd end up storking her baby; she's too young to be a mother and has no desire, either. As she leaves, she vows to be smart about her second chance. She's thankful she has one.

The mother's inner monologue reveals that even if the Bill of Life was supposed to solve the issue of abortion (and did, in a sense, since abortion is illegal in this world), it still didn't really solve the problem of what women do when they get pregnant and don't want to be pregnant. While the mother is understandably thrilled that she has a second chance at life because of storking, this also means that her baby may have to suffer unintended consequences—such as ending up in a state home and being unwound later, like Risa.



CHAPTER 10

A couple streets away, Risa rings a doorbell, adopts the name Didi, and tells a baffled woman that she's collecting clothes and food as part of a school competition. The woman disappears and returns with a bag of food and clothes. Connor is impressed, but Lev points out that they're still stealing. In the woods, Connor and Lev find clothes, but there's nothing for Risa. Connor doesn't think that changing clothes will matter, but Risa points out that cops always note what people are wearing. Connor points out that they're not criminals, but Lev insists that they're felons since kicking-AWOL is a federal crime. They move along and pass the mother, but she ignores them.

The revelation that kicking-AWOL is a federal crime shows that society in the novel is set up as to not give teens marked for unwinding any way out: even if they manage to escape being unwound, having a federal crime on their record may harm them as adults later, while the particulars of their crime may mark them as being out of touch with the beliefs of the general population and harm them further.



CHAPTER 11

Connor knows they have to be in town to get food and information, but it makes him nervous. He finds a newspaper and they flip through it to see if it mentions them. They find an article about the pileup on the interstate, but it doesn't mention them. Both Lev and Risa are confused, since the news always mentions Unwinds, but Connor shouts that this is a gift—no report means no pictures. Connor struggles to keep his temper under control, but he knows that Risa will realize this is a good thing. Instead, Risa suggests that the cops might want them dead, which will be easier if nothing gets out. She asks if Lev's parents may have paid off the police to kill his kidnappers, which Lev considers.

The disconnect between how Connor and Risa interpret the lack of a story about them shows again that Connor allows his anger to rule him, which keeps him from considering far more likely (and dangerous) alternatives to his first thought. Risa, meanwhile, already knows how to look for motivation and who might profit from their situation, putting her in a better position to both channel her anger and keep them alive.



They see a police car turn onto the street and hear a baby cry out. Connor wants to run, but Risa grabs him. Instead of going with his first thought, he thinks ahead and realizes that running will draw attention. He looks around and suggests that they head for the bus stop, where other kids their age are gathered. Lev is unwilling to go, but the bus rounds the corner. He walks across the street as Connor yells that he'll get a detention for being late. Risa assures Lev that they won't board the bus, but its lights begin to flash, and the cop car stops where the cop can see kids loading. They have to get on.

Connor becomes suddenly aware of the crying baby, which is on the porch by the bus stop. He knows the baby was storked and stops. Risa yells at Connor, but just then, the door of the house opens and a small kid yells to his mother that they've been storked again. Connor tells himself that this isn't the same baby, but he bolts for the porch, grabs the baby, and Risa tells the mother in the house that the baby is hers. The woman taunts Connor and Risa as Risa gathers the wailing infant. Connor feels hopeless, helpless, and broken.

The fact that Connor is learning to think through his thoughts and not give in to his anger shows again that he does have the potential to change how he moves through the world in such a way as to keep himself and others alive. The fact that Lev isn't running for the cop car suggests that he may be questioning whether he really wants to be tithed—perhaps Marcus's impassioned objection to the practice has planted a seed of doubt in Lev's mind.



Connor telling himself that this isn't the "same baby" shows that there's more to this than just not thinking storking is a great idea—rather, there's something in his past that makes him believe that taking the responsibility for the baby himself is better than leaving it on the porch. Depending on one's thoughts on storking, it's also possible to see this as activism, again showing that one's perspective can change everything.



CHAPTER 12

Risa realizes that Connor is prone to making dangerous decisions. She leads them to the back of the bus, passing a young mother and a six-month-old. Lev asks why they have a baby, and Connor responds that the cops are looking for three kids, not three kids and a baby. Risa knows he's lying but doesn't press him. The young mother introduces herself as Alexis and her baby as Chase. She perkily praises Risa and Connor for staying together and Risa for going back to school so soon. Connor proudly says that the baby's name is Didi and Alexis notes that Lev is cute. Risa says menacingly that Lev is her brother and is only 13. Alexis only leaves them alone when Chase bumps his chin.

Risa understands that remaining with Connor means that she's at risk of being caught, especially since he's willing to snag a baby—whenever Didi cries, they're going to attract attention in a way that three teens wouldn't on their own. The way that Risa shuts Alexis down about Lev recalls Risa's experiences growing up in a rough state home: she understands that any extra attention on Lev could also put them in jeopardy.



CHAPTER 13

Lev's plan was to get away as soon as they got to civilization, but he pretends to be like Connor and Risa longer than he originally planned. He would've thrown himself at the police car if their pictures had been in the paper but seeing nothing is confusing and Risa's theory seems like a real possibility. He wants Connor and Risa punished, but he doesn't want them killed. Lev is even more afraid of Connor and Risa after seeing Connor steal the storked baby, and he thinks they must be unwound. On the bus, Lev moves forward a seat. A boy listening to headphones sits next to him. Lev grabs the boy's notebook and writes that he's being held hostage, asking for help. The boy doesn't look but snatches his notebook back and crumples the page with Lev's note on it.

In the case of the owner of the notebook, his perspective is so narrow as to blind him to anyone else's situation. In some ways, however, he's also a reflection of Lev—though Lev is beginning to feel conflicted, he's also so entrenched in his belief system that he's unable to understand why Connor and Risa might be running. His support for the unwinding laws also suggests that he's probably sympathetic toward storking as well, and likely sees Connor's actions as especially egregious.



CHAPTER 14

Connor scans the school. There are security guards and teachers, so there's no way to escape quietly. Lev suggests they go in, and Risa says they can hide in the girls' bathroom. Connor says they can escape at lunchtime, but Risa points out that Didi might spoil their plans since they have no way to feed her. They slip into a bathroom after the bell rings and each take a stall. After a bit, Connor explains why he snatched Didi: it was because the boy said that they got storked *again*. Lev points out that he has three siblings who came by stork, and Connor sarcastically points to the hypocrisy of Lev's parents accepting unwanted babies while tithing their own. Lev insists that tithing is in the Bible and that Moses was storked.

Connor says that his parents didn't want another child, so they put the baby on a neighbor's doorstep the next morning. They heard nothing until two weeks later, when another baby showed up. Connor's mom realized it was the same one, but the baby was ill. It died in the hospital. Connor says he kept wondering why God would bring a baby into the world when it was going to be so unloved. His parents paid for the funeral and the whole neighborhood cried like the baby was theirs. Connor realized that they all killed it. Lev declares that people shouldn't give away storked babies, while Risa says they shouldn't stork babies at all.

Connor knows they're both right. In a perfect world, all babies would have homes. Their world isn't perfect, however, even if some people think it is. The bell rings and the bathroom floods with people. The late bell rings and Didi wakes up and begins to make noise. Risa suggests they change stalls as a precaution. She and Connor discover that Lev is gone, and Didi starts to wail.

Though Connor has a point in noting the hypocrisy of Lev's parents, it's again important to keep in mind that Lev's family interprets the Bible in such a way as to leave room for both tithing and accepting storked babies. Both are moral and right, in their view. Connor, however, sees firsthand that storking doesn't solve the problem of unwanted babies, as plenty of the people who receive those babies via storking don't want them either.



Connor sees that the problem of unwanted babies is a much bigger and more complicated issue than Lev or Risa want to admit, especially since he's seen firsthand that storked babies are more likely to die from neglect or exposure. This suggests that storking represents a humanitarian crisis, even if it's legal—which again shows that the law isn't effectively solving the problems it's supposed to.



Connor's aside that some people think his world is perfect makes it clear that there are those, like Lev, who have no conception of the issues that storking raises, no matter the intent. Someone raised to think like Lev wouldn't pass on a storked baby; therefore, it's inconceivable to him that the system doesn't work perfectly.



CHAPTER 15

Lev is certain his heart will explode. Sneaking out of the bathroom was nerve-racking and all the kids in the hallways are huge and intimidating. He's never had to worry about high school before, since he knew he'd never get there. A kind kid points Lev in the direction of the office. Lev reasons that nobody will kill Connor and Risa at a school; they'll just head to their unwinding. He thinks that being torn from his purpose was the scariest thing to happen to him, but he thinks it's a lesson from God: kids who shirk destiny become lost. He explains his situation to the secretary, and minutes later, a nurse checks him over.

That Lev is thinking about the possibility that Connor and Risa might be in mortal danger shows that Lev is learning to be more compassionate and broaden his worldview thanks to the 24 hours he's spent with them. This starts to show that it doesn't take much to introduce someone to a new way of thinking, and that becoming aware of different perspectives can begin to make someone more compassionate toward people he or she previously didn't care about.



Lev asks to call his parents. The nurse offers him her cellphone and leaves him alone. Lev dials Pastor Dan and begs for him to get his parents to call off the police. Pastor Dan says they never called the police; he convinced Lev's parents that his kidnapping was God's will. Desperately, Pastor Dan says that nobody else knows Lev is gone—they believe he's been tithed, so they won't ask questions. Lev insists he *wants* to be tithed, which makes Pastor Dan angry. He says that now, Lev can be anyone he wants to be. Lev feels betrayed by the man who told him that tithing was glorious. He feels alternately joyful and angry and hangs up. Police cars arrive, and Lev knows what he has to do. He slips out and pulls the fire alarm.

Once again, Lev's confusion and anger are normal reactions—someone he trusted completely is now telling him that his purpose was a lie. However, it's still telling that Lev chooses to pull the fire alarm and in doing so, help Connor and Risa—it shows that he still trusts Pastor Dan and his assessments, even if they make little sense to him right now.



CHAPTER 16

The fire alarm goes off during the teacher's prep period. She considers staying put, but reasons it'd set a bad example. She sees policemen at the door and thinks that something is wrong. She passes an open science lab and starts to pull the door closed, but she hears a baby's muffled cry. The teacher calls for the mother and baby to come out, but the mother continues to muffle the baby's cries. Annoyed, the teacher enters and finds Connor, Risa, and Didi. She doesn't recognize them, but she knows that teens only look this afraid when they're Unwinds. Connor says "please," and the teacher knows he's asking her to be a compassionate human being. The teacher brushes off a colleague, holds out a hand to the teens, and asks them to tell her nothing. She thinks she'll get them to safety—it's the best example she can set.

The teacher insists that it's her duty to treat Connor and Risa like people with the right to their lives and their bodies, even when nobody else does—and that it's important to take this stand, even if nobody else sees that the teacher engaging in this kind of activism. This starts to show that a person doesn't need a vested interest in a cause to support it—in the teacher's case, as was the case with Marcus, she has nothing to lose or gain by helping Unwinds. Instead, she just believes that it's the morally right, kind, and compassionate thing to do.



CHAPTER 17

Risa sees the police and knows this is Lev's fault. She focuses on Didi. The teacher, Hannah, shushes Connor and asks for Didi, telling Connor and Risa to walk out with everyone else. Risa sees the genius of this: without a baby, they don't stand out as much. In the hallway, a policeman stops Alexis because she fits Risa's description. Risa continues past and sees Hannah pull out her car keys. Suddenly, she hears Lev behind them yelling their names. Risa and Connor run, but fire trucks block their path. Risa stops him and they both begin to clap. Thinking that Risa and Connor are clappers, Kids look at them in horror, scream, and run away in a panic. Hannah finds them and hands Didi over. She tells them to go to an antique shop in town and ask for Sonia.

Despite Lev's honest intentions here, he still puts his friends in a great deal of danger by doing this. His choice to yell likely stems from a combination of his anger and confusion with Pastor Dan, as well as his fear for his friends—which suggests that at this point in Lev's life, his anger and his sense of compassion are competing for space in his head. This situates Lev in a position where anything could tip him to one side or the other, depending on what happens to him next.



CHAPTER 18

Lev feels truly alone. He shouts for Connor and Risa to help him, but he knows it's too late: they hate him. Kids trample over him and scream about clappers. Lev wants to explain himself to his only friends, but he can't move until the stampede thins. He gets up and realizes that if he stays put, the police will notice him. Lev runs with the other kids, not sure if he should blame Pastor Dan for abandoning him or himself for betraying the two people willing to help him. He also wonders if he should blame God.

Lev's willingness to even consider blaming God for his mistake shows that his perspective has already widened enough to cause him to question everything he grew up believing in a strict religious household. When he runs, it does show that, at least for the time being, Lev is on Connor and Risa's side and wants more time to figure out where he stands on the issue.



CHAPTER 19

Didi cries inconsolably. Connor wants to complain, but he knows that it's his fault. In town, he hears kids talking anxiously about the clappers. He congratulates Risa on suggesting they pretend to be clappers, and they praise each other for their good ideas. Risa notes that they're less dysfunctional without Lev, which makes Connor feel angry. He says that Lev will get what he wants now, but he still regrets not being able to save him.

While pretending to be clappers was undeniably a successful move, posing as terrorists is still an awful thing to do—the fear of the people around them was genuine and, some might argue, their choice was unethical for this reason. However, in a world that, to them, seems wildly unethical to begin with, posing as terrorists begins to look like a justifiable option.



Connor and Risa enter the antique shop, which contains antiques like iPods and plasma-screen TVs. An old woman with a cane gruffly asks her what they want, and Risa says they're looking for Sonia. The woman says that she's Sonia and asks if they're clappers. In response, Connor punches the wall and points out that he didn't explode. Sonia stops him from leaving with her cane and says that Hannah called. Loud enough for the other customer in the store to hear, she suggests they go check out the baby things in the back. Risa insists they need to trust Sonia and hands Didi to Connor. He's surprised that Didi isn't heavier. He thinks that they could stork her again. However, although he doesn't want her, he can't deal with someone else wanting her even less.

