

The Chocolate War



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ROBERT CORMIER

Robert Cormier was born and raised in Leominster, Massachusetts—a city that would become an important inspiration for his writing and serve, disguised under other names, as the setting for many of his novels. Cormier attended a private Catholic school, and there developed an interest in writing; after one of Cormier’s college teachers sent off his first story for publication in a Catholic magazine, Cormier gained the confidence to pursue writing as a career. Cormier’s most well-known novels include the 1977 young-adult book *I Am the Cheese*, which tells the surprisingly dark story of a young man betrayed by the Witness Protection Program, and 1974’s *The Chocolate War*, a frequently-banned book about violence, masculinity, tradition, and the terror and anger that can lie at the intersection of all three. Before his death in 2000, Cormier received a lifetime achievement award from the American Library Association for his contribution to the field of young adult literature.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The mid-1970s in America were a time of social change and even upheaval. The sexual revolution, the civil rights movement, and the war in Vietnam were all fresh in the collective American memory, and the newly-granted freedoms and breaks with tradition that had taken root in society were pressed flush up against the painful repetitions of military violence, government corruption, and oppression of minority groups. The question on the poster in Jerry’s locker, “Do I dare disturb the universe?”, was surely on the minds of many Americans as they reckoned with their historical moment: having come so far forward, and yet still facing down so much necessary “disturbance” in order to create even more social change and continue bettering their society. Moreover, 1974 was the year of Richard Nixon’s resignation from office, making him the first President of the United States to do so. The insidious corruption of Nixon’s reign coupled with the startling break from tradition his resignation signaled no doubt inspired some of the themes within *The Chocolate War*.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The Chocolate War, which deals with themes and motifs of violence, power, and masculinity—as well as coercion, groupthink, and societal oppression—is kin to several other works of young adult fiction that provide young people with a lens through which they can view and consider such big,

frightening issues. William Golding’s 1954 novel [Lord of the Flies](#) also features a group of young men, isolated from society and struggling to assert their power over one another. Though Golding’s characters are marooned on an uninhabited island and Cormier’s are deeply entrenched in a rigid, tradition-obsessed Catholic school in New England, the parallels between the novels are astounding, and the ways in which patterns of violence, power-seeking, and coercion emerge amongst a group of young men thrust together in close quarters are explored unflinchingly in both books. Todd Strasser’s 1981 young adult novel [The Wave](#), in which a teacher creates a school-wide movement called “The Wave” to teach his students about the harmful but alluring rhetoric of fascist regimes, specifically Nazi Germany, but finds that his experiment goes off the rails, shares similar themes with *The Chocolate War* as well. Donna Tartt’s novel *The Secret History*, aimed at adults, is also set on the campus of a small New England college steeped in custom and convention, and follows a new freshman as he navigates the dark underbelly of his new schoolmates’ more unsettling traditions.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Chocolate War*
- **When Written:** Early 1970s
- **Where Written:** Massachusetts
- **When Published:** 1974
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Young adult fiction; realism
- **Setting:** New England
- **Climax:** Jerry Renault faces off against his bully Emile Janza in a boxing match in front of the entire school.
- **Antagonist:** Archie Costello; Emile Janza; Brother Leon; tradition
- **Point of View:** Close third person, tracking many different characters at various points

EXTRA CREDIT

Banned. *The Chocolate War* is one of the most frequently-banned contemporary young adult novels. The book’s reckoning with its young male characters’ budding sexualities as well as their unsettling drives towards violence and coercion—not to mention the insidious and even evil school administration, which contributes to the novel’s sense of hopelessness—is often seen as too “adult” for students who are the very same age as the characters within the text.

Beyond the Chocolate War. In 1985, Cormier published a sequel to *The Chocolate War*, fittingly called *Beyond the Chocolate War*. The novel introduces new characters to Trinity High, and tracks the fallout of the “war” Jerry inspired and the ongoing moral and intellectual power struggle between Obie and Archie.



PLOT SUMMARY

It is the start of the school year at Trinity High, an all-boys' school in New England. Freshman Jerry Renault subjects himself to football tryouts—though the process is violent and Jerry gets “murdered” by the other, bigger recruits, he feels a sense of pride and hope that he will make the team. What he doesn't know is that in the bleachers above the field, two prominent members of the school's secret society, the Vigils, are watching him. Archie Costello and his fellow Vigils member Obie watch over the tryouts; Archie is selecting students for his legendary “assignments” while Obie, the group's secretary, writes down their names and assigned tasks. Archie is a cruel, nasty boy, and Obie hates that Archie's power as the feared assigner of the Vigils gives him free reign to do as he pleases. Archie assigns a kid called The Goober to “Brother Eugene's room,” and for Jerry Renault—who, Obie tells him, lost his mother to cancer last spring—Archie chooses “**chocolates.**”

On the way home from tryouts, Jerry has an encounter with a hippie who hangs out in a park across the street from the bus stop. The hippie accuses Jerry of staring at him and his friends; though Jerry denies doing so, the hippie berates Jerry, calling him a “square boy.” The exchange rattles Jerry. Meanwhile, Brother Leon, the Assistant Headmaster of the school, nervously attempts to recruit Archie—and, by association, the Vigils—to help him with the school's yearly chocolate sale. Brother Leon has secured a massive amount of chocolate, and wants for each student at the school to double his quote from previous years and sell fifty boxes at an increased price of two dollars a box. Brother Leon knows this is a tall order, and wants the Vigils' help in getting students excited about the sale. Archie tells Brother Leon that he can count on the Vigils.

In the days leading up to the chocolate sale, The Goober completes his assignment—loosening the screws on all the furniture in Brother Eugene's classroom, leading to total bedlam as it all falls apart the next day when students take their seats—while Jerry contemplates his father's humdrum existence and, by proxy, his own. On the first day of the chocolate sale, as Brother Leon calls roll and asks each student to accept his quota of fifty chocolates, Jerry refuses to accept his boxes, much to Brother Leon's dismay. The other Trinity boys struggle to sell their chocolates, while the sale's treasurer, Brian Cochran, begins tabulating the abysmal totals, afraid of the dark and seemingly unstable Brother Leon's wrath. In a series of run-ins with school bully Emile Janza, it becomes clear

that Archie is blackmailing Janza by lording a compromising photograph over the bully. Brother Leon, meanwhile, is blackmailing his own students—namely the smart but meek David Caroni, who reveals that Jerry's refusal to accept the chocolates is widely-known to be part of a Vigils assignment. Caroni assures Leon that the assignment is only going to last ten days, and Leon delights in the realization that the next day is, coincidentally, the tenth day of the sale.

The next morning, though, Jerry still does not accept his chocolates. He himself doesn't know the reason for his resistance—he chides himself for extending the torturous friction with Brother Leon, even as his fellow classmates congratulate him for taking a stand against the boring, pointless chocolate sale. Jerry is motivated at least in part by a **poster** on the inside of his locker, which asks, “Do I dare disturb the universe?” and, as the days go by, he continues refusing to accept his boxes. Throughout Trinity, the students grow increasingly fed up with the chocolate sale. Meanwhile, Archie and Obie worry that Jerry's refusal to end his “assignment” will reflect poorly on the Vigils, and Archie decides to summon Jerry to another Vigils meeting to deal with him. The Goober quits football, telling Jerry that there is “something rotten” at Trinity.

As chocolate sales plummet, Brother Leon menacingly warns Archie that if the sale tanks, he will see to it that the Vigils do, too. Jerry arrives at a Vigils meeting, where Archie demands to know why Jerry won't sell the chocolates. Jerry refuses to answer, and Archie essentially begs Jerry to sell the chocolates. Obie is surprised to see the powerful Archie ask for anything at all, and secretly hopes that Archie's reign is coming to an end. As posters both condemning the chocolate sale and the Vigils begin cropping up in the school, the president of the Vigils, a senior named Carter, urges Archie to do something to rehabilitate the Vigils' image. Archie suggests that the Vigils throw their full weight behind the chocolate sale—doing so will both please Leon and delegitimize Jerry Renault, who will be marked as an outsider once the whole school is selling chocolates left and right.

Bad things begin happening to Jerry. His own teammates attack him during football practice; he receives prank phone calls from a disembodied voice that chuckles maniacally; his locker is vandalized and his inspiration poster destroyed; his homework assignments are stolen off his teachers' desks, threatening his grades. In spite of all this, Jerry still thinks it is worth it to try and “disturb the universe.” Chocolate sales begin soaring. Brian Cochran knows something fishy is going on, as seniors and Vigils members are bringing in large wads of cash with instructions on who to attribute the sales to, but he is enjoying his own nascent popularity for the first time ever, and does not speak up.

Jerry is assaulted after school by Emile Janza, who taunts him and calls him a “fairy” and a “queer” before summoning a bunch

of neighborhood boys to beat Jerry up and leave him bloody on the ground. That night, when the injured Jerry returns home, he is harassed by voices on the street calling his name and the endless ringing of the telephone. The next day at school, Jerry is treated like a ghost—not just students, but teachers, too, begin freezing Jerry out entirely. He is grateful for the silent treatment, but when a group of boys tries to push him down the stairs, he realizes his trial by fire is not over yet. Finally, the chocolate sale ends—Leon is relieved when Brian Cochran tells him that, somehow, every single box of chocolates except for fifty have sold. Archie and Obie cook up a plot to raffle off the fifty remaining boxes to the student body—a raffle like “no other in any school’s history.”

On the night of the raffle, the Vigils construct a makeshift boxing ring on the football field. Having ensured that the brothers will not be present, the Vigils are free to stage a cruel and unusual event: in raffling off the fifty unsold boxes and a cash prize, the Vigils have allowed each member of the student body to submit as their “ticket” an instruction for either Jerry or Emile Janza, who will be facing off in a boxing match to settle the score between them. As they wait for the match to start, Jerry and Janza are both nervous—Jerry realizes that he has made a mistake in allowing Archie to talk him into the chance at ultimate revenge, while Janza worries that Archie will expose the compromising photo of him masturbating in the school’s bathroom.

Before the match begins, Obie brings out the Vigils’ mysterious **black box** for the whole student body to see—as the assigner, Archie must reach into the box with each assignment and pull out a marble. If the marble is white, the original assignee completes their assignment; if the marble is black, Archie must take it on himself. Obie and Carter make Archie draw from the box twice—once for Jerry and once for Janza—but Archie draws a white marble each time. As the match begins, The Goober arrives. He hears the crowd chanting “Kill ‘em” over and over, and becomes worried for Jerry. As the match starts, Jerry and Janza strike one another according to the instructions on the “tickets” Carter pulls from a box; when Carter, caught up in the excitement, reads off an instruction for Janza to strike an illegal blow to Jerry’s groin, Jerry defends himself, enraging Janza. Janza begins beating Jerry to a pulp as the crowd cheers him on. Obie looks up into the stands and sees Brother Leon watching the carnage unfold gleefully. Without warning, the stadium lights go out. Archie runs for the utility building, hoping to reset the electricity and let the match finish, but once there he encounters Brother Jacques, who has come to stop the madness.