Connor's internal argument about what to do with Didi again shows that even if he recognizes that storking poses major problems, he still isn't in a place to really do anything about it—in fact, taking Didi on has put him in more danger and is possibly hurting any chances Didi might have for a better future. This begins to suggest that while Connor may have done a good thing by snagging her, part of being an effective activist is knowing one's limits—overreaching can have unintended negative consequences for all.



Connor begins to feel angry in the way that gets him in trouble. Risa gathers milk, a bowl, and a spoon, and after taking Didi back, begins to feed her. Connor is impressed, and Risa explains that she got to take care of babies at the state home. Connor is exhausted and wonders if his parents are looking for him. He thinks that if he'd run away with Ariana, they would've gotten caught immediately. Sonia joins them, laughs when they insist they don't want to be trouble, and tells Risa to have Connor get her pregnant again—she can't be unwound that way. Risa's jaw drops and Connor says Didi isn't theirs.

The rule stating that female teens can't be unwound if they're pregnant opens up the possibility that the laws and systems are more dysfunctional than ever. This implies that there may be teens who understand that being pregnant is the only way to escape unwinding and therefore do what they can to get pregnant, thereby creating even more possibly unwanted children and perpetuating the cycles of unwinding and storking.



Sonia motions for Connor to move a huge, heavy trunk and then reveals a trapdoor. She leads the way down and flips on a light, revealing two boys and a girl, all terrified. Sonia shows Connor and Risa around and leaves. The lanky blond boy, Hayden, looks wealthy. Mai, an Asian girl wearing a spiked leather choker, insists they'll die, but Roland, a tough-looking boy with a shark tattoo, taunts her for her outlook. All three have horrible pasts: Hayden's divorced parents "solved" their custody battle by unwinding him, Mai's parents wanted a boy, and Roland beat his stepfather for beating his mom, but his mom took the stepdad's side. Connor decides to never turn his back on Roland.

Connor soon feels claustrophobic. He knows that Risa is thankful to have something to do as she cares for Didi. Mai reads and Roland organizes food and divides it out. When Connor pushes back, Roland hands him a can of Spam and tells Connor to straighten out if he wants better. Hayden resolves the situation by grabbing the Spam and starting to eat it. Roland and Connor glare at each other until Connor compliments Roland's socks. Connor joins Hayden and the two chat as they share Spam. Connor admits that Didi isn't his or Risa's, and Hayden tells Connor to let Roland think he's in charge.

Connor can't sleep the first night. He doesn't trust Roland. Mai and Hayden are also awake, and Hayden lights a candle and passes his hand over it. Hayden admits that he's been thinking about unwinding. Nobody really knows how it works, but he wants to know. Connor gets it: Hayden likes being on the edge of danger or of dangerous thoughts, just like Connor does. Hayden stops smirking and says if he gets unwound, his parents might get back together. Mai says they'll just blame each other, but Hayden suggests they could reenact **Humphrey Dunfee**. Mai has never heard the story, so Hayden puts his candle between them all like a campfire.

Hayden says that **Humphrey** isn't the kid's real name, but his parents had him unwound. It went off without a hitch, but his parents were unstable to begin with and lost it after Humphrey was unwound. They went on a rampage to find all the people who received Humphrey's parts, kill them, and put their son together again. Hayden makes Mai jump, which makes Connor laugh. Roland appears, irritated, and sends them to bed. Mai confirms that Humphrey Dunfee is just a story, but Hayden says he knew a kid who supposedly had Humphrey's liver and disappeared.

The various stories telling how each teen's guardians decided to unwind them begins to show that it's not just those who are economically vulnerable that suffer—kids like Hayden, who grow up wealthy but have parents who are unspeakably selfish, take the fall for that selfishness. Notably, even though Hayden does grow up with money, that doesn't save him. As an Unwind, he has just as few rights as those who come from other walks of life, reinforcing that all teens are vulnerable because of how few rights they have compared to adults.



Connor's sense of claustrophobia puts him at risk of striking out in anger, especially with someone like Roland around. Roland likely feels more in control when he can bully others and divvy out who gets what, which does suggest that Roland may come from a life in which he didn't have much control. Hayden believes that it's a kindness to everyone to let Roland stay in control, if only to avoid violence in such a small space.



For someone like Connor who just wants to avoid unwinding at all costs, it's not worth it to consider what happens during the unwinding process or after—doing so may possibly nudge him in the direction of supporting unwinding, something he can't afford to do if he wants to stay alive. Hayden, however, makes the case that it's very possible to know everything there is to know about something controversial like this and still maintain one's position.



Humphrey Dunfee's story is one in which, importantly, violence gets passed along from one person to the next—Humphrey's parents unwind him (which is an act of control and violence), and then set out to punish everyone else whom they seem to believe is complicit in their decision. This shows how violence can cause a person to want to make others feel their pain and experience it with them.



On the third day, Sonia calls the kids upstairs one by one. Roland goes first, followed by Mai and Hayden, and they all return oddly quiet. Connor goes next. Upstairs, Sonia pulls out blank paper and instructs him to write a letter to someone he loves or whom he thinks needs to hear what he has to say. She leaves. Connor begins a letter to Ariana but scraps it and writes to his parents instead. His words flow quickly. He starts off angry but closes by telling his parents he loves them. Then he cries, and when he calms down, he seals and addresses the envelope and calls for Sonia. She asks him to write the date of his 18th birthday and says that if he doesn't come back to claim it within a year of that date, she'll mail it.

Sonia opens the trunk. It's filled with letters and almost brings Connor to tears. Sonia explains that if she dies, Hannah will take care of the letters. Connor says that Sonia is doing a great thing, but Sonia insists that she's done horrible things. She says that people are both good and bad, but that she's happy to be good right now. Risa hands Connor Didi when he gets downstairs and she heads up. Holding Didi is comforting and he thinks that if his soul had a form, it'd be a sleeping baby in his arms.

CHAPTER 20

That night, the teens file out and into an alley, where a small delivery truck with an ice cream cone on the side waits. Sonia stops Risa and Connor and Risa notices Hannah standing nearby. Hannah says that Didi can't go with the teens—instead, Hannah and her husband will take Didi and say they were storked. Connor inserts himself into the conversation and asks if Hannah wants the baby. Risa reminds him that he doesn't want her and Connor walks away. As soon as Hannah takes Didi, Risa feels relieved and empty. She climbs into the back of the truck, which is filled with other scared teens. Risa feels furious that she misses Didi and wonders if, in the days before the Heartland War, women who got abortions felt the same: free, yet vaguely regretful.

The letters that Sonia makes the Unwinds write allows her to expand her activism even further by letting these kids' parents in on how they feel about the situation—something that will hopefully cause them to feel remorseful for what they did, but ideally not in a way that will lead to a repeat of Humphrey Dunfee. By doing this, Sonia hopefully creates a coalition of people who see firsthand how dehumanizing and unwinding is for the victims, and in an ideal world, will inspire those people to action.



Sonia's insistence that people are made up of good and bad begins to speak to the novel's insistence that activism like this can help someone redeem themselves, while also suggesting that even those who support unwinding or are involved in the practice aren't all horrific monsters. People, she suggests, aren't that simple, and it's important to look for the good as well as to recognize the bad.



Risa's ability to wonder if her emotions are similar to those women who got abortions shows that she makes an effort to empathize with others, something that in turn allows her to develop compassion, and later helps turn her into a better activist. That Didi gets what appears to be a happy ending suggests that Connor's choice to steal her, while risky, may have given Didi a shot at life that she wouldn't have had otherwise.



Risa thinks of her time caring for infants at the state home. The infant wing was overflowing with unwanted babies that the state could barely feed. One nurse often said that it's impossible to change laws without changing human nature first, and other nurses would always respond that it's impossible to change human nature without changing the law. Risa can't decide if it's worse to have thousands of unwanted babies or to make them disappear before they're born. The nurse encouraged Risa to love the babies she could and pray for the rest, so Risa always named a few rather than let the computer do it. Connor interrupts her and they discuss Didi for a moment. A kid asks the driver where they're going, but he doesn't know. Another kid says they're going somewhere called "the graveyard." Chilled, Risa curls up and lets Connor put an arm around her.

The nurses' debate over whether laws or human nature need to change first begins to question the law's role in dictating how society feels about certain issues. The fact that the Bill of Life successfully normalized unwinding in the eyes of many suggests that it's very possible for laws to change beliefs by enforcing a standard of morality, while the sheer number of people who have already helped Risa and help her going forward show that this isn't always the case. The differences in opinion here again show how many ways there are to think about what's happening, while Risa's recollection of so many unwanted babies makes the point that, in any case, something needs to change.



CHAPTER 21

Lev and an umber boy named Cyrus, who goes by the nickname CyFi, walk along some train tracks. CyFi likes to hear himself talk and occasionally mentions "the good Lord," which annoys Lev since God doesn't seem to be helping him much. CyFi rambles on about how people came to use "umber" instead of "black," and notes that his dads believe that it was a way for people to make themselves seem nicer. CyFi is a runaway too, but he won't tell Lev where he's going. Lev doesn't care. They met at a mall where Lev was hiding, and CyFi showed him how to trick food court employees into giving him food. Lev understands that CyFi needs an audience, and Lev would rather hear CyFi talk than listen to the anxious, guilty voices in his own head.

What CyFi's dads say about why people switched to using "umber" instead of "black" recalls the way that Risa's lawyer called her out for "inflammatory" language: controlling how people talk about something can influence how people think about it by making it seem better or nicer. That Lev is hanging out with CyFi because he wants to hear something else speaks to how vulnerable he is right now—and at this point, CyFi is probably the most benign influence on Lev, as he opens Lev's worldview without introducing him to dangerous or harmful ideas.



CyFi defines "decapitated" for Lev, which annoys Lev even further. Lev snaps that CyFi can stop talking with double negatives. Extremely offended, CyFi says he's speaking in Old World UMBER patois, but Lev insists the dialect is fake. CyFi rants about how he chooses to not speak like Lev so he can respect his ancestors. CyFi briefly mentions his dads, a family structure Lev has only ever heard of, and then continues to brag about his high IQ. He pauses and says it's not as high as it used to be: he was in an accident that destroyed his temporal lobe and got a new one from an Unwind. He got a whole temporal lobe instead of brain bits because his dads paid off the surgeon, but the Unwind wasn't as smart as CyFi is.

The revelation that CyFi's dads were able to pay off the surgeon to get a "better" part—a whole temporal lobe—shows again how inequitable and corrupt the world of the novel is. When CyFi laments that he's not as smart as he used to be thanks to the Unwind's lower IQ, it also suggests that unwinding and the corresponding organ transplants are normalized in their society even if they have negative effects. For CyFi and others, this is a simple fact of life.



One of Lev's sisters has epilepsy and had tiny parts of her brain replaced to cure it, but Lev never considered where the brain bits came from. CyFi asks Lev how smart he is, and Lev says he doesn't know; his parents believe that everyone is equal in God's eyes. He admits that he's a tithe, which seems to impress CyFi. CyFi notes when they cross the state line, but Lev doesn't ask what state they're in so that he doesn't sound stupid. The boys sleep in shacks where tracks meet. Lev is freezing, as he only has a stolen puffy white coat. He hates that it's white, since he's worn white his entire life and it's not comforting anymore.

One night, CyFi asks why Lev's parents tithed him. CyFi explains that he was storked and his dads were so pleased to wind up with a baby, they got "mmarried." Lev doesn't know what it means to get mmarried, but CyFi won't elaborate. CyFi asks what Lev's parents are like. Lev says he hates them. They do everything they're supposed to do, but they love God more than they love him. For hating them, Lev believes he's going to hell.

Two days later, they reach a town in Indiana and CyFi insists they need to head south. Lev notices that CyFi isn't acting right. He shuffles, drops his patois, and Lev notices something threatening in his voice. CyFi says they're going to Joplin, Missouri, but won't say why. This worries Lev, as once they get there, he knows he'll be on his own. CyFi suddenly ducks into a Christmas store and Lev sees him snatch a gold ornament off of a tree. Once back outside, CyFi bolts. Lev is afraid he's having a seizure and considers abandoning CyFi, but the look in CyFi's eyes was the same look of desperation Lev saw in Connor's eyes. Lev vows to not betray CyFi either.

Lev cautiously follows CyFi and finds him hiding under a playground slide. His face and one hand twitch, and he looks like he's in pain. CyFi shakily says he didn't steal the ornament; he doesn't steal. He crushes the ornament and then instructs Lev to look through his coat pockets. Lev finds a small treasure trove of expensive, shiny jewelry, and CyFi snaps at him to get rid of it before "he" makes CyFi change his mind. Lev buries the jewelry except for one diamond bracelet and returns to CyFi. CyFi's patois returns.

Lev's sudden understanding of where his sister's brain bits came from reminds him of all the ways in which unwinding truly does help people. Given his uncertain thoughts about unwinding, this could push him in either direction: either he may decide that this is proof enough that the costs of unwinding are worth the benefits, or he may decide that because he now feels bad for Connor and Risa, it's not worth it to sacrifice them.



Lev's insistence that he's going to go to hell for hating his parents is an indicator that the worldview he grew up with isn't one that's designed to let someone like Lev gather information and come to their own conclusions. Rather, Lev believes he's doomed, which will make him vulnerable to choosing drastic and radical measures in the future.



When Lev recognizes that the look in CyFi's eyes was the same as that in Connor's, it shows that Lev is expanding his worldview and, in the process, is developing empathy and compassion for those who are different from him. The sudden change in CyFi, meanwhile, suggests that there's something seriously wrong with him that's possibly influencing his decision to travel to Joplin—remember, CyFi isn't an Unwind, and therefore has no good reason to be out on his own as a teenager.