Jerry awakes to find The Goober holding him—he wishes he could tell The Goober that he now realizes he was wrong to try “disturbing the universe,” but is in so much pain that he cannot speak. As an ambulance arrives, Brother Jacques tries to get the story out of Archie—but Brother Leon comes to Archie’s

defense. As Brother Jacques, frustrated, stalks away to see to Jerry, Archie basks in the knowledge that, with Brother Leon on his side, it is going to be a great year. After the madness dies down, Archie and Obie sit in the bleachers. Obie wishes aloud for another “kid like Renault” to come along and give Archie his just desserts, but Archie seems not to notice. Instead, he tells Obie he is hungry, and asks if Obie has any of the unsold chocolates—Obie says they were all stolen when the lights went out. The two sit in silence before making their way home.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Jerry Renault – Jerry Renault is the protagonist of the story and a freshman at Trinity High, a Catholic all-boys’ school in New England steeped in years of tradition. Jerry, whose mother has recently died, longs to find a place for himself at Trinity; he tries out for the football team, almost asks out a girl, and slowly begins making friends, but his plans are waylaid when he is caught up in an assignment from the school’s secret society, the Vigils. Ordered to refuse to participate in the school’s yearly **chocolate** sale for ten days, Jerry suffers greatly as he butts heads with the strange, slimy assistant headmaster Brother Leon and becomes known as an outsider among his classmates. After the ten days are up and Jerry still refuses to accept the chocolates—spurred, in equal measure, by his desire to “disturb the universe” and avoid a “square,” repetitive lifestyle like his father’s, and to make a name for himself at his stuffy school—he becomes a legend on-campus, lauded by his classmates for his bucking of tradition. Even as Jerry’s popularity soars, the secret mechanisms with the school begin working against him, and soon, Archie Costello, Brother Leon, Emile Janza, and sundry other members of the student body have embarked upon a campaign of physical and psychological violence against Jerry, meant to break his spirit and force him to conform. As Jerry struggles against the powers that be and seeks to figure out what it is he wants out of his own life, he wrestles with the stifling forces of tradition and mindless compliance with the status quo—but, in a painful twist, is ultimately defeated, and in the end regrets having tried to “disturb the universe” in the first place.

Archie Costello – Archie Costello is the “assigner” of the Vigils, the secret society on-campus at Trinity. Archie is a cruel, sneaky, and power-hungry boy whose ravenous desire for power and control symbolically manifests as an insatiable craving for **chocolate**. Archie relishes his unique role on campus—as a member of the Vigils, he is already popular and powerful, but as the assigner, he wields complete control over anyone he wishes. To rebuke an assignment—a task, prank, or dare—from the Vigils is unheard of on Trinity’s campus; that is, until Jerry Renault, instructed to refuse to accept his quota for the chocolate sale for ten days and then relent, keeps up with

his protest even after the ten days are up. As Jerry emerges as a threat to the Vigils' control over the school, Archie becomes obsessed with quashing him—and nervous about his ability to remain reliable in the eyes of Brother Leon, the assistant headmaster, with whose combined permission and ignorance Archie can effectively rule the school alone. Archie enjoys enacting psychological rather than physical violence upon his classmates, and loves to make others squirm. Archie is seen as despicable and repellent by almost everyone around him, and yet his unique position within the school forces most others bend to his will.

Brother Leon – The assistant headmaster of Trinity High, Brother Leon is a slimy and devious man who may or may not be embezzling money from the school. Brother Leon is a showman who holds his classes in the palm of his hand during his animated, intense lectures; he often singles students out and uses them in demonstrations, blurring the lines of teacherly ethics. Brother Leon heads the **chocolate** sale each year, and, this year, has secured twenty-thousand boxes—double the normal amount. Leon tells anyone who will listen that the sale is important for school spirit, and designed to boost morale and camaraderie—but as the sale gets off to a rocky start, his intense nervousness at the poor numbers betrays the fact that Leon may have more at stake in the sale than he is letting on. As the days go by and Jerry refuses the chocolates week after week—first as a Vigils assignment and later of his own volition—Leon develops an intense hatred of the boy, seeing Jerry as a symbol of all that is wrong within the school. He calls him out in front of the class each day, though he knows that Jerry is never going to accept the chocolates. In the end, when Jerry is pitted against Janza in a veritable fight to the death, Brother Leon looks on from a distance as Jerry is beaten to a pulp—seemingly approving of the violence. Brother Leon is cruel, self-serving, secretive, and obsessed with tradition. His blatant disregard for the well-being of his students, not to mention his preoccupation with enlisting Archie and the equally shadowy Vigils into his command, reveal Brother Leon's unsuitability (to say the least) to the role of a teacher and his narcissistic self-interest.

Emile Janza – A school bully whose animalistic love of violence proves useful to Archie Costello. Archie is blackmailing Emile—Emile believes that Archie has a compromising photo of Emile, which shows him masturbating on school property. Though Emile puts up a wild, devil-may-care front, he is firmly in Archie's palm, and often does Archie's bidding—such as when he corners Jerry after school, calls him a “fairy” and a “queer,” and beats him up with the help of several neighborhood friends in an attempt to humiliate Jerry into bending to the Vigils' will. Though Janza is tough and cruel, he is motivated by a very real sense of fear and a desire to belong. As he prepares for his climactic fight against Jerry at the end of the novel, Janza reveals that all he truly wants is to be a member of the Vigils

one day.

Obie – The secretary of the Vigils and Archie Costello's archenemy. Despite his hatred of Archie, Obie knows that Archie's reign is uncontestable, and so he seeks to challenge him in small ways—such as calling him a “bastard” repeatedly and humiliating him towards the end of the novel by forcing Archie to confront his greatest (and perhaps only) fear, the **Black Box**, in front of the entire school.

The Goober – A skinny, quiet freshman who becomes Jerry Renault's only friend. The Goober is given an assignment by the Vigils before Jerry. He is reluctant to carry it out, but he goes through with it—though he is disgusted with what he's done for weeks after it's over. The Goober is trying out for football alongside Jerry, but as the “**chocolate war**” escalates and Jerry suffers more and more, The Goober quits football and even starts staying home “sick” from school, not wanting to give anything else of himself to Trinity—a place that he feels is “rotten” and even “evil.”

Carter – The president of the Vigils. Carter is a senior, and is very different from his right-hand-man Archie. Whereas Archie relishes psychologically torturing his assignees, Carter shies away from psychological violence—which he finds repulsive—and would prefer the Vigils to maintain their stronghold on the school through hushed-up physical retribution against defectors and dissenters.

Jerry's Father – Jerry's father is a widower and a pharmacist who keeps odd hours due to his demanding but dull job. Jerry's father seems to be on autopilot since the death of Jerry's mother, and is deeply disconnected from his son and the pain Jerry is going through. Jerry is afraid of ending up like his father—moving mindlessly through a life full of “fine” days and boring work.

Brother Jacques – One of the brothers at Trinity. He attempts to pull Leon into line after he discovers that Leon has abused school funds to order so many **chocolates**, and, in the end, Jacques is the one who stops the terrible boxing match between Jerry and Janza by turning out the lights. For all his efforts, Cormier implies that Brother Jacques's righteous ways will not be enough to stop the corrupt Brother Leon and the Vigils.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Brother Eugene – A teacher at Trinity who is, rumor has it, so shaken up by the Vigils' attack on his classroom—carried out primarily and reluctantly by The Goober—that he leaves the school.

Bailey – A student at Trinity who is singled out by Brother Leon and used as a punching bag for one of his cruel but instructive lessons.

John Sulkey – A Trinity senior who won an award for selling the

most tickets in a school raffle last year, and is determined to do well in the **chocolate** sale this year, too.

Tubs Casper – A Trinity boy who plans on using the funds he makes in the **chocolate** sale to buy his girlfriend a bracelet.

Paul Consalvo – A Trinity student who has been attempting to sell **chocolates** in nearby tenement buildings, but has had little luck.

Brian Cochran – The treasurer of the **chocolate** sale. An unpopular boy, Brian knows that there is a lot going wrong with the chocolate sale, from fudged numbers to possible embezzlement on Leon’s behalf, but is too afraid to speak up and risk falling out of Leon’s good graces.

David Caroni – A smart student at Trinity who finds himself being blackmailed by Brother Leon for information about Jerry Renault’s resistance to the **chocolate** sale.

Kevin Chartier – A Trinity student who has had a very hard time selling **chocolates**, and has even been chased down the street by a stray dog while going door-to-door.

Danny Arcangelo – A Trinity student frustrated by the **chocolate** sale.

Howie Anderson – A Trinity boy who, following Jerry’s example, decides to give up on the **chocolate** sale.

Richy Rondell – A friend of Howie Anderson who vows to stop selling **chocolates** after Howie does so first.

Ellen Barrett – A girl who shares a bus stop with Jerry. Jerry becomes infatuated with her and looks her up in the phone book, but fails to engage her in conversation.

Frankie Rollo – A junior at Trinity who is a troublemaker and a loner. The Vigils attempt to give Rollo an assignment, but, emboldened by Jerry’s refusal to cooperate with the Vigils, Rollo refuses, incurring the wrath of the Vigils’ president, Carter.

and intrigued by the question of what it means to “disturb the universe,” keeps up with his refusal—and in doing so, he isolates himself from his classmates and becomes a loner within his school, both socially and ideologically. By framing his novel around Jerry’s internal conflict during his “protest,” Robert Cormier raises questions of what it means to stand alone against the status quo, ultimately suggesting that even in the face of persecution and violence, the hope and independence one individual stands for can alter the foundation of any society.

When Jerry first declines to sell the chocolates, he is doing so on a dare from the Vigils—a dare which cannot be shirked on pain of social ostracizing or further torment from the Vigils. Jerry, a freshman, has been struggling hard to fit in at school, and readily goes along with the Vigils’ command. However, Jerry has also been slowly and steadily questioning his place in the world and what it means to go with the flow, never asserting his individuality or questioning his place in society.

Early on in the novel, Jerry gets into a mild confrontation with a hippie. “Fascinated” by the presence of a group of “street people, drifters, [and] drop-outs” who hang out across the street from school, Jerry often watches the “flower children” smoke, lounge, and socialize. One afternoon, a hippie approaches Jerry and calls him out for staring. The hippie accuses Jerry of seeing him and his friends as a category of “sub-human,” and then says that it’s Jerry who is the “sub-human,” conditioned as he is to follow routine and participate in the rules set forth for him by his school and his family. The confrontation rattles Jerry, and though he knows that the hippie was provoking him, he cannot shake the feeling that the hippie was right, and that there is more to life than what he’s experiencing. Further, Jerry’s mother has recently died, and he and his father have been adjusting to the loss in a weary, detached way. They don’t speak about their loss much, and instead maneuver around each other mutely. Jerry watches as his father, a pharmacist, moves through his days seemingly on autopilot. When Jerry asks his father if he ever wanted more out of life, Jerry’s father deflects, but Jerry cannot hide his disappointment that his father’s life is so “boring and humdrum.” Jerry also has a **poster** taped up to the inside of his locker—“Do I dare disturb the universe?” it reads, quoting a line from T.S. Eliot’s 1910 poem “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.” Jerry looks at the picture every day—it is “traditional at Trinity” for boys to decorate their lockers, and Jerry has chosen to adorn his with this question. In this way, Jerry is acknowledging his part in the school’s “society,” but implicitly questions his role within it from the get-go—and, more than that, daily confronts the question of what it means to be a disturbance within a tightly-ordered universe.

As Jerry’s refusal to sell the chocolates progresses past schoolyard dare and moves into the territory of a protest against the “society” of Trinity, his sense of isolation is



THEMES

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THE INDIVIDUAL VS. SOCIETY

At the heart of Robert Cormier’s *The Chocolate War* is the struggle between Trinity freshman Jerry Renault and the rest of the student body of his elite boys’ school. When Jerry controversially declines to participate in the school’s annual fundraiser—a **chocolate** sale—he is, at first, a participant in a dare from the school’s secret society, the Vigils. After the ten-day dare is up, however, Jerry, perturbed

palpable—despite his fear, sadness, and frustration, though, he slowly begins to chip away at the rigid structures and traditions that define Trinity. In the early days of Jerry's solo protest, he feels "swept with [...] a sadness deep and penetrating" each time he answers "No" when Brother Leon daily makes his students reply to the roll call with how many boxes of chocolate they've sold. Jerry's classmates, especially his only friend, The Goober, urge him to just take the chocolates—but Jerry, spurred by the experiences he's had with the hippies, his father, and his Eliot poster, refuses to give in. Though Jerry doesn't know it, his classmates have also become inspired by Jerry's individual resistance. As two of his classmates, Kevin Chartier and Danny Arcangelo, discuss their frustration with the ritual of the chocolate sales, they express their admiration for "that Renault kid." Though they don't know why Jerry is continuing to protest, they think he has the "right idea" in refusing to take the chocolates, and admit to one another that they, too, want to stop selling chocolates.

As Jerry's protests go on, the upper echelons of the Vigils—namely Obie and Archie, the secretary and assignment-giver of the organization, respectively—realize that Jerry must be dealt with, as he is becoming a threat to the foundation of their school's society, and the rule of the secretive and fearsome Vigils. As they devise increasingly cruel ways to punish Jerry and make him to cave to their demands, the entire school community is affected by the fallout. Though Jerry suffers greatly at the hands of the Vigils' physical and psychological torment and their attempts to ostracize him socially, he ultimately alters the fabric of the school—revealing to everyone just how low the Vigils will sink in pursuit of power, and just how obscure, arcane, and useless the traditions the Vigils perpetuate have become.

In the end, Jerry is the subject of several beatings, pranks, and manipulations—all at the behest of the Vigils, and all designed to make Jerry feel even more like an outsider in order to push him to the brink and force him to conform to Trinity's twisted society. Jerry refuses at every turn, however; though he suffers tremendously, and though his pride, physical well-being, and psychological stability are all rattled by the book's end, he ultimately exposes the corruption within his school and creates for his fellow classmates a small twinge of hope that, in the future, things might change. Though at the end of the novel, Archie and Brother Leon's power remains more or less intact, the put-upon Obie suggests that Archie and the rest of the Vigils will one day get their comeuppance; "Maybe another kid like Renault will come along," he tells Archie, warning him that his just desserts are yet to come and demonstrating the impact Jerry's protest has had.

peers have pressured him into undertaking and support him in carrying out. When he goes rogue and persists with his individualistic, seemingly aimless protest, however, the givers of his "assignment"—Archie Costello and the secretive, powerful group of Trinity boys known as the Vigils—begin to realize that perhaps their powers of coercion are less effective than they'd presumed them to be. As they attempt to control Jerry's actions and force him to bend to their will, the Vigils find that Jerry's agency and determination to hold the course of his own agenda becomes a kind of chaos. They choose to meet the chaos Jerry has engendered with a controlled pandemonium of their own, and as the struggle between Jerry and the Vigils progresses steadily towards its explosive conclusion, Cormier argues that the line between control and chaos is often thinner and blurrier than it seems.

In his refusal to partake in the tradition of selling chocolates, Jerry threatens the order of Trinity society. The Vigils, who, in effect, created the threat by suggesting that Jerry refuse the chocolates for ten days, realize that they must take control of the chaos they have created. Doing so, however, will prove difficult, and as Cormier explores the Vigils' attempts to control the rogue Jerry Renault, he shows how control and chaos are just two sides of the same coin. Jerry himself is surprised the first time he says a genuine "No" in response to Brother Leon's chocolate-sales roll-call; he had wanted so badly for the Vigils' assignment to be over and for his life to go back to normal, but in the heat of the moment he chooses chaos. He admits even to his best friend The Goober that he does not know why he made the decision to defy the Vigils and keep up with the "assignment" even past its end—though Jerry's desire to "disturb the universe" and his fear of becoming an automaton like his dull pharmacist father seem to be behind his choice.

In the wake of Jerry's first authentic "No," several other students begin questioning the purpose of the chocolate sale as well, and the chaos Jerry has created threatens to spread throughout the school. Obie asks Archie what should be done about Jerry—Archie has a lackadaisical attitude towards Jerry's resistance and seems to want to let things play themselves out, until Brother Leon intervenes. Leon, who is almost maniacally invested in the chocolate sale, orders Archie to squash the chance that students will "rally around a rebel," threatening to eradicate the Vigils if Archie fails to control the situation with Jerry. Brother Leon wants to control the chaos threatening to overtake the school, but seems to recognize that doing so will be delicate, and that the wrong move could tip things even further into pandemonium and make the chocolate sale irrelevant in the eyes of not just one child, but the whole of the student body.

As the Vigils begin their systemic attempt to control Jerry and force him to sell the chocolates, they execute a protocol that is tightly controlled and meticulously planned—but which has the effect of throwing Jerry's life into chaos. The Vigils place prank



CONTROL VS. CHAOS

Jerry's refusal to sell **chocolates** at school is initially part of a controlled, structured dare his

phone calls to Jerry's house at all hours of the night, breathing on the other end when Jerry and his father answer. The Vigils force the football team to physically tackle and incapacitate Jerry during practice—again, a measured maneuver that nonetheless wreaks havoc on Jerry's body. The Vigils also order notorious bully Emile Janza to beat Jerry up—but Janza goes rogue, and involves a street gang of his own in the attack. As the repeated assaults against Jerry escalate and intensify, it becomes clear that the Vigils' measured attempts at controlling the situation are bleeding into a chaos of their own. In the end, the Vigils devise one final maneuver that is an exercise in control and chaos. They offer Jerry the chance to get back at Janza by fighting him publicly in a boxing match in front of the entire school. The Vigils devise a raffle system—in order to win Jerry's boxes of chocolates plus a monetary prize, students must submit cash and a slip of paper instructing either Janza or Renault to deliver a specific blow—right uppercut, left jab, etc. The boxing match is a bloody spectacle and a strange blend of chaos and control—the opponents' moves are dictated to them, and each blow is ostensibly “controlled,” until an illegal move throws things off the rails and ends up putting Jerry in dire physical danger, in the novel's ultimate explosion of control into chaos.

In showing how chaos and control exist just a hair's width from one another, Cormier creates a sense of tension, drama, and instability throughout *The Chocolate War*. After all, any war is a careful but unstable blend of control and chaos—even the best-laid battle plans, when put to the test, can devolve into chaos and create casualties and catastrophes on all sides.



MASCULINITY, VIOLENCE, AND POWER

The insecurity, uncertainty, and volatility of late boyhood—even more concentrated within the setting of an all-boys' high school—is fertile ground

for Robert Cormier's tale of coercion, tradition, and the dangers of individualism. As the boys of Trinity haltingly and shakily approach manhood, their everyday interactions with one another become tinged with violence. Once Jerry rattles the foundations of their school, the student body's collective desire “for [one another's] blood” comes to a head. Cormier ultimately suggests that the environment of Trinity High, in its embrace of the negative aspects of masculinity, creates a constant struggle for power and control—between both its students and its teachers—that often leads to violence.

Throughout the novel, Cormier shows how the young male students at Trinity use violence as a means of attaining power over one another, and even over their teachers. The first pages of the book describe the violence of Jerry Renault's first football tryout. He is so thoroughly beaten at the end that he drags himself to a bathroom stall and vomits. While physical violence is transpiring on the field, a different kind of violence is happening up in the stands as two members of the Vigils,

Archie and Obie, plot what assignments they will give out in the coming weeks. Psychological violence as well as physical violence is a way of demoralizing one's peers in the world of Trinity, and the Vigils are masters of this kind of dehumanization. The Vigils employ psychological violence against other students by forcing them to undertake “assignments” that vary in intensity from pranks and gags to serious personal risks. After The Goober is forced to carry out an assignment in which he loosens the screws on all of the furniture in Brother Eugene's classroom, The Goober is psychologically distressed, and Brother Eugene is so shaken that he takes a leave from school. Though rumors swirl that the Brother was called away on a family emergency, the Vigils claim his departure from school as their own victory.

The Vigils resort to physical violence, too, as a means of sustaining their power. When Jerry refuses their order to accept the **chocolates** and participate in the schoolwide sale, the Vigils enact a campaign against him. Archie enlists a school bully, Emile Janza, to beat up Jerry in order to cow him into selling chocolates. Janza corners Jerry after football practice and taunts him for being a “fairy” and a “queer,” assaulting his masculinity and reputation. Jerry tries not to rise to Janza's provocations, but when he calls Janza a “son of a bitch,” Janza reveals that he has brought a gang of neighborhood kids along with him to assist in the beating. As the group descends upon Jerry, he surrenders to their kicks and blows, knowing he doesn't stand a chance against such an orchestrated attack. The novel culminates in a humiliating boxing match that greatly compromises the safety of both participants in it, Jerry and Janza. The Vigils stage the match in order to raffle off Jerry's unsold chocolates, plus a catch prize—but really, the match signals the Vigils' desperation to secure their stronghold over Trinity, and their desire for control over the student body; the group sees inciting Janza and Renault to violence and getting the rest of the school excited about witnessing it as the purest means of doing so.