When CyFi notes that there's another person who might make him change his mind, it offers up the possibility that there may be more going on with CyFi's temporal lobe than simply not being one from a genius. Recalling Josias's transplanted arm that imbues him with the talents of the Unwind from whom the limb came, it's possible that CyFi, too, is being affected by the consciousness of the Unwind whose temporal lobe now resides in him. If true, this would open up a whole host of other problems with the ethics of unwinding, seeing as it may push people like CyFi to engage in illegal or unhealthy behavior.



CyFi and Lev sleep in a motel that night. Lev asks what's going on and dangles the diamond bracelet. He asks what his name is, and CyFi slumps. CyFi confirms Lev's suspicions: CyFi's temporal lobe still belongs to the Unwind. CyFi says he doesn't know the kid's name, but the kid had problems that he now has to deal with. He says the kid isn't bad, he's just hurting and steals compulsively. CyFi experiences some of the kid's emotions, and it's especially hard since most people automatically assume an umber kid is a bad kid. Thanks to this temporal lobe, CyFi embodies this stereotype by stealing. CyFi admits that he hasn't told his dads and that the Unwind doesn't know he's a part of CyFi. Lev realizes that the kid lived in Joplin, and CyFi replies that he hopes if he helps the kid get back there, he'll leave CyFi alone.

What CyFi says specifically about how racism still functions in his world. The idea that umber kids are deviants and criminals is one rooted in the reader's world, which suggests that, as CyFi's dads noted, shifting from "black" to "umber" didn't do anything to help race relations. While there's clearly a lot wrong with CyFi's situation, unwinding actually puts him at risk even though it's supposed to help him.



CHAPTER 22

For three weeks, Connor and Risa bounce between safe houses. They finally land at a huge warehouse near an airport with about 30 other kids. It's freezing, with one bathroom with no lock, and all the kids are angry and scared. She reasons that this is why the Fatigues, the seven adults who run the place, carry guns. New kids arrive every day, and Connor and Risa keep an eye out for Lev. The other kids hope that the Akron AWOL—Connor, whose story of tranquilizing a cop has since turned into legend—will show up. Connor keeps his identity a secret. By the end of the first week, there are 43 kids with almost nothing to do, and tensions rise.

Risa asks one Fatigue why they're doing this. The Fatigue insists that it's an act of conscience, and saving kids is its own reward. Risa also understands that such a big-picture view means that the Fatigues miss the social cues that point to trouble, all thanks to Roland. Connor hasn't been great either; he gets in fights. One morning, Risa approaches him to get him to check himself. Connor admits that he sits alone so much to keep himself out of trouble. Hearing all the voices makes him blow up.

Risa sets Connor a mission: watch the other kids. She points out that the kids who eat first are Roland's friends, and that Roland is nice to kids nobody likes until the other kids like that person—then he uses them. She says Roland is power hungry and smart, and Connor is his biggest threat since the other kids know he could take on Roland. Connor says he'll gladly fight, but Risa tells him not to. It's exactly what Roland wants—he likely wants to kill Connor.

The buzz surrounding the legend of the Akron AWOL suggests that what these runaway Unwinds really need is someone they can rally behind so that they can channel their anger and frustration at the system. Connor's unwillingness to step into that role, however, speaks to the fact that he's still a fundamentally angry boy who isn't ready to take on a leadership position. He won't be able to make this shift until he discovers how to channel his anger into activism.



It's comforting to hear the Fatigues say that they don't need a reward to feel compelled to do the right thing, as it indicates that they recognize the kids' humanity and right to life even if they're not paid to do so. However, Risa also observes that their outlook is fundamentally flawed, as it means that they don't necessarily see the kids as individuals in need of guidance.



Risa's assessment of what Roland is doing shows that while it's possible to use one's anger for good, as Risa does when she observes this social structure and protects Connor in the process, it's also possible to use it for evil too, which Roland is presumably doing as he turns everyone to his side.



CHAPTER 23

Connor hates to admit it, but Risa is right: Roland is skilled at subtly manipulating and bullying people, all while acting dumb as to escape the Fatigues' suspicions. Connor also feels conflicted about Lev. He keeps an eye out to see if Lev shows up and feels alternately angry and worried. Connor reasons that Lev is probably unwound by now, and though Connor knows it's not his fault, he feels like it is.

The sense of responsibility that Connor feels for Lev's supposed fate shows once again that being exposed to differing viewpoints is one of the most effective ways to develop compassion. Hopefully, this will encourage Connor to think better of any other tithes he meets and help them too.



CHAPTER 24

The Fatigues bring Christmas dinner for the kids an hour late. Risa is hungry, but she also knows that this is an ideal time to use the bathroom. She hangs the occupied sign. As she turns to the toilet, Roland slips in behind her and says that this is a good time to get to know each other. Risa scans the room, but there are no possible weapons and no way out. As she moves to hit or kick him, he pins her against the wall and suggests they have sex. Risa screams, but a jet passes overhead and drowns it out. Connor steps in behind Roland and nonchalantly washes his hands. Risa is flabbergasted. Connor says that he and Risa broke up. Roland lets Risa go, smiles at her, and leaves.

Sexually harassing Risa like this makes it clear that Roland isn't someone to trifle with. He may be a skilled manipulator, but his willingness to gain power by asserting his physical and sexual dominance over others indicates that he's not in this for the greater good. Instead, he's bullying others for selfish reasons, something the novel overwhelmingly suggests makes Roland an immoral person—especially when, by assaulting Risa, he violates her bodily autonomy, which unwinding also does.



Shaking, Risa turns on Connor. Connor says he did exactly what Risa told him to do and didn't take Roland's bait. Risa knows he's right. Connor adds that now, Roland will try to win her over with kindness. Overwhelmed, Risa bursts into tears and shoves Connor away. She sits in the bathroom alone, thankful for what Connor did but feeling like heroes are supposed to fight. She realizes that she thinks of Connor as a hero.

Risa has every right to be scared and angry, even if Connor is right about what Roland is after and what will happen next. This again shows that Unwinds have many reasons to be angry and that their bodily autonomy is at risk at every turn.



CHAPTER 25

Holding his temper in the bathroom is the most difficult thing Connor has ever done. He wants to pummel Roland, but he knows that Risa is right about Roland wanting a fight. Connor also heard that Roland made a makeshift knife, and he suspects that if the opportunity arises for Roland to stab him, Roland will make it look like self-defense. Part of Connor hates his new pattern of behavior, but the other side of him loves exercising this power. He knows that he's manipulating Roland into being nice to Risa, but he also knows that soon, Roland will figure it out.

As Connor begins to recognize that what he's doing is powerful, he becomes increasingly comfortable stepping into a leadership role. Protecting Risa is the first step in this, as he effectively makes sure that those in his inner circle don't suffer at the hands of other bullies. Tempering his anger, in this sense, makes Connor both a better and a more powerful person.



CHAPTER 26

The pawnbroker watches as Lev enters his shop one evening. Lev approaches the counter, pulls out the diamond bracelet, and asks how much he can get for it. He admits that he's an Unwind, which is unusual. Usually Unwinds have elaborate stories, and the pawnbroker isn't sure what to do with the truth. The pawnbroker refuses to do business, even when Lev asks for \$500—the pawnbroker knows the bracelet is worth many times that. Lev points out that if the pawnbroker turns him in, the police will get the bracelet. Finally, the pawnbroker agrees to the deal and leads Lev to the safe in the back. Once the safe is open, Lev hits the pawnbroker over the head. The pawnbroker wakes hours later to see that Lev took the money in the safe but left the bracelet.

Lev's hard dealing and ultimate violence with the pawnbroker makes it clear just how much he's changed since Connor ripped him out of the car a month ago. It shows in particular that Lev believes that he has to turn to violence to get anything done, something that doesn't bode well for Lev's future. In this sense, he's undergoing the exact opposite transformation as Connor: as Connor learns to be less violent and more cunning, Lev uses his cunning to inform his violence.



CHAPTER 27

The day after Christmas, the Fatigues wake all the kids in the warehouse up. Connor notices that the safeties on the Fatigues' weapons are off. The Fatigues herd kids into a room filled with airline packing crates. They ask the kids to divide up by gender, four to a crate, and hurry the process. Connor sees Roland coming for him and knows that in a crate, Roland will kill him. Connor punches one of Roland's friends, which makes a Fatigue haul him back and shove him toward a different crate with three other boys. They seal the boys in the crate.

Here, punching Roland's friend in order to escape being trapped in a crate with Roland shows just how far Connor has come. Although this is an act of violence that shouldn't be condoned, it likely saves both Connor and Roland from a worse fate. A month ago, Connor may have simply allowed Roland to instigate a major fight, something that wouldn't have helped either of them—and if it's true that Roland has a knife, this could've gotten Connor killed.



A nasally voice belonging to a kid known as Mouth Breather, Emby for short, insists they're going to die. Connor threatens to shove his sock in Emby's mouth and Hayden offers his sock. The fourth boy introduces himself as Diego. Their crate begins to move. Emby continues to anxiously insist they're going to die. Connor snaps at him but feels bad and reassures Emby. Hayden suggests that dying is better than being unwound and asks the others for their opinions. Connor tells him to stop as they take off.

Remember that Hayden thrives on this kind of philosophical debate, while for Connor, it's easier to think of the world as existing in black and white and not engage with hard questions like this. This sets up this journey as one in which Connor will begin to experiment more with alternate perspectives, simply because he can't escape Hayden's questions.



In the air, Connor and his crate mates don't speak for a while. Quietly, Diego says he'd rather be unwound. Emby says he'd rather die, since he'd go to Heaven, but Connor thinks that if they've all done horrible things that made their parents want to unwind them, they're not going to Heaven. Emby insists that Unwinds are still technically alive, and Hayden asks if the others believe this. Connor tries to stop the conversation, but Emby pipes up that he doesn't think unwinding is bad—he just doesn't want to be unwound. When he was a kid, his lungs started to shut down from pulmonary fibrosis, and an Unwind's lung saved him. He insists that the kid was already unwound and if he hadn't gotten the lung, someone else would've.

Emby's argument is a controversial one for a variety of reasons. While the fact that he's alive is positive, his situation raises the moral dilemma of whether Emby's life or the Unwind's life is more important than the other—and then, if the Unwind's life is unimportant enough to deny him or her their right to their own body. Further, when Emby insists that someone else would've gotten the lung if he hadn't, it shows that Emby doesn't believe there's anything he can do to change the system.



This enrages Connor, who points out that without unwinding, there would be more doctors trying to cure diseases rather than replacing body parts. Ferociously, Emby says that Connor would feel differently if he was staring down death, but Connor insists he'd rather die. Emby goes into a coughing fit that concerns everyone. When he recovers, he explains that his parents could only afford an asthmatic lung. Hayden asks why Emby's parents are unwinding him if they went to the trouble of fixing him, but Emby says his parents died and his aunt signed the order since she has three kids to put through college. Hayden grumbles that it's always about money.

Hayden points out that nobody answered whether unwinding kills a person. Diego suggests that it depends on where a person's soul is when they're unwound. Connor suggests that the soul might break up during the unwinding process, but Diego insists that souls are indivisible. Hayden wonders if an Unwind's soul stretches out over its corresponding body parts. Connor finds this thought terrifying and remembers the trucker whose arm could do card tricks. He wonders if the arm's original owner still enjoys the tricks and thinks that even if souls aren't real, an Unwind's consciousness must go somewhere.

Hayden says he knew a girl who believed that God knows who's going to be unwound and doesn't give them souls, like the unborn. Emby insists that the law states that the unborn have souls from conception. Connor points out that being a law doesn't make it true, but Emby argues that by the same token, that doesn't mean it's false. He believes the law is what is because lots of people thought about it and decided it made sense, which both Diego and Hayden agree with. Hayden asks for a true opinion from Emby. Emby says that unborn babies have souls from the moment they kick and suck their thumbs. Hayden turns on Connor, who insists that babies get souls when they're born. Diego says they're both wrong: people, unborn and otherwise, have souls from the moment they're loved.

With prodding, Hayden admits he doesn't know when people or babies get souls. Connor insists this is the best answer, as if more people would admit they didn't know, there might not have been a Heartland War. They feel the plane descend and everyone panics a little. Emby wonders if they're actually going to a harvest camp. The boys start to list where they'd like their body parts to go if Emby is right.

Hayden's aside that it's always about money is correct in a number of ways. The idea that Emby's parents couldn't afford a healthy lung suggests that there are a number of families, like Emby's, who can't afford care that's going to give them the best chance at life—which suggests that there are also others who can't afford transplants at all, and may therefore die. This economic inequality speaks to the way in which the system created by unwinding doesn't actually serve everyone fairly.



This conversation again introduces all four boys to new perspectives on unwinding and the soul, something that helps all of them develop empathy and form bonds with each other. This begins to show that open dialogues like these are an extremely effective and nonviolent way to bring people together to calmly discuss difficult concepts.



When Emby insists that the law exists because lots of people decided it made sense, it shows that he holds a decidedly optimistic view of how his government works. Later, the reader learns that this is a questionable, if not entirely false, view of government within the novel. Emby's acceptance of what the law says, meanwhile, nevertheless speaks to the ability of something that's law to easily become normalized and considered correct. However, because Connor has seen firsthand that not all are as just as they might seem in theory, he's unwilling to buy this idea.



Connor makes the case here that it's impossible to come to one set understanding of what constitutes right and wrong, but that this isn't a bad thing. Rather, it's only bad when people get too caught up in arguing over who's right and who's wrong.