The teachers at Trinity—all men—are referred to as Brothers. Though this title implies an equality and sense of fraternity with their students, many of the Brothers abuse their power—namely Brother Leon, who uses psychological violence (and indeed physical violence) as a means of maintaining power over his students. Brother Leon is a Trinity teacher with cruel teaching methods. Early on in the novel, Jerry is indignant and frightened when Leon singles out a student named Bailey in front of the class and accuses him of cheating. Brother Leon smacks Bailey on the cheek with his blackboard pointer and accuses him, again and again, of cheating. It is only when one boy at last speaks up to defend Bailey that Brother Leon reveals he was using Bailey to demonstrate the perils of silence and groupthink, encouraging them to stand up for one another in times of need. Though Brother Leon is attempting to impress upon his students the importance of fraternity, support, and

justice, he is doing so in an inhumane manner that demonstrates violence as a way of holding a captive audience, foreshadowing the bloody, grisly end of the novel.

At the start of the chocolate sale, Brother Leon goes through the roll and asks each student if he will accept the chocolates. Jerry is the only one to say no, drawing Brother Leon's ire. Each day, as Brother Leon calls roll and asks his students to report how many chocolates they have sold, Jerry answers only "No"—and yet Leon continues calling Jerry's name each day. In doing so, Leon is engaging in behavior antithetical to the "lesson" he tried to teach his class through Bailey; Leon is psychologically torturing Jerry, and putting him on the spot in front of all his other classmates. In the end, during the fight between Jerry and Janza, Obie spots Leon standing on a hill above the field—Leon, Archie later reveals, wanted to watch violence done unto Jerry. Leon, a teacher tasked with securing the well-being of his students, has failed his own "lesson"—he has encouraged the psychological and physical torture of Jerry Renault, and has wielded his own power as a teacher against the boy at each and every turn.

The tight-knit, all-male environment of Trinity High is a hotbed for aggression, desire, and posturing to begin with—but the escalating cruelty that emerges throughout the pages of *The Chocolate War* shows how violence pervades the Trinity community, creating an atmosphere where anything is possible, even the betrayal of students at the hands of their teachers, and even the chaos, intensity, and instability of all-out war.



TRADITION

Trinity High School is steeped in tradition. There is a hierarchy within the student body in which seniors are at the top of the food chain; every year,

each student must sell twenty-five boxes of **chocolate** in a schoolwide fundraiser; a powerful group of students called the Vigils, which has operated behind the scenes for years despite repeated conflicts with faculty and administration, effectively rules the school. All of these traditions go unquestioned—until Jerry Renault refuses to take part in the chocolate sale, challenging the status quo and breaking with tradition. Set in the mid-1970s, a time of great social change and upheaval, Cormier uses his "young adult" novel *The Chocolate War* to demonstrate how tradition for its own sake is often used as a means of maintaining systems of power and control—so the struggle for freedom means challenging an unnecessary connection to tradition. At the same time, Cormier argues, humans naturally cling to ritual, and so some traditions cannot be toppled.

From the very start of the novel, the traditions that rule Trinity High are shown to do more harm than good. The Vigils are perhaps the most striking and definitive "tradition" at Trinity—but even within this longstanding secret society, there

are threats to its structure. The group's secretary, Obie, is "bored" and "disgusted" by how the society is run. Archie Costello is not the president of the Vigils, but as the deviser and assigner of the often dangerous, risky, or simply cruel dares, pranks, and missions the society doles out, he holds the most power in the entire school. At the start of the novel, Obie's disdain for Archie signals unrest even within the traditions that govern Trinity, and foreshadows how Jerry's protest against the chocolate sale will gain a foothold and begin to rattle those traditions from within.

Near the start of the book, Brother Leon, the Assistant Headmaster who is in charge of the chocolate sale each year, announces to his pet student Archie that each boy's quota will be doubled this year. The school is in financial jeopardy, and Leon is counting on the chocolate sale to raise at least forty thousand dollars. Archie himself—one of the staunchest upholders of Trinity tradition—is skeptical about the new, more demanding numbers, and wonders whether the student body will remain loyal to the tradition of the chocolate sale when they learn how many they each have to sell, and at an increased price to boot.

The Goober is given a difficult assignment by the Vigils, but he reluctantly accepts, knowing that it is "tradition here at Trinity" to do the bidding of the Vigils no matter the personal cost. He is supposed to visit the school after dark and loosen the screws in one of the Brothers' classrooms. As The Goober carries out the assignment, he struggles and despairs—he fears he will never loosen all the screws on all the desks, chairs, and blackboards before sunrise—until masked members of the Vigils come to his aid. This instance shows that even the Vigils know that their traditions are in jeopardy, and that the escalating pranks and dares Archie is assigning are not tenable. It also shows, however, how desperate the Vigils are to ensure that their traditions are upheld and that their will is done.

As Jerry, motivated by his own fear of becoming a thoughtless participant in traditions that discourage individualistic thought and elevate groupthink, resists several Trinity traditions (refusing to kowtow to his upperclassmen, fighting for an unlikely role on the football team, refusing to sell chocolates, shirking an assignment from the almighty Vigils), Cormier shows just how much it costs an individual to revolt against deeply entrenched tradition. Jerry's rebellion against the Vigils is in many ways symbolic of the larger changes happening in American society in the 1970s—changes that sought to establish more freedom of speech, thought, and action. Jerry does not know exactly what it is that he wants out of his revolt, but he knows that to give in to tradition is to live out his worst fear; he does not want to be an unquestioning participant in power structures that do not serve him, better him, or allow him any agency.

Jerry's balking at tradition makes him an outcast, however—though a select few admire his headstrong ways,

most of his classmates prove themselves to be too mired in tradition to take up Jerry's cause or support him. Notorious bully Emile Janza, at Archie's behest, accuses Jerry of being homosexual and rallies a group of neighborhood kids to beat him up; The Goober, Jerry's best friend, calls out sick from school rather than confront the tidal wave of anger and confrontation that overtakes Trinity as the end of the chocolate sale approaches. Trinity is no place for outsiders, or for anyone who does not want to participate in the traditions it holds dear.

In the end, Jerry is beaten nearly to death by Emile Janza in a boxing match staged by the Vigils before the whole school—a new “tradition” in and of itself. Forced to compensate for the extra boxes of chocolate unsold by Jerry, the Vigils have staged a raffle with a violent prize; students get to submit instructions for who should hit whom, and how, and where. As Jerry faces down Janza, it becomes clear that the disruption of one tradition at Trinity will only give rise to newer, even darker ones. Though Jerry has succeeded in changing the fabric of Trinity and sparking a conversation, he has failed to topple its oldest, most arcane tradition: the reign of the Vigils. Trinity's obsession with tradition has not changed, only the traditions themselves.

The traditions that govern Trinity High can be seen as parallels for the traditions and mechanisms of power that govern the world more largely. Cormier chooses a high school as a setting for this experiment in revolution and the toppling of tradition to show how, even on a small scale, deeply entrenched traditions are not easily overturned. Though he does argue that Jerry is successful in starting a conversation at Trinity and rising up against the tide of conformity and traditionalism, his larger suggestion—that it takes repeated and concentrated attempts at change to actually effect it—is both gloomy and hopeful.

quota from previous years—each boy must sell fifty boxes rather than twenty-five. Leon's belief that his “special” students will be able to carry out the increased demands of the sale with no problem demonstrates his voracious desire for control over the student body and the fate of the school alike. In this way, chocolate represents of the desire for control many of the characters within the book wrestle with. Chocolate is filling, rich, and has little nutritional value—it is a luxury and even a decadence whose overindulgence can result in illness, weight gain, and problems with one's teeth. The fact that the boys are made to peddle chocolate to their families, friends, and neighbors is symbolic of the wildfire-like spread of desire for control experienced both by Brother Leon at the outset of the novel and by the Vigils as they attempt to enforce Leon's new policies and ensure that all of the chocolates are sold. As the boys disseminate the chocolate throughout their community, so too do Leon and the Vigils disseminate their own dark, unsustainable desire for power and control by any means. As the chocolate sales—and the chocolate “war” inspired by Jerry Renault's refusal to take part in the sale—spread throughout Trinity and the community beyond it, every character, even the minor ones, is forced to reckon with the ways desire takes up space in their lives—and, on a much more practical level, how in the world they are going to unload so many chocolates on such a small community.



THE BLACK BOX

Archie Costello holds the coveted position of “assigner” within the Vigils—the esoteric but powerful secret society that effectively runs Trinity High from behind the scenes. As such, Archie is in charge of devising “assignments”—projects and tasks ranging from benign pranks to seriously risky mischief, which are doled out to underclassmen seemingly at random. With every assignment Archie gives out, however, he must subject himself to the will of the black box—a sort of failsafe instituted long ago as a method of controlling, to some degree, whoever is in charge of making up the Vigils' assignments. In the black box there are six marbles—five white and one black. If the assigner draws a white marble, the assignment goes to its original assignee as intended; if he draws the black marble, however, he must take the task on himself. This prevents the assigner from going “off the deep end” with the intensity of the tasks he devises, as there is always the chance he will have to carry them out himself. Archie Costello has beaten the black box every time he's reached into it for three years—and yet each time he does, he feels a moment of panic and terror as the control and power he enjoys on a daily basis due to his coveted role within the Vigils slips away for just a moment, and he surrenders to fate and chance. The black box, then, is a symbol of chaos; in a novel preoccupied with the intersection of chaos and control, and the ways the two competing states interact and overlap, the black



SYMBOLS

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



CHOCOLATE

Throughout the novel, chocolate is a shifting but ever-present symbol—the book's whole plot is structured around a schoolwide chocolate sale, in which the all-male student body of Trinity high is yearly made to sell chocolate to raise funds for the institution. At the start of the novel, the untrustworthy Brother Leon announces that this year, the stakes for the sale are higher than ever; the school is in financial jeopardy, its Head is ill, and to compensate Brother Leon has secured—possibly through shady channels—a massive amount of Mother's Day chocolate, the ribbon-adorned boxes of which will be sold at double the price of previous years' sales. Moreover, each boy will be responsible for selling double his

box represents a controlled method of chaos. The black box has a strict set of rules that govern it, and much thought and effort has gone into making it, but to those control-hungry characters like Archie Costello, the box is chaos distilled: a rare moment when control is out of the question.



JERRY'S POSTER

It is “traditional” at Trinity High for every student to decorate the inside of his locker with a poster. In the inside of freshman Jerry Renault’s locker, there is a poster of a man walking alone on the beach. At the bottom of the poster are the words “Do I dare disturb the universe?”—a quotation from the famous long poem “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” by T.S. Eliot. The poster, then, is a symbol for the disruption of tradition. Even though in simply hanging it, Jerry is participating in a Trinity tradition, in pursuing the poster’s challenge he soon finds himself on a course that will break with tradition and isolate him from his school, his peers, and even himself.

Trinity is an environment so deeply steeped in tradition that it is nearly impossible to take an original action or strike out on one’s own. This is why Jerry’s refusal to take part in the **chocolate** sale is so shocking and disorienting to the rest of the student body; tradition is what keeps Trinity afloat, and without tradition, the very edifice of Trinity begins to fall apart. The school is not prestigious, or wealthy, or particularly rigorous—all it has, really, are its longstanding traditions, and by disrupting them, Jerry is committing what is in the eyes of many of his peers and teachers a grave sin. The poster, however, symbolizes that Jerry has thought long and hard—each time he opens his locker—about what it means to be a “disturbance,” and what it means to “dare” to disturb a longstanding order. The poster’s message is doubly ironic, as the tasks assigned by Archie Costello and the Vigils are themselves mostly dares; this environment in which dares are necessary in some cases and extremely taboo in others is hypocritical and inconsistent, just like many of the structures that hold up Trinity itself.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Ember edition of *The Chocolate War* published in 2004.

Chapter 3 Quotes

☞ Jerry walked to the bus like a sleepwalker. He hated confrontations. His heart hammered. He climbed aboard, dropped his token in the coin box and lurched to his seat as the bus moved away from the curb.

He sat down, breathed deeply, closed his eyes. *Go get your bus, square boy. [...] You’re missing a lot of things in the world, better not miss that bus.*

A big put-on, of course. That was their specialty, people like that. Putting people on. Nothing else to do with their lives, piddling away their lives.

And yet. . . Yet, what? He didn't know. He thought of his life—going to school and coming home. Even though his tie was loose, dangling on his shirt, he yanked it off. He looked up at the advertising placards above the windows, wanting to turn his thoughts away from the confrontation.

Related Characters: Jerry Renault (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 20-21

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Jerry has just had a confrontation with a hippie. The hippie caught Jerry staring at him and his friends, and approached Jerry to warn him not to stare at their group as if they were “sub-human.” The hippie then said that it was Jerry who was, as a “square,” the real sub-human. The confrontation has rattled Jerry, and though he tries to soothe himself by telling himself that the hippie was simply picking on him for lack of anything better to do, the conversation has shaken something loose inside of him. Jerry knows that much of his life is following rote routine, and in this passage, he begins to question the patterns of that life for the first time. This confrontation—and the thoughts Jerry has in its wake—will inform, in many ways, his choice to rebel against the status quo by refusing to participate in his school’s chocolate sale, bucking tradition in an attempt to figure out who he truly is and what he truly wants out of life.

Chapter 4 Quotes

☝☝ "How many boxes?"

"Twenty thousand."

Archie whistled in astonishment. He usually didn't blow his cool that easily, particularly with someone like Brother Leon. But the image of twenty thousand boxes of chocolates being delivered here to Trinity was ridiculous. Then he saw the mustache of moistness on Brother Leon's upper lip, the watery eyes and the dampness on his forehead. Something clicked. This wasn't the calm and deadly Leon who could hold a class in the palm of his hand. This was someone riddled with cracks and crevices. Archie became absolutely still, afraid that the rapid beating of his heart might betray his sudden knowledge, the proof of what he'd always suspected, not only of Brother Leon but most grownups, most adults: they were vulnerable, running scared, open to invasion.

Related Characters: Brother Leon, Archie Costello (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 22-23

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Brother Leon begins attempting to recruit Archie—and, by proxy, the powerful Vigils—to back his chocolate sale, even though the quantity of chocolates the Trinity boys must sell has doubled, along with the price of each box. Archie can see from the start of this passage that Brother Leon is under some kind of stress or pressure, and is in a vulnerable state. As the novel progresses and Brother Leon's mental state deteriorates as the chocolate sale vacillates between successful enterprise and much-loathed dud, Archie's observation that Brother Leon is nervous and unsettled about the sale will echo through the pages of Cormier's tale.

Chapter 5 Quotes

☝☝ He had beaten the black box for three years—could he do it again? Or was his luck running out? Would the law of averages catch up to him? A tremor ran along his arm as he extended his hand toward the box. He hoped no one had noticed. Reaching inside, he grabbed a marble, concealed it in the palm of his hand. He withdrew his hand, held the arm straight out, calmly now, without shiver or tremor. He opened his hand. The marble was white.

The corner of Archie's mouth twitched as the tension of his body relaxed. He had beaten them again. He had won again. I am Archie. I cannot lose.

Related Characters: Archie Costello (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: Book Page 37

Explanation and Analysis

The black box is the one mechanism within the powerful secret society of the Vigils that serves to temper the group's actions. The group's assigner, when giving out assignments, must always consult the black box to see whether he will have to carry out his own assignment himself. The black box is a sort of failsafe meant to protect the Vigils—and the school—from people like Archie; sadistic, power-hungry egomaniacs who would wreak havoc on the community just for fun. Archie's confidence wanes just momentarily when he reaches into the box each time, but as soon as he sees that he has drawn the white marble, he feels invincible once again. Cormier seems to be setting Archie up to eventually face his worst nightmare—drawing the black marble—but in a shocking turn, Archie will actually never draw it, and will always prevail. Still, the black box strikes fear deep in Archie's heart, demonstrating the chaos inherent within even the most clear-cut mechanisms of control and order.

Chapter 6 Quotes

☝☝ Brother Leon regarded them pityingly, shaking his head, a sad and dismal smile on his lips. "You poor fools," he said. "You idiots. Do you know who's the best one here? The bravest of all?" He placed his hand on Bailey's shoulder. "Gregory Bailey, that's who. He denied cheating. He stood up to my accusations. He stood his ground! But you, gentlemen, you sat there and enjoyed yourselves. And those of you who didn't enjoy yourselves allowed it to happen, allowed me to proceed. You turned this classroom into Nazi Germany for a few moments. Yes, yes, someone finally protested. "Aw, let the kid alone." Mimicking the deep voice perfectly. "A feeble protest, too little and too late..."

There was scuffling in the corridors, students waiting to enter. Leon ignored the noise. He turned to Bailey, touched the top of his head with the pointer as if he were bestowing knighthood. "You did well, Bailey. I'm proud of you. You passed the biggest test of all—you were true to yourself."

Related Characters: Brother Leon (speaker), Bailey

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 44-45

Explanation and Analysis

Brother Leon has just put one of his students, Bailey, up in front of the rest of the class and accused him of cheating. Brother Leon tried to entrap Bailey in an intellectual catch-22 by implying that Bailey was either a cheater or a heretic; in denying cheating, Bailey had to implicitly be stating that he was perfect, and no one, Brother Leon said, is perfect except for God. After several minutes of psychological torture, one student at the back of class spoke up to ask Leon to leave Bailey alone. In this quotation, Leon excoriates his students for not speaking up earlier on Bailey's behalf, leaving the boy to suffer alone. Bailey, who was true to himself even in the face of torture and cruelty, is the only worthy member of the class.

This passage seems to suggest that Leon values those who are sure of themselves, and who do what is right rather than what is easy; as the novel progresses, however, it will become evident that Leon does not actually practice what he preaches. Leon will soon enact a campaign of psychological violence against Jerry Renault for doing exactly what Bailey did in this passage and the one preceding it—standing up for his beliefs even in the face of opposition and attempts at dehumanization.

Chapter 9 Quotes

☝☝ "Hey, Dad."

"Yes, Jerry?"

"Were things really fine at the store today?"

His father paused near the kitchen doorway, puzzled. "What do you mean, Jerry?"

"I mean, every day I ask you how things are going and every day you say fine. Don't you have some great days? Or rotten days?"

"A drugstore's pretty much the same all the time, Jerry. The prescriptions come in and we fill them—and that's about it."

[...]

Was life that dull, that boring and humdrum for people? He hated to think of his own life stretching ahead of him that way, a long succession of days and nights that were fine, fine—not good, not bad, not great, not lousy, not exciting, not anything.

Related Characters: Jerry's Father, Jerry Renault (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 60-61

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Jerry, realizing that his father says that his day was "fine" each and every day, attempts to dig a little deeper and connect with his father, with whom his relationship has been strained in the months since his mother's death. Jerry's father, however, tells Jerry that his days are, more often than not, truly just "fine." Jerry, still fearful of being "square" and boring after his encounter with the hippie, is slightly devastated to hear that the truth of his father's life—and perhaps adult life more generally—is that it is filled with dullness and mediocrity, and is in no way remarkable. Jerry's fear of leading a "humdrum" existence will continue to motivate his increasingly controversial and risky actions as the book goes on.

Chapter 13 Quotes

“Let me get this straight, Renault,” Brother Leon said and his voice brought the room under his command again. “I called your name. Your response could have been either yes or no. Yes means that like every other student in this school you agree to sell a certain amount of chocolates, in this case fifty boxes. No—and let me point out that the sale is strictly voluntary, Trinity forces no one to participate against his wishes, this is the great glory of Trinity—no means you don't wish to sell the chocolates, that you refuse to participate. Now, what is your answer? Yes or no?”

“No.”

The Goober stared at Jerry in disbelief. Was this Jerry Renault who always looked a little worried, a little unsure of himself even after completing a beautiful pass, who always seemed kind of bewildered—was this him actually defying Brother Leon? Not only Brother Leon but a Trinity tradition?

[...]

“You may pick up your chocolates in the gym, gentlemen,” Brother Leon said, his eyes bright—wet-bright. “Those of you who are true sons of Trinity, that is. I pity anyone who is not.” That terrible smile remained on his face. “Class dismissed,” Leon called although the bell had not sounded.

Related Characters: Jerry Renault, Brother Leon (speaker), The Goober

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 82-83

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Jerry refuses to participate in the chocolate sale right to its director's face. Brother Leon is infuriated by Jerry's refusal, though he himself admits that Jerry is well within his rights to refuse the chocolates. This passage demonstrates how deeply wedded to tradition Trinity truly is—though there are no rules about participating in the sale, tradition creates pariahs out of those who shirk it. In the simple act of refusing the chocolates, Jerry has marked himself as an enemy of Trinity tradition, and therefore has outcast himself from ever being recognized as one of its “true sons.”