CHAPTER 28

Every crate, including Risa's, experiences the same conversation that Connor's does. This forms bonds among the kids, though Risa only feels close to a girl named Tina, who also grew up in a state home. The plane touches down and Risa hears banging. Someone pulls the crate open a crack and asks if everyone is okay. It's a kid about Risa's age. Outside the crate, Risa looks at her traveling companions and realizes that they look very different from how she remembered them—they're not as ugly or overweight as she first thought. Risa gets in line to exit the plane and learns that there was one crate of five boys that died. She hopes one wasn't Connor.

Risa steps out into bright sunlight and intense heat. There are planes everywhere, many from airlines that no longer exist. Risa realizes that this is a plane graveyard: when a plane is decommissioned, whoever runs this operation loads kids into it. She looks around and sees both Connor and Roland, but she wishes Roland had suffocated. A golf cart driven by a kid rolls toward them, but the passenger is an older adult. He introduces himself as the Admiral and welcomes everyone to the Graveyard. He says that everyone will follow his rules while they're here, and nobody will be unwound on his watch. The crowd cheers and Risa notices that the Admiral makes eye contact with every kid. Risa allows herself to hope.

When Risa realizes that the girls in her crate aren't at all how she imagined them to be, it again speaks to the power of conversation and gaining perspective to help someone develop empathy and compassion for others. Because of what Risa, Connor, and the others learn during this flight, it's possible that they'll realize that they're not all that different from one other—and that if they work together, they can achieve common goals and make the world a better place.



When the Admiral makes a point to make eye contact with every new Unwind, it's a way of showing them that he recognizes them all as individual human beings. Giving them this ability to hope and feel seen also brings kids to the Admiral's side and gains him their loyalty, as few others have really taken an interest in the kids as individuals up to this point.



CHAPTER 29

Lev and CyFi arrive in Joplin, Missouri. For a while now, Lev has been the one in charge since CyFi now experiences seizure-like shuddering, which he says has to do with having oil and water in his brain. Lev realizes that CyFi doesn't even know what he has to do in Joplin, but he hopes it's not destructive. One day when CyFi asks why Lev is still with him, Lev says that someone has to witness whatever happens. Lev tries to give CyFi hope, but CyFi twists Lev's words to sound horrible.

When Lev tells CyFi that he needs to witness what happens, it suggests that Lev also understands the power of seeing someone as an individual. He understands that whatever happens, good or bad, will be something that only he can talk about after the fact—depending on the emotional, social, or legal consequences it has for CyFi.



CHAPTER 30

CyFi fears that in Joplin, his mind is going to spill out of his ears. The boy in his head doesn't speak, but he emotes and doesn't understand that he's part of CyFi. When the boy can't find memories or words he wants, he hurls anger, fear, and grief at CyFi. CyFi and Lev wander Joplin, looking for streets that the kid in CyFi's head recognizes. They finally find an ice cream shop and the high school and realize that the kid was on the fencing team—it's customary to steal opposing teams' swords. CyFi feels the other kid take over. He has to assure the kid that Lev is a friend.

The way that CyFi describes inhabiting his brain with this other boy shows that unwinding is in no way as easy, ethical, and beneficial as its proponents would have others believe. In particular, the Unwind's grief and anger suggest that the suffering of knowing one is unwanted doesn't end when they're unwound—that trauma continues, possibly for the rest of their life.



CyFi turns a corner and says that “they” are going to be mad that he’s late for dinner. He speaks in a voice that’s not his own. CyFi notices a cop car following them and sees another in front of a house he knows is his. Across the street, the dads get out of their car and approach. CyFi says in his odd voice that he has to do this and tells the cops to not bother Lev. The cops frisk CyFi before letting him approach a couple standing at the door of the house. CyFi recognizes them and can’t separate his emotions from the kid’s. The woman asks CyFi if he’s Tyler, and CyFi knows that he is. CyFi/Tyler mimes what he wants, thinking it’s a weapon. He realizes he needs a shovel, and Tyler’s dad sends CyFi to the shed.

Again, this experience impresses upon everyone watching—Lev, the dads, and Tyler’s parents—that unwinding doesn’t just make a troubled kid go away. Instead, at least in the case of brain transplants, it just foists that kid on someone else, harming the recipient emotionally in the process and leading them to do things they might not otherwise do, hence CyFi’s solo trip to Joplin.



CyFi/Tyler grabs the shovel and heads to the back corner of the yard. He starts to dig and unearths a briefcase. When he opens it, CyFi/Tyler freezes: it’s filled with jewelry. Tyler thinks that he might be able to fix things if he can give it back and with a handful of jewelry, he runs to his parents, drops it at their feet, and begs them to not unwind him. CyFi realizes that Tyler doesn’t know he’s already been unwound.

While CyFi may literally get another perspective by having Tyler in his head, Tyler is unable to experience that same perspective since there’s no way for him to know that he’s already been unwound. This shows that there are major ethical issues with unwinding, as Tyler’s trauma suggests this isn’t at all humane.



CHAPTER 31

Lev screams at Tyler’s parents to tell him they won’t unwind him. He’s unspeakably angry and holds the shovel like a bat. Finally, Tyler’s parents promise they won’t unwind him. CyFi begins to sob with relief and Lev drops his shovel. CyFi’s dads help CyFi up and Lev takes off into the woods. He fixates on the look on CyFi’s face when he dropped the jewelry at Tyler’s parents’ feet, and the way that Tyler’s parents looked like *they* were the victims. Lev understands that this is a frighteningly transformative moment for him.

For Lev, this moment makes it clear to him that everything he was raised to believe is true is a lie: unwinding is inhumane and only kind of helps people like CyFi. Lev’s anger, however, isn’t something he knows how to control, which will make him vulnerable to those who want to harness his anger for their own goals.



CHAPTER 32

The Graveyard is in Arizona and houses more than 4,000 planes. The Admiral’s rules are that kids don’t have to stay and that they’ve earned the right to be respected. They must follow his rules and treat their lives like gifts. He insists that these kids are better than those who would unwind them. Everyone must pull their weight, and the kids can neither rebel nor give into their hormones. Once they turn 18, they’re no longer the Admiral’s problem, but they must go on to make something of themselves. The Graveyard is a thriving business of selling parts of or whole decommissioned airplanes. The Admiral only employs one adult on the property: Cleaver, his trustworthy helicopter pilot. The Unwinds spend their days stripping planes for parts to sell, and they live in refurbished planes. The Admiral keeps his motivation for running the Graveyard private.

The Admiral keeping his motivations private again makes the case that there doesn’t need to be a reason for someone to do something kind and good for someone else. Further, the rules he has for the kids in his care, though strict, imbue the kids with the sense that he cares about them as individuals, and that he wants them to live and be successful—which is more than any other adult they’ve met outside his organization has been able to offer them.



CHAPTER 33

Risa's first few days at the Graveyard seem to last forever. She attends a tribunal made up of the Goldens, the Admiral's five most trusted kids who are in charge of the Graveyard. Risa hates them immediately and hates herself for admitting she's from a state home. One girl says they don't need a pianist, and a boy says the kitchen needs help. Risa agrees to wash dishes, and as she turns to leave, she sees that the next boy coming in has a broken and bloody nose. Risa coaches him through stopping the bleeding and the Goldens promote her to be a medic. It's terrifying at first since Risa has no training, but soon, Risa finds purpose and feels secure. The Admiral is odd, but Risa feels like he gave her the right to exist.

The idea that the Admiral gives Risa back her right to exist speaks to the power of engaging in activism as the Admiral does. He makes it his job to let his charges know that he genuinely wants them to survive and feel like valued members of the community. Risa's role as a medic further imbues her with a sense of worth and purpose, as her contributions are something that she can feel really make a difference in the health and wellness of the camp. In this way, the Admiral is also teaching the Unwinds how to be a part of a society.



CHAPTER 34

Connor never thought of himself as a mechanic, but he can't stand it when people look at a broken thing wondering who will fix it. He starts by working on a fried air conditioner and his success means that the Goldens transfer him to the repair crew. The work keeps Connor's mind off of both Risa and Roland, who wheedled his way into being Cleaver's helicopter assistant. Other kids fear and respect Roland for this, but they all want Connor on their side. Hayden says it's because Connor has integrity. Connor thinks that he is getting into fewer fights and is better at mastering his impulses, all thanks to Risa. One day, Connor asks if Risa is falling for Roland. She responds that when she accepts the food and blanket Roland offers, she does so because it means Roland will be cold and hungry.

Connor undergoes much the same development as Risa does as he finds his place as a mechanic. Deciding to fix air conditioners notably helps everyone be more comfortable in the scorching Arizona heat, so fixing them is an important way for Connor to support the community. When this earns him the respect of the other Unwinds, it also shows that behaving kindly like this is an effective way to build up a coalition.



About once per week, the kids gather under a canopy for the work call. The Admiral never attends, but he watches from video feeds. This makes Connor distrust the Admiral. One of the Goldens announces calls for work. Connor never raises his hand, as he believes that the Admiral is using them, but Hayden points out that unwinding makes unpaid work look good. After the meeting, Roland stops by Connor and says that he also dislikes the Admiral. Roland mentions that the Admiral's teeth are clearly not his own, and it's rumored that he keeps a picture of the kid they came from in his office. Connor reminds Roland that he hates him, but Roland insists they have a common enemy and walks off.

Connor's distrust of the Admiral is understandable, since Connor has been given little reason to trust the adults who care for him. However, his suspicion stems from anger at not knowing exactly what's going on—which then makes him vulnerable to Roland's rumors about where the Admiral's teeth came from. If true, of course, the Admiral would be a horrendous and evil villain, but Connor also knows that Roland isn't trustworthy to begin with.



Connor thinks over Roland's words for a week. He thinks that Roland is right—the Admiral's teeth *aren't* those of an aging veteran, and since the work call kids never come back, it's impossible to say that they don't just get unwound. Connor never voices his fears, as he doesn't want to align himself with Roland.

If the Admiral's teeth really did come from a kid he had unwound, it would represent a major abuse of the system he supposedly hates. It would be even more egregious than Emby's lung—a situation that clearly necessitated as transplant—as there are far more ethical alternatives for fixing one's teeth.



During Connor's fourth week, a plane arrives. Connor watches the Goldens march the newcomers to the supply plane and recognizes Lev in the back. He drops everything and runs forward, simultaneously furious and thrilled. Lev, meanwhile, looks hardened and dirty. He smiles at Connor and the Goldens let Connor grab Lev. Connor punches Lev in the eye for betraying him, and then hugs him and says he's glad Lev is alive. That night, Lev wakes Connor up by shining a flashlight in his face. Connor points out that Lev is breaking rules, but Lev just tells Connor to never hit him again. Lev leaves and Connor can't sleep. He knows something happened to Lev.

Two days later, the Admiral calls Connor to repair something in his residential jet, a former Air Force One. Connor is curious and afraid, but he's disappointed to see that the jet's interior is worn and faded. The Admiral greets Connor, puts away the gun that he's ostensibly cleaning, and shoos away the young kids cleaning his cabin. Then, he explains his coffeemaker is broken and says he doesn't grab a different one because he wants this one repaired. He says that he hears Connor's name often and it's always because Connor solves problems, even when it's through fighting. In the kitchen, Connor notices the coffeemaker isn't plugged in. When he plugs it in, it begins making coffee immediately. The Admiral grins terribly and tells Connor to sit.

Connor catches sight of a smiling boy about his age. The boy's smile looks just like the Admiral's, proving Roland's suspicions. When the Admiral asks, Connor admits he doesn't like him. The Admiral says that Connor thinks he's a slave dealer who uses Unwinds for profit. He asks Connor to think of why a decorated admiral needs to sell children. Connor snaps and says that the Admiral is "power hungry" and chooses parts from kids he unwinds. He points out the Admiral's teeth and asks what parts of him the Admiral wants. This surprises the Admiral, but he rips out his teeth and throws them on the table. Connor screams.

The Admiral explains that they're dentures, which used to be common before unwinding, although today it's cheaper to get an Unwind's teeth. Connor looks toward the photo, and the Admiral says the boy is his son. Connor apologizes, and the Admiral explains exactly where the money goes: operating costs and bribery, for the most part. The Admiral asks if Connor believes him and says that he's going to show Connor something worse than false teeth.

Even if Lev isn't necessarily violent when he wakes Connor up, his sneakiness and threats give the impression that he'd have no problem getting violent if need be. Despite this, ending up at the Graveyard also creates some hope that now that Lev is back with friends he trusts, he'll be able to come to a better and more nuanced conception of how the world works and where he fits into it. In other words, he has the opportunity to gain new perspectives in a place like this.



Even if Connor interprets everything the Admiral says and does here as sinister and evil, pay attention to the fact that the Admiral says he wants to repair things, not replace them. Though Connor is too caught up in his fear and anger to catch this, it's possible to read the Admiral's comment as a subtle condemnation of the unwinding and organ transplant system, which replaces things rather than fixes them. The description of the Admiral's "terrible" grin comes from Connor's perspective, which again suggests that it's just his interpretation that makes it look that way. The reader, therefore, shouldn't necessarily believe his characterization of the Admiral.



Given how tuned-in the Admiral seems to the whims and fears circulating through the Graveyard, it's genuinely surprising that he isn't aware of the rumors surrounding his teeth. This reminds the reader that the Admiral isn't infallible and is liable to make mistakes or miss things, just like anyone else. Again, though this goes over Connor's head a bit, it also humanizes the Admiral for Connor and makes him more willing to listen to what the Admiral has to say.



Dentures are extremely expensive—they can cost several thousand dollars in many cases. It's worth considering, then, how it's less expensive to harvest full sets of real teeth from Unwinds. This suggests that there are a lot of Unwinds, for one, and that unwinding is a normalized, subsidized, and inexpensive practice.



Half a mile away, the Admiral stops his golf cart at the FedEx jet that brought Connor to the Graveyard. Connor notices the five graves as the Admiral instructs him to find crate number 2933. Connor screams when he sees what's inside the crate: the Goldenes, dead. Outside the jet, the Admiral says that the Goldenes died by suffocation and in the same crate as the first five boys. He adds that whoever did this took out the five most powerful kids, presumably to shake up the power structure. Connor thinks of Roland, but he doesn't think Roland could do this. The Admiral says that the culprit wanted him to find the Goldenes, and that now he has no spies. He asks Connor to help him find the culprit and to return tonight to bury the bodies in secret.

The next morning, the Admiral announces that he sent the Goldenes to organize new safe houses. Roland betrays no reaction and seems distracted, but this is possibly because he's been learning to fly the helicopter and wants to get to work. He gives rides to lots of kids when Cleaver isn't around, which allows him to spread rumors about the Admiral. Connor works hard to keep his mouth shut.

Connor decides to install a mister under the wing of the recreation jet, both for comfort and so he can listen to conversations in the jet. The problem is that kids want to help and hang out with him. Roland points out that Connor is "the Admiral's new golden boy." Hayden interjects that lots of kids, including Emby, have been up in the Admiral's jet. Emby squirms and says that the Admiral is curious about his family, but Roland insists that the Admiral wants Emby's hair. Connor yells at Roland for picking on Emby, but Roland brushes him off.

That night, Connor tells the Admiral about his suspicions regarding Roland. The Admiral doesn't let Connor leave and instead, says that he fought in the Heartland War—his scars came from a grenade. When Connor asks what side the Admiral was on, the Admiral asks how much Connor knows about the war. Connor admits he knows little. The Admiral says that there were actually three sides: the Life Army, the Choice Brigade, and the American military, which was supposed to keep the other two from killing each other. The Admiral was part of the military. He says that conflict begins with an issue, but by the time it balloons into a war, what matters most is which side is the most hateful.

Connor's willingness to recognize that Roland probably doesn't have this kind of violence in him speaks well of both Connor and Roland. It shows that while Connor still sees Roland as a threat, he recognizes that Roland has limits as to what he'll do. For Roland, it suggests that even if he's dangerous and violent, his maliciousness doesn't extend quite this far. Connor is able to come to this recognition because he can now control his anger and doesn't jump to conclusions anymore.



Though it's reasonable for Connor to keep an eye on Roland, watching him also means that Connor isn't watching for other possible culprits. In this way, he's letting his hatred for Roland get in the way of his own intuition that Roland didn't kill the Goldenes.



In Roland's defense, the idea that the Admiral is interested in Emby's family is somewhat suspicious, if only because it seems unusual that the Admiral would take an interest in anyone's family. When Hayden jumps to defend the Admiral by pointing out that he talks to lots of kids, however, it shows that Hayden already understands the importance of looking carefully at all sides of a story rather than jumping to conclusions.



When the Admiral mentions that by the time a conflict becomes a war, hate is the only thing that matters, he sets the stage for Connor to discover that whatever happened to resolve the Heartland War. Namely, the passing of the Bill of Life, which didn't necessarily happen because people thought about it. Instead, it happened because people were overcome with hate and were unwilling to see others' perspectives.



The Admiral says that before the war, right and wrong was turned upside down. People were murdering abortion doctors, while other people were getting pregnant and selling the fetal tissue. It turned into war until the **Bill of Life** came into being. The Admiral says he was there when people came up with the idea to terminate pregnancies retroactively, and at first, it was a joke—until the Nobel Prize went to the scientist who came up with the procedure allowing every part of a donor to be used in transplants. The Admiral and the military brought both sides to the table and proposed the Bill of Life with the intention of shocking them, but both sides signed it and were happy to move on, no matter the consequences. Soon, everyone wanted new parts and unwinding became big business.

The Admiral nods to the photo, which is of his son, and says that Harlan was smart, but troubled. About 10 years ago Harlan started stealing, and since the Admiral was part of the Unwind Accord, he was pressured to unwind Harlan. The Admiral and his wife changed their minds, but Harlan was already gone. Connor is surprised that he feels sorry for the Admiral and offers condolences, but the Admiral says that Harlan's unwinding is the entire reason Connor is here. The Admiral's wife started a foundation in Harlan's memory and the Admiral has saved more than 1,000 kids in the last three years. Connor knows that the Admiral is saying this to earn his loyalty.

What the Admiral says about the genesis of the Bill of Life goes against everything that Emby believed was true in the shipping crate. The Bill of Life didn't come into being because people thought it made sense, it became law because it was going to solve the issue at hand—which the Admiral suggests was the war, not abortion. Then, when the Admiral points to the rise of unwinding as a profitable business, he explains why unwinding is still happening and why it's so ingrained in society: there are people who are making lots of money off of vulnerable kids, no matter how unethical this practice is.



When the Admiral essentially brushes off Connor's condolences and says that what happened to Harlan is why he runs the Graveyard in the first place, the Admiral shows clearly how one's poor past decisions can influence them to change their behavior and become an activist to make the world better for others. This is what the Admiral does with his teeth, too: he refuses to profit off of the system he's trying to take down.



CHAPTER 35

After leaving CyFi, Lev's mind is a dark place. On the night that Connor is with the Admiral, Lev sneaks out, as he's done every night. He sees that the sentries are asleep and thinks that the Admiral was silly to send the Goldens away without good replacements. A girl he met told him to go to a corner of the Graveyard. Lev climbs into the plane and tells Cleaver who sent him. Cleaver is thrilled and introduces Lev to Mai and Blaine. Lev asks if Roland is a part of the group, but Cleaver says that Roland isn't right for them.

Lev says he wants to be a part of the group and tells them his story when asked. Cleaver is thrilled that Lev was a tithe and asks how much Lev hates the people who were going to unwind him. Lev says he hates those people and the people who would get his parts totally and completely, and he wants to make everyone pay. Even Lev is amazed at his fury. He asks Cleaver what they believe. Cleaver says they don't have a cause, but they believe in messing with the world. Blaine makes a comment about messing with the Admiral, but Cleaver redirects and asks Lev if he's in. Lev thinks that he's deeply angry and wants to act on it. He feels like a part of something for the first time since he left home. Cleaver slaps him on the back.

Lev's questions about Roland speak to Roland's reputation as a troublemaker—in his mind, of course Roland would be involved with such a group given his penchant for bullying. The fact that Roland isn't a part of this particular group suggests again that Roland isn't as all-around horrible as Lev, Connor, Risa, and the reader have all been led to believe.



Lev's surprise at his own fury indicates that his anger is entirely out of control—it's surprising and possibly scary, even for the person experiencing it. Especially since Lev doesn't know how to manage his anger, Cleaver is able to channel Lev's emotions for his own purposes. In this case, Cleaver is a recruiter for the clappers, which means that Lev is getting involved with dangerous, violent things. Further, Blaine's comment that they messed with the Admiral suggests that this group may be to blame for the Goldens' death.



CHAPTER 36

Risa is the first to notice that there's something wrong with both Connor and Lev. It annoys her, since she feels at home and even thinks she might join the Army as a medic when she turns 18. She heads for a study jet early one morning. Connor is already there and looks very tired. He's reading *Criminology for Morons*, which Risa finds troubling. Connor looks around and says that the Admiral is looking for replacements for the Golden. He asks Risa to promise that if the Admiral asks her, she'll refuse, and says that the Admiral asked him and probably asked Emby. Risa asks if she can help, but Connor kisses her. Risa kisses him back.

Risa realizes that Lev scares her. He comes to the infirmary one morning with a bad sunburn, which he got because he didn't follow the rules and wear sunscreen. He reluctantly takes off his shirt so Risa can inspect his back. Risa sees the handprint and asks who hit him. Lev refuses to say and in a dead voice, tells Risa to give him cream for the burn. Risa says she misses the old Lev; this Lev is too creepy for her. Lev points out that he tricked Risa and turned her into the police and says that he has better things to do now.

There's a work call the next day, which Cleaver runs. There are only a few jobs, one of which is a brutal one on an oil pipeline in Alaska. Three kids raise their hands: a boy Risa doesn't know, Mai, and Lev. Risa stares in disbelief and exchanges a glance with Connor. The minute she reaches the infirmary, she calls for messengers until Lev arrives. She orders him into the back room and asks what he's thinking taking the job. He insists he just wants to see Alaska and when Risa threatens to tell the Admiral he's seriously ill, Lev says he's not naïve anymore—there are things he has to do. Risa lets him go but tells him he's naïve and stupid. She believes she won't see him again.

*Risa has shown herself to be the type who puts her head down in situations like these and goes with the flow, hence why Connor reading *Criminology for Morons* is disturbing for her—it suggests that Connor isn't following her lead and sticking with what they know about how to survive. Asking Risa to refuse any offer to help the Admiral, meanwhile, shows that Connor now cares deeply for Risa, and he's able to use what she taught him to try and protect her.*



It's clear to Risa that Lev isn't the kid he once was—if only because he refuses to follow simple rules like wearing sunscreen. Even if she's unaware that he's involved with the clappers, her suspicion that something is up shows that she's skilled at stockpiling information and understanding when things are wrong with her friends.



Notice how Lev frames what he has to do—it closely mirrors the way he talked about his tithing months before. This suggests that the clappers are fulfilling some of the same needs that Lev was getting filled by inclusion in his church and through his impending tithing. With this, it explains some of why Lev falls in with the clappers in the first place: they make him feel just as at home as his church did but give him a purpose that feels even more meaningful.



CHAPTER 37

Emby isn't aware of everything swirling around him, as he does his best to keep his head down. Per the Admiral's request, he arrives at the Admiral's jet. There are two men in suits there, which terrifies Emby. The Admiral calls Emby by name and says that he's special—and because of this, Emby is leaving. He's going to meet someone who's eager to meet him. Emby asks who it is, hopeful it's one of his parents and that they're not actually dead. The Admiral says it's his ex-wife and Emby starts to panic and wheeze. He explains he has asthma and the Admiral asks one of the suited men to get Emby better medication. The man calls the Admiral "Admiral Dunfee," which shocks Emby. After Emby is gone, the Admiral looks at Harlan's picture. Many know Harlan as **Humphrey Dunfee**. The Admiral feels like he's redeeming himself.

Discovering that the legend of Humphrey Dunfee is more or less a true story speaks to the way in which stories, just like people, can become increasingly wilder and out of touch, just as Lev transforms as he gets in deeper with the clappers. It also reflects how people see anything related to standing up to unwinding as fundamentally sinister (remember that the Dunfee parents supposedly kill the recipients of Humphrey's organs).



CHAPTER 38

It takes two days for kids to realize that Emby is gone. Everyone suddenly acts like Emby was their best friend and they stage searches for him. Roland uses Emby's disappearance to scare people into fearing the Admiral, while Connor believes that Roland got rid of Emby after killing the Golden. Connor shares this with the Admiral, who stays silent. The Admiral knows he can't play into Roland's game and doesn't want to answer Connor's questions if he tells the truth, so he lets Connor believe Roland did it. Connor leaves and the Admiral thinks of how he can make this situation work for him. His shoulder and arm start to hurt, so he sends for aspirin.

Not telling the truth to anyone about the Golden or about Emby ends up being a serious mistake for the Admiral, which suggests that while lying and deceit does have its place (the Graveyard's existence and good work is proof of that), this situation isn't one of them. Further, denying the other Unwinds the truth means that they become increasingly scared and angry, which the novel will go on to show can lead to disastrous consequences.



CHAPTER 39

Hayden gives Roland an envelope. Roland knows it's from Connor, and it reads that Connor knows what he did and will make him a deal at the FedEx jet. He wonders what Connor is referring to, as he's been sabotaging generators and stealing laxatives so he can blame things on the Admiral. Roland grabs his knife and heads for the jet.

While the reader already knows that Roland didn't kill the Golden or Emby, giving some insight into Roland's head encourages the reader to empathize with him and understand that just as Sonia said, Roland isn't an entirely bad person.



CHAPTER 40

At the jet, Connor waits inside and threatens to expose Roland if he doesn't come in. Roland jumps in and using the Admiral's pistol, Connor guides Roland toward crate 2933. At the crate, he tells Roland to get in, but Roland fights back. Connor kicks him back into the crate and slams it shut before firing two bullets into a corner to give Roland air. He sits down outside and tells Roland to talk.

Even though Connor has many good reasons to suspect Roland, the novel suggests that Connor is doing an awful thing by jumping to conclusions and attempting to force a confession out of him. While it does represent Connor's understanding that he needs to know Roland's perspective to get the full story, his methods are still shortsighted.



CHAPTER 41

A search party returns from the desert. They didn't find Emby, but they did find the Golden's graves—and they believe the Admiral is responsible, just like Roland said. With Roland and Connor gone, the kids suspect that the Admiral killed them too. A mob of angry Unwinds storms the Admiral's jet.

These Unwinds have every reason to be angry and suspicious, even if they are wrong. That their anger is understandable reveals the Admiral's major oversight: he underestimated how incensed and afraid his charges are, and how easy it is for mob mentality to take over and incite violence.



CHAPTER 42

Just before the search party returned, Risa was in the Admiral's jet giving him aspirin and checking his blood pressure. He applauded her thoroughness and expressed support for her aspiration of becoming an Army medic. Risa heard a commotion outside as the Unwinds began to storm the jet.

Risa caring for the Admiral, and his support for her in return, is a stark contrast to the mayhem and violence happening just outside the jet and further highlights the anger and destructiveness of the mob.



CHAPTER 43

Angry Unwinds swarm the Admiral's jet and see Risa inside. One kid opens the hatch, but Risa punches him, sprays bactine in another kid's eyes, and seals the hatch. Kids begin to tear apart the plane with their bare hands and others throw rocks at it. The Admiral goes pale and asks how he let this happen. Someone outside rips out the power line connecting the jet to the generator. The air conditioning stops, and the jet begins to bake.