Chapter 19 Quotes

Jerry opened his locker. He had thumbtacked a poster to the back wall of the locker on the first day of school. The poster showed a wide expanse of beach, a sweep of sky with a lone star glittering far away. A man walked on the beach, a small solitary figure in all that immensity. At the bottom of the poster, these words appeared—*Do I dare disturb the universe?* By Eliot, who wrote the Waste Land thing they were studying in English. Jerry wasn't sure of the poster's meaning. But it had moved him mysteriously. It was traditional at Trinity for everyone to decorate the interior of his locker with a poster. Jerry chose this one.

Related Characters: Jerry Renault (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 123

Explanation and Analysis

This passage is an interesting one, as Jerry, inspired by the poster in his locker, furthers his commitment to breaking with tradition even as he knowingly participates in an established Trinity tradition by hanging the poster in the first place. Jerry clearly wants to be a “true son of Trinity” and participate in its history—he longs to join the football team, has accepted the Vigils' assignment, and has engaged in the tradition of hanging a poster in his locker. Still, his poster choice betrays his subconscious desire to “disturb the universe,” and actually break with the traditions and rituals that threaten to turn him into the mindless automaton he is so afraid of becoming.

“Renault.”

It would be so easy, really, to yell “Yes.” To say, “Give me the chocolates to sell, Brother Leon.” So easy to be like the others, not to have to confront those terrible eyes every morning. Brother Leon finally looked up. The tempo of the roll call had broken.

“No,” Jerry said.

He was swept with sadness, a sadness deep and penetrating, leaving him desolate like someone washed up on a beach, a lone survivor in a world full of strangers.

Related Characters: Brother Leon, Jerry Renault (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 124

Explanation and Analysis

Shortly after surveying his poster and questioning what it means to “disturb the universe,” Jerry finds himself back in Brother Leon’s class, once again subjected to the Brother’s cruel torment. While disturbing the universe seems exciting and thrilling in theory, the cold, hard reality of rebellion is a lonely thing—and as Jerry considers how much he has already sacrificed, and how much more he will have to suffer in pursuit of his goal of disturbance, he feels very isolated indeed. Jerry’s poster features a man walking along a beach in silent contemplation—Jerry’s feeling of being washed up on a beach all alone, as if out of a shipwreck, “disturbs” that image of quiet contemplation and reveals revolt against the status quo for what it truly is: disorienting, physically and emotionally taxing, and even dangerous.

Chapter 22 Quotes

“Renault... zero,” Brother Leon said, his voice a sibilant whisper. “Can you imagine that, Cochran? A Trinity boy who has refused to sell the chocolates? Do you know what’s happened, Cochran? Do you know why the sales have fallen off?”

“I don’t know, Brother Leon,” Brian said lamely.

“The boys have become infected, Cochran. Infected by a disease we could call apathy. A terrible disease. Difficult to cure.”

What was he talking about?

“Before a cure can be found, the cause must be discovered. But in this case, Cochran, the cause is known. The carrier of the disease is known.”

Brian knew what he was getting at now. Leon figured that Renault was the cause, the carrier of the disease. As if reading Brian’s mind, Leon whispered “Renault . . . Renault. . .”

Like a mad scientist plotting revenge in an underground laboratory, for crying out loud.

Related Characters: Brian Cochran, Brother Leon (speaker), Jerry Renault

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 146-147

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Brian Cochran—who is already wary of the shady, unhinged Brother Leon—witnesses the depths of Leon’s obsession with Jerry Renault’s revolt against the chocolate sale. Leon has so much hatred for Jerry that he thinks of him as a “disease” that must be cured. This metaphor of Jerry’s rebellion as something infectious—something that threatens to sweep up and “contaminate” the entire student body—will be repeated throughout the novel, but it is perhaps most potent in this quotation, as Leon, like a “mad scientist” bent on eradicating the disease that is Jerry, quietly plots revenge against the boy. It is never more clear than in this passage how Leon is actually the sick or “diseased” one whose illness threatens to taint the school—a grown man fantasizing about getting revenge against literal children.

Chapter 23 Quotes

“Look, Jerry. There’s something rotten in that school. More than rotten.” He groped for the word and found it but didn’t want to use it. The word didn’t fit the surroundings, the sun and the bright October afternoon. It was a midnight word, a howling wind word.

“The Vigils?” Jerry asked. He’d lain back on the lawn and was looking at the blue sky, the hurrying autumn clouds.

“That’s part of it,” The Goober said. He wished they were still running. “Evil,” he said.

“What did you say?”

Crazy. Jerry would think he’d flipped. “Nothing,” Goober said. “Anyway, I’m not going to play football. It’s a personal thing, Jerry.” He took a deep breath. “And I’m not going out for track next spring.”

They sat in silence.

“What’s the matter, Goob?” Jerry finally asked, voice troubled and loaded with concern.

“It’s what they do to us, Jerry.”

Related Characters: Jerry Renault, The Goober (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 151

Explanation and Analysis

The Goober has been having intensely conflicted feelings since his own Vigil assignment, which involved loosening the screws in Brother Eugene’s classroom so that all of the

furniture fell apart. The incident, rumor has it, drove Eugene from the school, so deeply affected was he by the petty cruelty and disorientation of the prank. Now, Goober tells Jerry that he plans to quit the football team. Jerry is confused, and wants to know what The Goober's reasoning is; The Goober can only answer that there is something terrible inside of Trinity that preys upon people like Jerry and The Goober. The Goober is a sensitive soul, even more so than Jerry, and his sense that something is "rotten" in Trinity foreshadows the intensifying cruelty—and indeed, the burgeoning evil—Jerry will face down in the days and weeks to come.

Chapter 24 Quotes

☝☝ "Listen, I think Leon's in deep trouble. There's more than chocolates involved here, Archie."

Archie resented Cochran's familiarity, the use of his name. But he didn't say anything, curious about what the kid had to say.

"I overheard Leon talking with Brother Jacques. Jacques was trying to back him into a corner. He kept mentioning something about Leon abusing his power of attorney. That he'd over-extended the school's finances. That was his exact word, 'overextended.' The chocolates came into it. Something about twenty thousand boxes and Leon paying cash in advance. I didn't hear all of it . . . I got out of there before they could find out I was around . . ."

"So what do you think, Cochran?" Archie asked, although he knew. Leon needed at least twenty thousand dollars to draw even with the school.

"I think Leon bought the chocolates with money that he wasn't supposed to use. Now the sale's going lousy and he's caught in the middle. And Brother Jacques smells a rat..."

Related Characters: Brian Cochran (speaker), Brother Jacques, Brother Leon, Archie Costello

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 154-155

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Brian Cochran confronts Archie about his suspicions regarding Brother Leon and the chocolate sale. Leon's unstable demeanor and unhealthy investment in the sale have been clear from the get-go, but as the weeks have gone on, the unassuming Brian Cochran has discovered something more sinister than he could have imagined at the

heart of the sale. The revelation that Brother Leon has, in all likelihood, been abusing his role as Assistant Headmaster and misappropriating funds, perhaps for his own financial gain, explains why Brother Leon has had such an inappropriate emotional and psychological investment in the sale, and has gone against his own principles in attempting to enforce the fifty-box-a-head quota. The realization that other Brothers are onto Leon foreshadows the ending of the book, and sets up a confrontation between Leon and Jacques—apparently the only one other than Brian, and now, Archie, who knows what is truly going on.

Chapter 25 Quotes

☝☝ Carter blew air out of his mouth in exasperation. He was losing patience with Archie's cat and mouse crap. He had sat here for two years watching Archie play his silly games with kids, having Archie act the big shot as if he ran the show. Carter carried the responsibility for the assignments on his shoulders. As president, he also had to keep the other guys in line, keep them psyched up, ready to help make Archie's assignments work. And Carter wasn't crazy about this chocolate stuff. It was something beyond the control of The Vigils. It involved Brother Leon and he didn't trust Leon as far as he could throw him. Now, he watched the kid Renault, looking as if he was ready to faint with fright, his face pale and eyes wide with dread, and Archie having fun with him. Jesus, Carter hated this psychological crap. He loved boxing where everything was visible—the jabs, the hooks, the roundhouse swings, the glove in the stomach.

Related Characters: Carter (speaker), Jerry Renault, Brother Leon, Archie Costello

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 162-163

Explanation and Analysis

Carter, as captain of the football team and head of the Vigils, is ostensibly the most powerful person in the school. His power is contested, though, by Archie the assigner's claim to control over the student body of Trinity, and Archie's sly, insidious brand of psychological torture does inspire more fear and squeamishness, it seems, than Carter's almost regal dominance. Carter believes in a more concrete kind of control, as opposed to Archie's desire for a control mechanism that inspires chaos. Physical violence, though, has an element of chaos in it, too, one that Carter may not

yet be ready to admit attracts him.

Chapter 28 Quotes

☞ The morning after that first night phone call, Jerry opened his locker and shook his head in disbelief. His poster had been smeared with ink or some kind of blue paint. The message had been virtually obliterated. *Do I dare disturb the universe?* was now a grotesque jumble of unconnected letters. It was such a senseless, childish act of vandalism that Jerry was more awed than angered. Who'd do such a crazy thing? Looking down, he saw that his new gym sneakers had been slashed, the canvas now limp shreds, rag-like. He'd made the mistake of leaving them here overnight.

Ruining the poster was one thing, a gross act, the work of the animal—and all schools had animals, even Trinity. But there was nothing prankish about ruining the sneakers. That was deliberate, somebody sending him a message.

The telephone calls.

That attack on the football field.

Now this.

He closed the locker quickly so no one would see the damage. For some reason, he felt ashamed.

Related Characters: Jerry Renault (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 182-183

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Jerry opens his locker to find that it has been vandalized—his poster has been desecrated and his sneakers have been ripped to shreds. The vandalism that has been done to his locker is “childish”—in other words, it is chaotic and seemingly without direction. The annihilation of the poster seems pointed, but the destruction of the shoes is violent and almost sadistic. As Jerry realizes that he is being sent a message—not just through this act of vandalism, but through all of the other assaults and embarrassments, small and large, which have befallen him over the past several days—he is struck not by fear, sadness, or anger, but shame. He is ashamed to be a victim and a target, and embarrassed perhaps by how his own boldness has come back to bite him.

Chapter 30 Quotes

☞ “Goober sold his fifty boxes,” someone called. Cheers, applause and ear-splitting whistles. The Goober started to step forward in protest.