Once again, Risa's rationality saves the day. Even if the kids do have every right to be angry, that still doesn't excuse their behavior or their attempts to hurt the Admiral. This again makes the case that while anger may be justified and normal, it's still not okay to act out violently because of this emotion.



CHAPTER 44

Connor accuses Roland of murdering the Golden's, which Roland denies. Roland tries to threaten Connor, but Connor suggests that Roland killed Emby too. Connor says that if Roland confesses, he'll make sure the Admiral spares him. He knows that with enough pressure, Roland will confess.

Connor's quick suspicion of Roland suggests that there is a part of Connor which, despite the progress he's made, is still consumed by anger and resentment.



CHAPTER 45

The Admiral's jet is "impenetrable"—inside, Risa doesn't think the Admiral looks well. Outside, the kids not attacking the jet begin to destroy everything else in the Graveyard with a mixture of fury and odd joy. Cleaver sees the smoke rising and feels drawn to it. He flies the helicopter closer, lands, and the Unwinds notice him. They race toward him.

In the eyes of the Unwinds, adults are dangerous. They're the ones with all the power, as it's adults who released them to be unwound in the first place. This is why they wanted to hurt the Admiral and now, is why they want to hurt Cleaver. This is, again, something entirely understandable, especially since it points to how vulnerable and at risk so many teens in the novel's world are.



CHAPTER 46

Roland confesses to petty vandalism and theft. Connor begins to see that there's a flaw in his plan, as he's dead if he lets Roland out without a confession but he knows he can't keep Roland in the crate forever. From outside, Hayden yells for Connor. Roland tries to scream for Hayden, but the sound doesn't travel. Connor leaves the crate and sees that Hayden is bruised and anxious. Hayden says that the Admiral killed the Goldens and everyone thought he killed Connor too. Connor says that the Admiral didn't kill anyone, but Hayden says that nobody will believe that—they're tearing the Graveyard apart.

When Connor gets to the area outside the Admiral's jet, he sees bonfires and debris everywhere. A group of kids kicks something, and Connor realizes they're kicking a person. It's Cleaver. Connor rushes in, scattering the kids, and comforts Cleaver. Cleaver, however, smiles and says that chaos is beautiful—and this is a better way to die than suffocating. Connor stares, thinking that the only other person who would know about the Goldens is the culprit. Connor accuses Cleaver of killing them with Roland, but Cleaver says that Roland is innocent. He dies laughing at the look on Connor's face.

Connor races to the Admiral's jet and bangs a metal pole against the wing to get kids' attention. He screams at them and says they should all be unwound, which shocks them back to sanity. They obediently help him put the stairs back up to the hatch and as soon as it's up, Risa throws the hatch open. Connor is shocked by the gust of hot air. Risa is fine, but the Admiral is having a heart attack. They carry the Admiral down the stairs and Connor forcefully tells the muttering kids that the Admiral didn't kill the Goldens or Emby. Risa notes that the Admiral has to get to the hospital. Connor leaves Hayden in charge and takes three boys to Roland.

CHAPTER 47

Roland crash-lands the helicopter in the hospital parking lot. Risa explains to the staff that they didn't think he'd be able to make it onto the helipad. A doctor listens to the Admiral's heart and tells her orderlies to prep him for transplant, but the Admiral weakly says he doesn't want a transplant. Connor tells the doctor to do whatever they used to do before they had hearts at their disposal. The orderlies whisk the Admiral away, with Connor and Risa right behind. Roland, however, grabs the doctor's arm and asks her to call the Juvey-cops—Connor and Risa are runaway Unwinds.

The things that Roland confesses to suggest that aside from his willingness to use sexual violence and potentially kill Connor, his preferred method of pushing back is primarily nonviolent and quiet. This doesn't diminish the fact that Roland is still an angry and out-of-control boy, but it does suggest that Connor seriously misjudged him when he decided to lock him in this crate and extract a confession.



The way that Cleaver talks about chaos suggests that he believes entirely in action and in being a part of that action, no matter what the cost is—even if that cost is his life. His confession that he killed the Goldens, meanwhile, suggests that he cares about “creating chaos” even in death, as he clearly recognizes that Connor is going to have to deal with the fallout of suspecting Roland.



Connor's recognition that he needs to ask Roland for help suggests that over the course of the last few months, learning to channel his anger and hearing about others' perspectives means that Connor has developed a sense of humility. Now, he recognizes that he's not always right, especially in a situation like this where the proof (thanks to Cleaver) is clear that Connor was indeed wrong.



Roland's willingness to sell out Connor and Risa suggests that he's far too focused on revenge to consider the possible negative consequences of trying to do this—remember that Roland, too, is running from the law, so he's at risk here just like Connor and Risa. The Admiral's refusal of a new heart, like his insistence on wearing dentures, shows again that he'll do whatever it takes to not profit off of the system he hopes to dismantle.



CHAPTER 48

Risa thinks that the Juvey-cops all look the same, like bullies, as she studies the one guarding her. She asks the cop how it feels to send kids to their end. In reply, he asks what it's like to live a life nobody else thinks is worth anything. Enraged, Connor asks if anyone thinks that the cop's life is worth living. This gets to the cop, but he suggests that unwound kids are happier. Risa tries to find a silver lining in this, but she can't. She knew that getting caught was a risk, but now, all of her hopes for the future are gone.

Though none of these characters know what happened to CyFi, the reader is now aware that what the cop says about unwound kids being happier likely isn't true. Because the reader has this perspective that the characters don't, they're able to see that, if all goes well, unwinding could soon be considered inhumane and banned.



CHAPTER 49

Roland doesn't like the Juvey-cop questioning him, but he has a plan. He knew the minute Connor let him out of the crate that everything had changed: the three guys Connor had with him should've been on Roland's side, but back at the scene of the riot, everyone listened to Connor. Roland agreed to fly the helicopter because he knew this would give him an opportunity. Roland tells the cop that he can alert him to a smuggling operation and more than 400 AWOL Unwinds, which piques the cop's attention.

Selling out the entire Graveyard is a new low, even for Roland. While it's worth considering that he is in a difficult situation in that his life is also at risk, his choice also betrays that he's selfish and doesn't even care for those kids at the Graveyard whom he considered friends. He's letting his anger take over, which keeps him from doing the right thing.



CHAPTER 50

The Juvey-cops lead Risa and Connor into the room with Roland, who looks extremely smug. The cop tells Connor that Roland offered them 400 Unwinds for his freedom, but Risa insists that Roland is lying. The cop says he knows Roland is telling the truth—they've known about the Admiral's operation for a year but have looked the other way, since it keeps Unwinds off the streets. The other cop says that if the Admiral dies, they may have to go raid the Graveyard. Connor asks if they can leave, in this case, but the cop says that Connor is a criminal and Risa is an accomplice. Roland is shocked to hear that Connor is the Akron AWOL, and even more shocked when the cop says that Roland can't leave either.

This is another opportunity to think of the implications of what the Juvey-cop is saying. If it's financially worth it for them to look the other way when they lose out on more than 100 Unwinds every year, this suggests that the system of harvest camps is already saturated with unwanted kids. This again suggests that the Bill of Life was ineffective in solving the issues of abortion or of organ donation, while also reminding readers that economics and cruelty drive this system.



CHAPTER 51

The narrator says that people can debate for hours on whether souls exist, but everyone knows that unwinding facilities have no souls. To make up for this, unwinding facilities—now called harvest camps—are in scenic locations and maintained like resorts. At Happy Jack Harvest Camp, the staff wear Hawaiian shirts and the barbed wire fence hides behind a hibiscus hedge. Unwinds see buses arrive daily, but they never see the trucks leaving the back way. Most kids stay about three weeks. In February, Risa, Roland, and Connor arrive at Happy Jack. Two armed Juvey-cops march Connor through the grounds as a warning to all: behave or else. However, the staff don't realize that by announcing they caught the Akron AWOL, they've turned Connor into a legend and boosted everyone's spirits.

The way that the harvest camps are designed suggests that in order to make unwinding palatable to the general public, architects and designers understood that it was necessary to create an environment that makes it look like teens' last days are happy, safe, and idyllic. Marching Connor through the campus as an example, however, makes it clear that this is just a front. In reality, the harvest camp is run like a prison and those in charge rule through fear—all the kids in the residence know that they're in the worst place they can possibly be.



CHAPTER 52

Risa sits in her orientation session and thinks that the camp is trying to set Connor up to fail so they can unwind him. She knows that Connor won't do the wrong thing unless it's the right thing to do. Risa always pictured harvest camps as akin to cattle stockades, but the beauty of the place makes it even worse. Unwinds spends much of their day exercising and Risa soon realizes that there are cameras watching to put a price on their parts. The counselor asks Risa if she has questions, and Risa asks what happens to bad or useless parts, like a deaf ear or an appendix. The counselor points out that some people can only afford deaf ears, and because they only have to use 99.44 percent of an Unwind, they can dispose of appendices. The counselor only takes genuine interest in Risa when Risa admits she plays piano.

The counselor's explanation that some people can only afford deaf ears reveals how deeply economics influences the wider unwinding system. It also reflects the reality that there are people in the world of the novel who cannot afford the best medical care, like Emby—and it means that there are likely others who can't afford medical care at all, and in some cases, likely die rather than receive an organ that's not entirely functional. This increases the sense that this system is unjust, as it shows how many more people are vulnerable and can't survive the system.



CHAPTER 53

Connor wants to lash out, but he knows that's what they want him to do and he knows that it would devastate Risa if he were unwound. He's a celebrity in his dormitory and spends his time trying to dispel rumors, but he's unsuccessful. Connor becomes friends with a boy named Dalton, who explains that everyone wishes they'd done what Connor did. The boys admit they're scared, and Dalton says that he's been at Happy Jack for six months because he plays in the band on the roof of the Chop Shop, where unwinding takes place.

Dalton's suggestion that everyone wishes they'd put up a fight like Connor indicates that whether Connor likes it or not, he truly has become a figure around whom others can rally. This turns him into an activist no matter his thoughts on the matter, as it means that he has the ability to steer his new companions in the direction of either compassionate activism or violence.



In the morning, Connor plays volleyball. Staffers stand around with clipboards to take notes on everyone's athleticism and Roland, on the opposite team, spikes the ball into a staffer's face. The game suddenly pauses as a group of kids wearing white passes by the court. One kid tells Connor that the kids in white are tithes and think they're better than everyone else. The staff don't help, as they refer to the non-tithe residents as "Terribles." As Connor turns back to his game, he thinks he sees Lev's face but reasons it's just his imagination.

The ways in which the tithes and the Terribles are treated differently again shows how easy it is to manipulate sentiment by manipulating language.



CHAPTER 54

Connor isn't imagining things: Lev is now clean-cut again and is at Happy Jack Harvest Camp. He doesn't see Connor because tithes, who "have a higher calling," are told not to "look at the terribles." He pretends to be sensitive and mild as his appointment for unwinding in 13 days gets closer.

Note that Lev is only pretending to be sensitive and mild—this is an explicit indicator that Lev isn't the actually sensitive and mild tithe the reader met at the beginning of the novel. Importantly, this is because Lev is now consumed by anger, which makes him more likely to act out violently and believe that doing so is the only way to handle his emotions (rather than talking, as Connor has learned to do).



CHAPTER 55

Risa loves playing piano, but she's horrified at the reason she's playing. From the roof of the Chop Shop, she watches guards bring kids down "the red carpet" to be unwound. Dalton and the band ignore the kids. Risa asks how they can stand it. The drummer insists she'll get used to it, but Risa declares she won't. Dalton points out that this is about survival: either they play, or they die. Risa asks what happened to their last keyboard player. The singer answers that they took him a week before his 18th birthday, as they have to let them go if they turn 18 and lose money in the process. Dalton says that right before his birthday, he's going to jump off the roof—it probably won't kill him, and they can't unwind him if he's injured. The singer says she hopes they lower the legal age to 17.

Risa struggles here with the knowledge that she's complicit in unwinding if she chooses to do nothing. Dalton's insistence that this is about survival speaks to the difficult situation these kids are in—their survival does depend on playing along, but they also have to live with themselves as they bear witness to something that all of them suggests is cruel and immoral. The singer's hope that the government will lower the legal age, however, is a hint that change is brewing outside of Connor and Risa's world—and hopefully, for the better.



CHAPTER 56

The dormitories at Happy Jack are divided into units of 30 kids. That evening, Connor notices that two beds in his unit are stripped. Nobody talks about the missing kids and Connor feels horrible that he can't remember their names or faces. He also feels bad because kids seem to think he can save them, when he knows he can't. Risa is the one bright spot in his life. He watched her play earlier and wishes that he'd gotten to know her better while they were together. Connor sits on his bed, thinking, and before he knows it, he's the last in the room. Everyone else is at dinner.

The realization that Connor can't remember the names or faces of the unwound kids reveals another way in which those at Happy Jack are forced to deny the humanity of others in order to maintain any hope that they'll escape. This is also a form of complicity with what's happening, as Connor now can't make a fuss and memorialize those kids who are already unwound.



Connor gets up to go, but Roland blocks his path. Connor realizes that Roland isn't really any taller than him and tells him to move. Both boys blame each other for their predicament, and Connor says that Roland would've murdered the Admiral and the Goldens if he'd had the chance—he's a killer. The boys begin a brutal fistfight and though Connor fights well, Roland is stronger. Roland slams Connor's head against a wall and says that now he's going to be a killer. He begins to suffocate Connor, and Connor realizes that he'd rather die like this than be unwound. Just as Connor starts to lose consciousness, Roland lets him go. Roland is crying as he leaves. Connor thinks that Roland is probably both disappointed and relieved that he's not a killer.

The realization that Roland isn't any taller than Connor is the moment in which Connor begins to realize that he and Roland aren't all that different. They may have slightly different aims and a different level of control over their anger, but at their core, they're both boys who have been abused by a system that doesn't think they have the right to exist—and they're both rightfully angry about this. When Roland can't kill Connor, it's another indicator that Roland isn't as evil as Connor thought he was.



CHAPTER 57

After dinner, Lev stands in the tithes' workout room on a treadmill that's not on. He studies his hands and thinks identification must be a nightmare when someone gets an Unwind's hands—but he knows that no one will get his hands or fingers. Most of the other tithes are in the rec room or in prayer groups. Lev attends prayer groups as often as he has to, but he secretly seethes when tithes "shred" Bible passages to justify unwinding. He recites the prayers and hopes that they'll lift him, but they don't. If his current path is wrong, he doesn't care.

The fingerprint identification question is yet another one to consider when thinking about the consequences of unwinding. That Lev is considering it at all illustrates again just how much his worldview has changed, as does his insistence that his peers are "shredding" Bible passages. Remember that for most of his life, Lev justified unwinding in the same way.



Lev turns on the treadmill and thinks of his blood test results. They showed high triglyceride levels, so the doctor prescribed a low-fat diet and extra exercise. Lev is certain that Mai and Blaine's blood tests came back similarly, and it's because they all have something else in their blood—an "unstable compound." Another boy joins Lev and asks if Lev is going to the candlelighting, a ceremony where the tithes light candles for those being unwound the next day. Lev finds it abhorrent, but he feels comforted that Risa and Connor are still in the Graveyard, alive.

It's important to take note of the fact that while Lev has turned to terrorism and feels consumed by overwhelming anger, he still manages to hold onto the fact that he has friends somewhere and that his imminent actions are going to help them. This suggests that no matter what Lev says, he's not entirely alone—and it offers hope that he can come back from this.



Lev slips into an old trash shed and finds Mai pacing. Blaine pulls out six packets that look like Band-Aids but refuses to say what they are. Mai says she's nervous because she recognized kids from the Graveyard on the Chop Shop roof and elsewhere. Blaine suggests that they "do it" in two days, since he's supposed to play football the day after. He finally hands out the Band-Aids and says they're detonators.

Lev, Blaine, and Mai are presumably going to blow up the harvest camp. Again, while their general intention—stopping unwinding—may be valid, the way they're going about it doesn't recognize the humanity of anyone else, since they're clearly willing to kill countless others to make their point.



The narrator explains that there never was a job on an Alaskan pipeline. A van took Lev, Mai, and Blaine to a run-down house inhabited by people who terrified Lev. Those people, however, knew what it's like to feel betrayed by life and to feel like they have nothing inside. They told Lev he was important to their cause, and they insisted that the world was evil. They'd never say that they, or what they asked Lev, Mai, and Blaine to do, was evil. Their message was just as deadly as the substance they put in his blood. Lev knows that soon the world will suffer just like him the minute he starts clapping.

What the recruiters told Lev shows again that they were able to offer him community and a sense of purpose, two things that he doesn't know how to create for himself if he's not a tithe and/or part of his religious community. This is one of the reasons Lev is so vulnerable to these people: he doesn't have the skills to figure out who he is and who he wants to be since other people have always made those choices for him.



CHAPTER 58

Connor eats breakfast quickly so that he can steal a minute with Risa. They meet in the girls' bathroom and hold each other in a stall. They kiss and Connor compliments her piano playing. After a minute, Risa slips away, and Connor hears her playing on the roof.

Meeting like this gives the impression that both Connor and Risa have come to terms with the fact that this may be their end, while the positive changes brought on by their relationship show that neither of them has reached their full potential yet.



CHAPTER 59

A counselor and two guards come for Roland soon after. Roland tries to plead with them, but the counselor says that Roland has a rare blood type that's in high demand. Roland tells them they want Connor, and the counselor says that Connor is scheduled for unwinding later in the day. As Roland steps onto the red carpet, he feels weak and asks for a priest. The counselor insists that priests give last rites for dying people, but they'll try. Roland tries to catch Risa's eye, feeling as though her acknowledgement will be better than nothing, but she doesn't look. At the steps of the Chop Shop, Roland begs for another day, but the guards lift him up the five steps. Doors close behind him, and Roland realizes the Chop Shop is soundproof.

When Risa doesn't meet Roland's eye, it's likely because she's decided that it's easier to keep playing when she doesn't have to look down at all the kids walking to their unwindings. While this is a reasonable coping mechanism for Risa, Roland's desire for some form of human contact in his last minutes suggests that it's just as important to acknowledge others' humanity as it is to keep oneself safe.



CHAPTER 60

Unwinding is a "secret medical ritual." No one besides the doctors who perform this procedure knows how it's done. To "unwind the unwanted," it takes six teams of two doctors, nine assistants, four nurses, and three hours.

Knowing that unwinding is a secret, complicated, and labor-intensive process gives the reader a bit more insight into just how serious of a practice it is. The inner workings of unwinding are clearly kept under wraps for a reason—if the public had more knowledge of the procedure, they might be more inclined to see it as immoral.



CHAPTER 61

Fifteen minutes into his unwinding procedure, Roland finds himself strapped to an operating table. A nurse at his head tells him that the only pain he'll feel is two pricks in his neck to numb his body and replace his blood with oxygen-rich gel, but he'll be awake the entire time. As Roland feels himself go numb, he tells the nurse he hates her. A few minutes later, the first set of surgeons arrive and begin to work on his feet. Roland wants to look, but the nurse keeps his attention on her. They talk about Roland's mother and stepfather.

An hour and 15 minutes in, Roland glances toward his toes but he can't see them—instead, there's an assistant cleaning the lower half of the table. He confesses that he almost killed Connor as a surgeon compliments Roland on his abs. Soon after, they pull away the lower half of the table. Roland tries not to look as surgeons lift things out of his abdomen. Since his blood is already gone, his organs are fluorescent green from the solution pumping through his body. He tells the nurse he's afraid and that he wants her to go to hell. Half an hour later, the nurse says they need to stop talking. Roland tries to focus on his anger or on Connor, but the fear drowns it all out.

Two hours in, the nurse asks Roland to blink if he can hear her—he can—and praises his bravery. Roland can't mentally escape, as there are hands and figures all around his head. He thinks that he doesn't deserve this and that he never got his priest. Twenty minutes later, they tell him his jaw will tingle. The nurse stares into Roland's eyes and smiles. Not long after, everything is dark for Roland, but he can still hear. He hears the nurse leave and a surgeon tells him he'll feel his scalp tingle. After that, the surgeons don't talk to Roland. They discuss basketball as they cut into Roland's brain.

Roland experiences bits of memories and remembers breaking his arm when he was 10. They offered him either a new arm or a cast, but the cast was cheaper. He drew a shark on the cast, and had it tattooed on his arm when the cast came off. As they remove each piece of his brain, he remembers that his dad went to jail for something and that he had a beautiful babysitter who shook his little sister. His sister was never right after that. He remembers crying in his crib and forgets his name, but he thinks that he's "still here" until the surgeons finish (20 minutes late) and call for the next Unwind to be prepped.

Roland having to stay awake through the procedure drives home even more clearly how inhumane unwinding is, as he must spend the next three hours unable to escape from the fact that these people think he's better off divided than as a whole, thinking, feeling person. Even if the nurse is reasonably kind to him, she's still complicit in a horrific system, and profits from it too.



What makes the unwinding process so inhumane isn't necessarily the fact that Roland is awake—it's that he must spend the entire three hours terrified. For the reader, getting to experience unwinding from inside the head of someone undergoing the procedure is the final clincher in the argument against unwinding. Roland has no power to fight back and no relief from his fear.



That the surgeons discuss basketball once they get into Roland's brain shows that for them, this is a job like any other; they're numb to the implications of what they're doing. Moreover, it's likely they have no idea Roland can still hear them and is still capable of gathering proof that nobody cares enough about him or his life to respect that he's still conscious and aware of what's going on around him.



That Roland received a cast instead of a new arm shows that he has been victimized in a variety of ways throughout his life: his family likely wasn't well-off, which meant that he couldn't receive the "best" care at the time, and now, he's again vulnerable to a system that seeks to profit off of him in any way possible.



CHAPTER 62

Lev hides his detonators in a sock and tries not to think about it; he knows Blaine will tell him when it's time. Lev joins other tithes on a nature walk led by a pastor. The pastor takes them to an odd tree with branches from all different types of trees. He says that they don't know what kind of tree it was to begin with and says it's wonderful. Lev spits that there's nothing wonderful about the tree, but he recovers by saying that it's the work of man and they shouldn't be prideful. This pleases the pastor and he leads them back to their housing. As they pass the dormitories, Lev finds himself face to face with Connor. The pastor steers Lev away after snarling at Connor and tells Lev that Connor is being unwound later.

Lev takes his first opportunity to sneak away and find Blaine. A staffer reluctantly lets Lev "say good-bye" to Blaine. Once he and Blaine are alone, Lev insists they have to "do it today." He lies that the staffers know there are clappers here, and soon they'll be found out. Blaine curses and says he's not ready, but Lev reminds him that if they're found out, the staffers will detonate them somewhere where nobody will see, hear, or care. They settle on detonating at one p.m.

Lev frantically rummages through his cubby looking for his detonators, but he can't find them. Another kid comes in behind him and tells Lev that he has the wrong cubby. Lev pockets his detonators and explains his appearance by saying he was running on the treadmill. The boy calls Lev's bluff since *he* was just at the gym, which makes Lev shout that they're not friends. A man silences Lev and leads him away.

Lev sits in a room with a counselor and two pastors. The counselor and the pastors want to know why Lev is so upset and they insist that Lev can't be tithed like this—he isn't in the proper frame of mind. Lev feels ready to burst as he sees that he only has 12 minutes to meet Mai and Blaine. When the counselor asks why Lev keeps checking the time, Lev says that he heard that his kidnapper was being unwound today and wonders if it happened yet. The pastor suggests they hold a special group meeting tonight so Lev can talk about his experience as a hostage. Lev agrees and then sits through guided relaxation exercises.

The tree acts as a symbol of sorts for what's theoretically possible with unwinding: being made up of all kinds of different parts, to the point where it's difficult to tell what's original and what's not. While this novel doesn't explore the possibility of creating people like this tree, the tree signals that there could be way more going on than just transplanting individual organs or tissues into others, setting the stage for moral quandaries to come.



The way that Lev convinces Blaine that they have to detonate sooner shows that part of the clappers' goal is to make a scene and draw attention to themselves—everything they've done is worthless if they're just going to explode somewhere where nobody will care. This represents an extreme and egotistic side to Lev's anger.



Lev's inability to control himself here stands in stark contrast to Lev's tight control over his actions when Connor and Risa first kidnapped him. His lack of control suggests that his anger has now overcome him, and he's no longer capable of even thinking rationally.



Because Lev is a fake tithe, and in theory, heading to his unwinding willingly, this counselor and these pastors have no conception of the possibility that Lev might be rethinking whether he wants to be a tithe. This suggests that these adults are extremely closed-minded, and that their unwillingness or inability to recognize Lev's discomfort means that they'll probably be unable to stop Lev from clapping.



CHAPTER 63

A guard stands outside the Chop Shop. He's bored and unsuccessful; he grew up in a state home and, like many other kids from the home who also left, decided to change his last name to Mullard, the name of the wealthiest family in the area. It hasn't done him any good. Mai and Blaine approach him with foil-covered plates, ostensibly for the band. They look shifty and nervous, but this is nothing unusual as all Unwinds look nervous near the Chop Shop. The guard calls it in to try to verify this, but the line is busy. He decides to let them in and forgets about them as soon as the doors close.

Much like the surgeons inside the Chop Shop, this guard sees what he's doing as just his job and not necessarily something with major moral implications. This reminds the reader that while everyone who benefits from this system is complicit in some way, not everyone focuses their energy on thinking about the negative implications of unwinding or of their role in relation to it.



CHAPTER 64

Connor sits in his dormitory feeling devastated that Lev is here and will be unwound. Two guards interrupt his thoughts and tell him it's time to go to the harvest clinic. Connor thinks that maybe Risa wants him, but one guard tells Connor that he's a liability since so many kids look up to him, and so he's being unwound today. The guards grab Connor and the boys still in the dorm won't look at him. Another guard says that he has a friend who's looking for brown eyes and explains that the guards sometimes get first dibs on parts, so Connor can rest assured that his eyes are going to a good place. In a panic, Connor wonders how to prepare himself and thinks that maybe they're right and unwinding could be okay. He decides to go to his unwinding with dignity and pride.

The choice to meet his unwinding with dignity and pride, rather than fight, speaks to the major transformation that Connor has undergone over the last few months. He now recognizes that violence isn't the best way to make anything happen. Instead, he realizes that it's more important for him to act in such a way as to make other people trust him, as doing so also gives him opportunities to learn from others' experiences.



CHAPTER 65

The narrator says that nobody knows what goes through a clapper's mind in the moments before they detonate. Whatever the thoughts are, they're seductive lies. For those who believe that unwinding is called for in the Bible, their lie promises a reward. For those who believe they'll change the world, their lie looks like a crowd smiling on them from the future. For clappers who are miserable, they believe they'll be freed from their pain when others suffer. Clappers who desire vengeance feel that their act will balance the scales of justice. In all cases, when a clapper claps, the lie reveals itself and the clapper dies alone.

The narrator makes the point here that while a person may be able to talk themselves into clapping (or indeed, into any act of terrorism or violence) by insisting that they're doing the right thing for some reason, all of that disappears as soon as the clapper has to reckon with the fact that, regardless, they're going to die. They're not going to see the world they believe they're helping to create and indeed, they're actually just causing terror, grief, and carnage.