He had only sold twenty-seven boxes, damn it. He had stopped at twenty-seven to show that he was supporting Jerry, even though nobody knew, not even Jerry. And now the whole thing evaporated and he found himself sinking back in the shadows, as if he could shrivel into invisibility. He didn't want trouble. He'd had enough trouble, and he had held on. But he knew his days at Trinity would be numbered if he walked into that group of jubilant guys and told them to erase the fifty beside his name.

Out in the corridor, The Goober's breath came fast. But otherwise he felt nothing. He willed himself to feel nothing. He didn't feel rotten. He didn't feel like a traitor. He didn't feel small and cowardly. And if he didn't feel all these things, then why was he crying all the way to his locker?

Related Characters: The Goober (speaker), Jerry Renault

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 197

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Goober is harassed and victimized in an unlikely way. He has intentionally stopped selling chocolates, he reveals, in a show of solidarity with Jerry's own protest, and yet he is singled out by the Vigils and held up as a beacon of Trinity pride and tradition. Given The Goober's conflicted feelings about Trinity—and his belief that something rotten or even evil lies within the very fabric of the school—being forcibly aligned with the chocolate sale hurts The Goober deeply and even frightens him. He is afraid to admit to these feelings, and attempts to repress them in order to save face and to not give into the Vigils' cruelty, but enough is enough—The Goober breaks down in tears.

Chapter 31 Quotes

☝☝ "You listen," Janza said, cool now, knowing he had struck a vulnerable spot. "You're polluting Trinity. You won't sell the chocolates like everybody else and now we find out you're a fairy." He shook his head in mock, exaggerated admiration. "You're really something, know that? Trinity has tests and ways of weeding the homos out but you were smart enough to get by, weren't you? You must be creaming all over—wow, four hundred ripe young bodies to rub against . . ."

"I'm not a fairy," Jerry cried.

"Kiss me," Janza said, puckering his lips grotesquely.

"You son of a bitch," Jerry said.

The words hung on the air, verbal flags of battle. And Janza smiled, a radiant smile of triumph. This is what he'd wanted all along, of course. This had been the reason for the encounter, the insults.

"What did you call me?" Janza asked.

"A son of a bitch," Jerry said, measuring out the words, saying them deliberately, eager now for the fight.

Related Characters: Jerry Renault, Emile Janza (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 202

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Janza—at Archie's behest—corners Jerry after school and begins taunting him, accusing him of being a homosexual and calling him a "queer" and a "fairy" in an attempt to incite Jerry to anger. Jerry knows what Janza is doing, and for a while consciously tries to resist rising to his bait. But as Janza lays the abuse on thicker and thicker, Jerry finds himself incapable of not making some move to defend himself. Though he knows he is giving Janza exactly what he wants in getting angry and cursing at him, Jerry decides that defending himself, no matter the cost, is more important than simply evading attention, abuse, or violence. This moment will be repeated—on a much larger scale—in the novel's final pages, as Jerry and Janza face each other down once again.

Chapter 35 Quotes

☝☝ "What do you say, Renault? Do you accept the rules?"

What could he say? After the phone calls and the beating. After the desecration of his locker. The silent treatment. Pushed downstairs. What they did to Goober, to Brother Eugene. What guys like Archie and Janza did to the school. What they would do to the world when they left Trinity.

Jerry tightened his body in determination. At least this was his chance to strike back, to hit out. Despite the odds Archie had set up with the raffle tickets.

"Okay," Jerry had said.

Related Characters: Jerry Renault, Archie Costello (speaker), Brother Eugene, The Goober, Emile Janza

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 225

Explanation and Analysis

As Jerry prepares to face off against his bully Emile Janza, Archie reads both boys the rules of the fight: the "raffle tickets" their classmates submitted to win Jerry's leftover chocolates plus a cash prize consist of directions for both fighters, which they must follow once drawn. The moment in which Archie asks if Jerry accepts the rules echoes Brother Leon's question on the first day of the sale as he asked his students if they would accept the chocolates. Jerry considers his answer deeply now: having said "No" to the chocolates rained a storm of chaos and humiliation down upon him, and saying "No" now would surely have the same effect. Moreover, Jerry does not want to let "guys like Archie and Janza" off easy—he wants to fight back against their legacy of violence, coercion, and cruelty in any way he can, even if it comes at a great personal risk.

Chapter 36 Quotes

☝☝ "I don't know how you do it, Archie," Carter was forced to admit.

"Simple, Carter, simple." Archie reveled in the moment, basking in Carter's admiration, Carter who had humiliated him at The Vigils meeting. Someday he'd get even with Carter but at the moment it was satisfying enough to have Carter regarding him with awe and envy. "You see, Carter, people are two things: greedy and cruel. So we have a perfect set-up here. The greed part—a kid pays a buck for a chance to win a hundred. Plus fifty boxes of chocolates. The cruel part—watching two guys hitting each other, maybe hurting each other, while they're safe in the bleachers. That's why it works, Carter, because we're all bastards."

Carter disguised his disgust. Archie repelled him in many ways but most of all by the way he made everybody feel dirty, contaminated, polluted. As if there was no goodness at all in the world. And yet Carter had to admit that he was looking forward to the fight, that he himself had bought not one but two tickets. Did that make him like everybody else—greedy and cruel, as Archie said?

Related Characters: Archie Costello, Carter (speaker), Emile Janza, Jerry Renault

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 231

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Carter expresses his amazement—and his reluctant admiration—at Archie's ability to orchestrate such an intricate event, and to get the student body so thoroughly involved and invested. Archie, however, knows that the key to getting the Trinity boys on the same side was, all along, preying upon their darkest parts, and exploiting the base greed, anger, and cruelty they all share as human animals. Carter is "disgusted" by Archie's view of the world—but deep down, he is very fearful that Archie is right in his estimation of the Trinity boys, and perhaps of the entire world.

Chapter 37 Quotes

☝☝ Triumphantly, he watched Janza floundering on weak, wobbly knees. Jerry turned toward the crowd, seeking—what? Applause? They were booing. Booing him. Shaking his head, trying to reassemble himself, squinting, he saw Archie in the crowd, a grinning, exultant Archie. A new sickness invaded Jerry, the sickness of knowing what he had become, another animal, another beast, another violent person in a violent world, inflicting damage, not disturbing the universe but damaging it. He had allowed Archie to do this to him.

And that crowd out there he had wanted to impress? To prove himself before? Hell, they wanted him to lose, they wanted him killed, for Christ's sake.

Related Characters: Jerry Renault (speaker), Archie Costello, Emile Janza

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 242

Explanation and Analysis

As Jerry finally gets a hit in on Janza, who has been pummeling him and threatening not just to harm him but embarrass him in front of the whole school, he feels a sense of pride. Jerry is the good guy and Janza is the bully—this is the narrative that Jerry, at least, has in his head. But to the bloodthirsty, riled students of Trinity, Jerry, who broke with tradition, is the traitor and the outcast—Jerry is the one the Trinity boys want to see fall. Realizing that he has, due to Archie's influence, become a pawn in his own destruction and a mindless cog in a vast machine (though in a different way than he worried he would), Jerry sees that perhaps he is no better than Janza—perhaps he is just another harmful force to Trinity, to the world, and to himself.

Chapter 38 Quotes

☝☝ "It'll be all right, Jerry."

No it won't. He recognized Goober's voice and it was important to share the discovery with Goober. He had to tell Goober to play ball, to play football, to run, to make the team, to sell the chocolates, to sell whatever they wanted you to sell, to do whatever they wanted you to do. He tried to voice the words but there was something wrong with his mouth, his teeth, his face. But he went ahead anyway, telling Goober what he needed to know. They tell you to do your thing but they don't mean it. They don't want you to do your thing, not unless it happens to be their thing, too. It's a laugh, Goober, a fake. Don't disturb the universe, Goober, no matter what the posters say.

Related Characters: Jerry Renault, The Goober (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 248

Explanation and Analysis

In the wake of the climactic fight between Jerry and Janza, Jerry lies beaten—physically, emotionally, and psychologically—in the arms of his only friend and ally. The Goober attempts to console Jerry while they wait for an ambulance to arrive, but Jerry has been so thoroughly flattened and defeated that he cannot connect to The Goober's kind words. Jerry, after all of his struggle against the institution of Trinity and its mindless traditions, has ultimately failed; the Vigils still rule the school, Brother Leon's sale, for all intents and purposes, was a financial success, and the traditions that govern Trinity have not been displaced. Jerry regrets having tried to “disturb the universe,” and the message on his poster, which once gave him hope and confidence, now appears in his mind as a foolish, fruitless, and even childish directive.

Chapter 39 Quotes

☝☝ “Maybe the black box will work the next time, Archie,” Obie said. “Or maybe another kid like Renault will come along.”

Archie didn't bother to answer. Wishful thinking wasn't worth answering. He sniffed the air and yawned. “Hey, Obie, what happened to the chocolates?”

“The guys raided the chocolates in the confusion. As far as the money's concerned, Brian Cochran has it. We'll have some kind of drawing next week at assembly.”

Archie barely listened. He wasn't interested. He was hungry. “You sure all the chocolates are gone, Obie?”

“I'm sure, Archie.”

“You got a Hershey or anything?”

“No.”

The lights went off again. Archie and Obie sat there awhile not saying anything and then made their way out of the place in the darkness.

Related Characters: Archie Costello, Obie (speaker), Jerry Renault

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 252-253

Explanation and Analysis

In the novel's final passage, Obie and Archie sit alone in the stands above the football field, privately reckoning—or not reckoning—with all that has just transpired. Obie hopes aloud that someone or something will one day stop Archie, who has just received the tacit support of Brother Leon even after being caught red-handed by Brother Jacques; it seems as if nothing, not even fate, will ever interfere with Archie's slow accrual of more and more power. Archie, though, seems almost bored, completely unaffected by all of the violence he has orchestrated and the madness which has transpired largely because of his actions. Archie's hunger for more chocolate—a symbol throughout the novel of the desire for power and control—indicates that though Archie has come out on top, he is not done yet, and will wreak even more havoc on Trinity High before the year is out.



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.

CHAPTER 1

Trinity High freshman Jerry Renault is getting “murdered” as he tries out for the school football team. As he is pummeled by the other players and repeatedly tackled to the ground, he hears his friend The Goober’s advice in his ears: “Coach is testing you, and he’s looking for guts.” Determined to prove he has the guts it takes to join the team, Jerry presses on, though he suffers great physical pain over and over with each play.

This opening scene introduces Jerry as someone determined to prove his worth, even under great physical or psychological strain. Jerry wants to be on the football team, believes he is good enough to be on the football team, and is going to show the touch coach that he deserves to be there.