Mai's life has been full of disappointment, but she broke when her boyfriend died in the shipping crate from the warehouse to the Graveyard. Even worse was watching the Golden's bury him carelessly. She eventually shared what she saw with Cleaver, and he plotted their murder of the Golden's. Blaine drugged the Golden's, but Mai sealed the crate and reveled in how easy killing was. Inside the Chop Shop, Mai locks herself in a storage room and waits. She'll let someone else go first. Blaine, meanwhile, waits in a hallway. He decided to not use his detonators since a "hardcore" clapper can detonate without them, and he wants to be hardcore like his brother was. He waits for someone else to go first.

Lev convinces the psychologist that he's relaxed and calmly leaves. Outside, kids run to the red carpet and shout that the Akron AWOL is being unwound. Lev sees the keyboardist in the band wail as kids converge and begin to applaud. Lev realizes what's going to happen and tries to scream for Connor. He makes it to the red carpet, but Connor enters the Chop Shop and the doors close. Lev looks up and sees that the keyboardist is Risa. Inside, a guard finds Blaine and shoots him with a tranquilizer. Blaine explodes immediately. Mai hears the explosion, tries not to think, and claps. It takes three tries. Risa notices Lev as the first explosion goes off. Dalton shouts that they need to leave, but the second explosion makes the band fall through the roof.

Lev watches the band fall. He feels like his world ended and he wants to make it all go away. He sticks the detonators onto his palms, thinking they look like the nail wounds in Christ's hands. Lev studies his hands, but he can't make himself clap. He feels like an even bigger failure. The crowd ignores Lev and points as Connor stumbles out of the Chop Shop. His right arm is mangled and he's missing an eye. Kids shout that he blew up the Chop Shop and rioting kids overwhelm the guards. Connor can focus only on the pain and he collapses. Lev leans over him and presses his shirt onto Connor's face. Another kid kneels down and shoots Connor with a tranquilizer.

When Mai's boyfriend died in the crate, she, like Lev, realized that the world is extremely unfair. Her inability to deal with the loss and what she saw healthily suggests that had she been more emotionally literate, she could've made better choices. Again, that she's motivated by grief allows the reader to sympathize with her, while learning that the Golden's didn't respectfully bury the five kids who died suggests that by the same token, they weren't all good.



For Lev, realizing that Connor and Risa are going to die, or at least be seriously injured despite his efforts, impresses upon him that becoming a clapper wasn't actually an effective way to either get his point across or care for the people he loves. Instead, his failure to effectively and healthily deal with his anger means that he causes irreparable damage to all of them. This is another groundbreaking moment for Lev, as it begins to show him that he chose the wrong path.



Though the novel overwhelmingly shows that this kind of a riot isn't an acceptable course of action, in this case, it's not nearly as destructive since the rioting Unwinds are attacking those who would unwind them otherwise. When Lev turns to saving Connor instead of clapping and causing even more damage, it shows that he now understands that he doesn't have to commit acts of terrorism to make a difference. Instead, he can help others.



CHAPTER 66

Connor wakes up, confused as to why he can only see out of one eye. He begins to remember that he was going to be unwound, and that Lev was there. A nurse comes in and brightly explains that Connor has been in a medically induced coma for two weeks. Connor begins to ask about Risa, but the nurse won't say. She calls Connor "Mr. Mullard" and says he needs to heal. For a moment, Connor thinks that he's been unwound and is in someone else's body, but his body feels right. He tells the nurse his name is Connor, but the nurse gives him an uncomfortable stare and says that they found an ID with the photo charred off for a guard named Elvis Mullard, and they're not going to waste that ID. Connor asks if he has a middle name.

Connor reaches his right hand out to shake the nurse's hand, but his shoulder aches. The nurse explains that his arm will hurt until the graft heals. With a sigh, the nurse says they couldn't save Connor's eye or right arm, but fortunately, as Elvis Mullard, Connor qualified for emergency transplants. Connor looks down at his new arm and inspects it. He stops short when he sees the tattoo of a shark on his wrist.

The guard who let Mai and Blaine into the Chop Shop presumably died, leaving behind this ID. While it's unclear exactly who came up with the idea to let Connor assume Elvis Mullard's identity, it nevertheless makes the point that there are even more individuals in the world who are willing to look out for vulnerable teens like Connor and other Unwinds. This suggests that going forward, in later novels, Connor should be on the lookout for these other helpers.



That Connor qualified for emergency transplants as Elvis Mullard suggests that whoever orchestrated this elevated Connor well above the original Elvis Mullard, given that the guard occupied a relatively low position in society. In a way, this also gives the real Elvis Mullard another chance to redeem himself, if only in spirit.



CHAPTER 67

When the Chop Shop blew up, Risa was awake the whole time. She was trapped and couldn't feel her legs, but she comforted Dalton until he died. The guitar player brought others back to free Risa. Now she's in the hospital, full of steel pins. She still can't feel her toes. A nurse lets Connor into the room and Connor says that Lev saved him. Risa says that Lev carried her out too. Risa realizes that Connor doesn't know that Lev was a clapper and is the one who didn't clap. As they talk, Risa notices that Connor's right fingers aren't his. She admits that she's paralyzed and refused the transplant operation, as they would've unwound her then—as a disabled person, she now can't be unwound.

Connor rolls his shoulder and his sling shifts, revealing the shark tattoo. Connor looks away in shame and promises to never touch Risa with that hand. Risa thinks of how that hand held her against a wall and threatened her, but she only sees Connor. She beckons him closer and puts his hand on her cheek. Risa says that Roland would never touch her gently.

While losing use of her legs is, of course, difficult for Risa to deal with on some level, she copes with her injury by thinking about things in much the same way that the Admiral did when he refused a heart transplant: it would be hypocritical to fight against this system while also allowing oneself to profit from it. Not having use of her legs doesn't make Risa any less able to be an activist—in fact, it makes her an example of what the novel suggests people should strive for in difficult situations like this.



Having Roland's arm with them, presumably for the rest of Connor's life, means that both Connor and Risa will have a constant reminder to look at all sides of a situation or of a person.



CHAPTER 68

Lev is in a high-security federal detention center. His cell is padded with a steel blast door, is kept cold, and Lev is both wrapped in fire-resistant insulation and suspended in midair. He can't detonate—if he does, the cell will contain the blast. He's had four blood transfusions, but nobody will tell him anything. Lev insists to his lawyer that he wasn't insane, but he's not sure anymore. The door opens and it takes Lev a minute to recognize Pastor Dan, since Pastor Dan isn't dressed like a pastor. After a few awkward greetings, Lev wonders why Pastor Dan is here. He wonders if they're going to execute him and if Pastor Dan is here to give him last rites.

Lev tells Pastor Dan to do whatever he's going to do. Pastor Dan asks Lev how much he knows of what's going on outside and asks if Lev knows Cyrus Finch. Lev starts to panic—clappers' friends and families usually become suspects. Lev insists that CyFi is innocent, but Pastor Dan explains that CyFi and others have been speaking out about what happened at Happy Jack and about unwinding in general. CyFi testified before Congress. Lev smiles as Pastor Dan says they might lower legal age to 17.

Then, Pastor Dan pulls out a magazine. On the cover is Lev's baseball picture and the headline reads, "Why, Lev, Why?" Lev hadn't realized that the outside world had also been wondering why he did what he did. Lev uncomfortably points out that all clappers make the news, but Pastor Dan says their *actions* do, not the clappers themselves. Lev is different because he didn't clap and instead, saved three people from the wreckage. He says that the other tithes held back, but Lev led the rescue effort. Lev remembers running back in and realizing that one false move would've blown up the rest of the Chop Shop. After ambulances took Risa and Connor away, Lev found a police officer willing to arrest him.

Pastor Dan says that Lev's actions confused people; they don't know whether he's a "hero" or a "monster." He says that he believes things happen for a reason, and he has to believe that Lev's kidnapping and becoming a clapper happened to "put a face on unwinding." Lev asks what happens now. Pastor Dan says they'll clear the explosives from Lev's blood, but that he's safe from unwinding now. Lev's lawyer believes that the government will cut him a deal since he led them toward the recruiting group, but Pastor Dan says that they'll probably see Lev as a victim. Lev insists that he knew what he was doing, but he can't tell Pastor Dan why. Pastor Dan insists that it's not Lev's fault he wasn't prepared for life—it's his and Lev's parents' fault. Pastor Dan suggests that he and Lev's parents are as guilty as the clapper recruiters.

When Lev suggests that he's not sure if he was insane or not when he joined the clappers, it speaks to the fact that Lev has no idea who he is at this point. His life has been entirely upended, first by missing his tithing and then by failing to clap. Further, seeing that Pastor Dan isn't dressed like a pastor only adds to the sense of wrongness, as even this figure from Lev's childhood isn't the person he thought he was. In short, Lev is unmoored—but he may have the opportunity to reinvent himself.



CyFi sets another example of how to effectively be an activist: working with the government to come up with laws that, unlike the Bill of Life, are actually well thought out and take more into account than just stopping a deadly and hateful war. That Lev can smile about this suggests that he sees the value in fighting back this way.



What Pastor Dan says about Lev humanizing both clappers and Unwinds suggests that what's been missing from the debate is the stories of those who, until this point, haven't had the power or the wherewithal to tell their stories. CyFi is a good start, as he's also a victim of unwinding in one way, but Lev represents victimhood in a way that impresses upon others just how emotionally traumatizing it can be for a child to be unwound.



When Pastor Dan suggests that he's just as guilty as the clapper recruiters for setting Lev along this path, he acknowledges that their religion does a poor job of giving kids like Lev a choice in the matter—and it also doesn't account for the fact that some tithes, like Lev, certainly lose their conviction when it comes down to it and in a society that respects everyone's bodily autonomy, those tithes would be able to back out. With this, Pastor Dan suggests that their world at large requires structural change to the way they talk about and legislate unwinding.



Pastor Dan says that Lev will probably spend a few years in jail and then be under house arrest. Lev wants to know what house he'll be in. With a sigh, Pastor Dan says that Lev's parents wouldn't take custody of Lev, so he's technically a ward of the state, but Marcus is petitioning for guardianship. Lev realizes that his parents disowned Marcus too. He asks Pastor Dan why he's dressed in street clothes. Pastor Dan says he left the church because he doesn't believe in a God who condones human tithing. Lev chokes up and says he didn't know that was a choice. For the first time, Lev feels like his soul is free and asks if he can also believe in Pastor Dan's God.

Admitting that he left the church because he doesn't believe in tithing, while specifying that he still believes in God, opens up a whole new world for Lev. Because of the insular community he grew up in, Lev has never known that this is a possibility, but seeing Pastor Dan make this choice shows Lev that he can have a relationship with God on his terms, and not supporting tithing doesn't mean he's going to hell or is a bad person.



CHAPTER 69

Harlan Dunfee grew up on a ranch in west Texas. He got into trouble three times and the Admiral got him off twice. Today is Harlan's 26th birthday. There are hundreds of guests at his party, including Emby. He has Harlan's right lung.

Revealing that Emby has one of Harlan's lungs explains the Admiral's interest in him, while also allowing Emby to remain firm in his belief that unwinding isn't all bad.



At the same time, a jet containing Unwinds arrives in the desert. Hayden introduces himself to a young Unwind and the group of kids steps off the airplane. A young man in a golf cart arrives, speaks with Hayden, and turns to the crowd. The young man—Connor—introduces himself as Mullard and then as Connor. The Admiral never returns to the graveyard on account of his health. He returns to his ex-wife on their ranch and keeps himself alive thinking about Harlan's party. He reasons that in a way, the stories about **Humphrey Dunfee** are true, since now all of Harlan's parts are in one spot again.

The Admiral's work to bring together all the people who received body parts from Harlan is another way for him to try to atone for unwinding his son. In this case, his atonement has to do with impressing upon all of those who benefited from Harlan's unwinding that their health and success came at a price: Harlan's life.



In the Graveyard, Connor addresses the new arrivals. His speech follows more or less what the Admiral's was, and he makes sure to make eye contact with every Unwind. He says that he knows some want to just survive to 17, while others want to end unwinding. Connor says they won't blow up chop shops and feed into the idea that Unwinds are violent. Instead, they'll use their words, infiltrate harvest camps, and free kids. The kids cheer as Connor says they have a right to their lives, to their bodies, and they deserve a world where those things are possible.

Connor's speech mirrors the Admiral's, which shows that the Admiral was a major force in showing Connor how to be a good activist and leader. His insistence that they can't blow up chop shops and appear violent also suggests that as the leader of the Graveyard, Connor will work hard to make sure his charges don't end up like Lev did and join terrorist groups because they don't know how to deal with their anger.



At the Dunfee ranch, Emby connects with the girl who has Harlan's left lung. Conversations begin to converge and soon everyone is talking with one another. The Admiral and his wife both cry. The Admiral looks at the crowd and says, "Harlan?" They answer as one by calling the Admiral "Dad." At the Graveyard, Risa plays a grand piano and smiles at the new Unwinds. She knows that this place is redemptive for them all. Connor watches her play and thinks that even this harsh place is beautiful. He finally allows himself to hope.

Risa's piano playing offers up another way to be an activist and support others, as she can help to lift spirits in the Graveyard. Both her and Connor's ability to now see that the Graveyard is beautiful suggests that they've learned to look beyond surface traits of places or people and understand that what matters is what lies beneath—and no matter the exterior, people can be kind, compassionate, and supportive.





HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Brock, Zoë. "Unwind." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 25 Oct 2019. Web. 11 Jun 2025.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Brock, Zoë. "Unwind." LitCharts LLC, October 25, 2019. Retrieved June 11, 2025. <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/unwind>.

To cite any of the quotes from *Unwind* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Shusterman, Neal. *Unwind*. Simon & Schuster. 2009.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Shusterman, Neal. *Unwind*. New York: Simon & Schuster. 2009.