Eventually, the coach pulls Jerry aside. The coach asks why Jerry wants to play football in the first place, and wonders especially why Jerry is trying out for quarterback. Jerry does not answer—he is focusing all of his attention just on not passing out. After a moment, the coach begrudgingly tells Jerry that he can have a spot on the team if he shows up for more tryouts the next day at three p.m. sharp. Jerry walks back to the main building, elated but dazed. He takes pride in knowing that though he was “massacred” by the other, older players, he has survived. In the bathroom, Jerry goes straight to one of the toilets and vomits.

Jerry’s determination has paid off, and he has proved both to the coach and to himself that he can withstand great physical pain and psychological torment—a necessity in the hypermasculine, hyperviolent sport of football. When Jerry returns to school alone, though, he shows signs of weakness—he is not invincible, and the difficult tryout has taken a toll on him.



CHAPTER 2

Up in the stands, Obie watches football tryouts and feels painfully bored. He is always tired lately—and most of all, he is tired of his classmate, Archie Costello. Obie asks Archie to let him leave the bleachers, as he is worried about being late for work. Archie points out that Obie hates his job stocking shelves at the supermarket anyway, and Obie feels as if Archie has read his mind. As Archie spaces out and looks down onto the football field in concentration, Obie admits to himself that he does, against his own will, admire Archie. Archie is dazzlingly brilliant, and is “practically a legend” at Trinity due to the intricate assignments he doles out on behalf of the Vigils—not to mention his reputation for “strange offbeat cruel[t.y.]”

This passage introduces the tenuous relationship between Obie and Archie. Thrust together by their mutual participation in the school’s secret society, the Vigils, the boys seem to really hate one another—and yet, at the same time, there is a casualness and easy rapport to their relationship. Obie’s loathing of Archie is tempered by the fact that Archie can often call Obie out on how he’s really feeling. Part defense mechanism, part power play, Archie is always able to bring Obie back from the brink of blind hatred.



Archie gives Obie the name of one of the boys below, and Obie writes it down. Obie asks what the assignment should be, and Archie cryptically answers “sidewalk.” Archie asks Obie if Obie will really get fired for being late to work; Obie answers that he probably won’t, but at the same time won’t get any closer to the raise he’s hoping for. Archie tells Obie he’ll let him go soon, and jokingly suggests he “assign” someone to Obie’s supermarket one day. Obie shudders at this idea, demonstrating “how awesome Archie’s power really [is.]”

Archie is odd, “offbeat,” and sinister—his power comes not from the ability to physically intimidate his classmates or inspire jealousy in them, but through his ability to make people emotionally uncomfortable or psychologically cowed. Even Obie, who has seen Archie’s power in full force many times before, is not immune to feeling afraid of Archie.



Obie reflects on the lengths he and the other students go to stay on Archie's good side, buying him Hershey's to satisfy his **chocolate** craving and accomplishing other tasks on Archie's behalf. Obie is the secretary of the Vigils, and the organization's president, Carter, has tasked Obie with keeping Archie happy; "when Archie's happy," the president once told Obie, "we're all happy."

Archie tells Obie that they only need to collect two more names. Obie is surprised they are scouting football tryouts for their marks—Archie, Obie thinks, prefers psychological violence to physical violence, and this is why he gets away with so much at school. As long as there are "no broken bones" on campus, the Brothers who run the school let the students get away with anything.

Archie calls out "The Goober," and Obie writes down "Roland Goubert." Archie notes the assignment as "Brother Eugene's room." Obie is excited—he loves when Archie involves the Brothers in assignments. Archie then asks the name of the kid who just left the field a few minutes ago. Obie flips through his carefully-coded notebook, which contains names and personal information of every student at Trinity, and finds Jerry's name. He tells Archie that Jerry's father is a pharmacist, while his mother died of cancer last spring.

Archie suggests that Jerry needs "therapy," and orders Obie to write Jerry's name down. Obie asks what the assignment is, and Archie says he'll think of something by the end of the afternoon. Obie teases Archie about running out of ideas, and Archie quickly orders Obie to put Jerry down for "**chocolates**." With that, Obie collects his things, ready to hurry for the bus so that he can make it to work.

CHAPTER 3

On the way home from school, Jerry stops in at a store and looks at a *Playboy* magazine. He worries that a girl will never love him, and that he will die before he gets to touch a girl's breast. Jerry is too intimidated to buy the magazine, however, and leaves the store empty-handed.

This passage shows that it is not just Obie who's quietly afraid of Archie—even the president of the Vigils, Carter, knows it is important to stay on Archie's good side.



The fact that Archie and Obie are, for perhaps one of the first times, recruiting football players and wannabes for Vigil assignments is in and of itself a break with tradition—and tradition, in the world of the Vigils, is of utmost importance. It is the only thing that keeps their society functioning.



Against his better judgement, Obie finds himself growing excited at the prospect of seeing one of Archie's new assignments come to fruition. For all his hatred of Archie, Obie is swept up in the glee of watching violence take place—and finds himself truly admiring Archie in moments like these.



Archie's cruel selection of Jerry for an assignment despite knowing the psychological torment Jerry has, no doubt, already been through in the wake of his mother's death demonstrates Archie's indiscriminately predatory ways, and his desire to create chaos under the guise of controlling others.



Jerry's classic teenage fears—and burgeoning teenage lust—demonstrate that he is just like any other boy at the end of the day; all he wants is to feel loved, accepted, and desired.



Out at the bus stop, Jerry reflects on the three days of brutal football tryouts he has endured, and stares at some hippies who have gathered in the Common across the street. Once a strange sight to behold, they are now “part of the scenery,” and Jerry is so absorbed in looking at them that he doesn’t notice when one of them crosses the street to come talk to him. The hippie calls Jerry out for staring at their group. Jerry denies staring, but the hippie presses him further, urging Jerry not to ogle their group as if they are “sub-humans.”

Jerry attempts to extricate himself from the conversation, but the hippie keeps on nagging Jerry. He tells Jerry that it is Jerry who is the “sub-human” for following the same routine; Jerry, he says, is a “square boy,” who is already middle-aged at just fourteen. The bus arrives, and Jerry hurries to get on. The hippie calls out to Jerry: “You’re missing a lot of things in the world, better not miss that bus.”

As Jerry boards the bus, his heart hammers in his chest. The hippie’s words echo in his ears. He tells himself to ignore them, but cannot. He looks up at some advertising placards above the bus windows, and sees some graffiti scrawled there. *Why*, one person has written. *Why not*, someone else has scribbled. Jerry closes his eyes, exhausted, not wanting to think about the obvious symbolism.

CHAPTER 4

Brother Leon, the Assistant Headmaster of the school, informs Archie that there are twenty thousand boxes of **chocolate** to sell in the school’s annual fundraiser this year—rather than ten thousand, as usual. Archie observes that Brother Leon, alone in this room rather in front of a class, is full of “cracks and crevices,” vulnerable and uncertain. Brother Leon is “sweating like a madman” as he tries to convince Archie that because the chocolates are “special” Mother’s Day chocolates secured at a bargain and will yield a high profit, Trinity students will have no problem selling all twenty thousand boxes.

The book is set in the mid-1970s, a time when hippies and countercultural youth had become “part of the scenery” but still outliers within society. As Jerry ogles the group, he doesn’t even realize he is doing so; he may not even be aware of his fascination with them, but after this interaction, he certainly will be.



This confrontation sees a free-thinking, free-loving hippie denigrate Jerry for his “square” lifestyle and allegiance to routine. Jerry is a fourteen-year-old student, so of course he has a routine; but nevertheless, the hippie’s words cut Jerry deep, and they will reverberate throughout the larger plot of the novel.



Jerry thinks of the hippie’s words as he heads home. When he tries to ignore them, he finds himself perturbed by the graffiti on the bus, which takes the same searching, indicting tone as the hippie’s assessment of Jerry’s life. The “why not?” scrawled on the bus ad also foreshadows Jerry’s preoccupation with yet another searching psychological question.



This first introduction to Brother Leon—one of the novel’s main antagonists—shows him as a slimy, vulnerable man who is clearly trying to cover something up. He is desperate for the approval and support of a student—a child—even as he seems to know that his own scheme is full of holes and roadblocks, and will not sit well with the student body.



Archie points out that the Trinity boys will be overwhelmed by the doubling of their quota—usually, each boy is only required to sell twenty-five boxes at a dollar a pop, and now they must all sell fifty boxes at two dollars each. Brother Leon insists that Trinity boys are special, but seeing that Archie is not convinced, Leon confides that the school is struggling—no rich men’s sons attend Trinity, and the school is not a boarding school with wealthy alumni. The **chocolate** sale, Leon says, is “vital” to the school’s success. Moreover, the Head of the school is ill and scheduled to enter the hospital tomorrow. In the meantime, the school will be in Leon’s hands—and Leon needs the help of the Vigils, a secret society that the administration and faculty ignore “completely,” to ensure that things run smoothly where the sale is concerned.

Leon is trying to control both the narrative surrounding this year’s chocolate sale and the outcome of the sale itself. Leon seems to know he has gotten himself in over his head, and that doubling both the quota and selling price of the chocolates will irk the students, on whom Leon depends to make good on his investment in the chocolates. Leon’s attempt to recruit Archie to his cause highlights for the reader the ways in which the two are similar—both are sneaky, power-hungry, and untrustworthy, and also vulnerable in ways they are both conscious and ignorant of.



Leon asks Archie if he can count on his help. Archie insists that he’s “just one guy,” and plays dumb about the existence of the Vigils. Leon tells Archie that Archie knows what he means, and their eyes meet in a tense moment. Both of them know that the Vigils essentially make the school’s rules. Archie has a sudden craving for **chocolate** as he holds Leon’s gaze. After a moment, he admits that he knows what Leon means, and, on his way out of the classroom, assures Leon that the Vigils will do all they can to help. Archie delights in the surprise on Leon’s face when the organization’s name is said aloud.

Archie enjoys psychologically toying with others—in denying the existence of the Vigils, he is riling Brother Leon up. The Vigils hold a unique place in Trinity society, as they are an open secret whose name is nevertheless never uttered. In saying the name of the group out loud, Archie breaks with tradition and also demonstrates to Brother Leon that he is a rogue who cannot be controlled by the Brother—it is Archie who has the power here, not his teacher.



CHAPTER 5

In a secretive Vigils meeting, Archie gives the freshman known as The Goober his first assignment. Archie outlines the preconditions for the assignment—there is nothing personal in it, it is tradition at Trinity for students to complete assignments, and those charged with carrying out assignments must pledge total silence, both about the Vigils and their own role in whatever transpires.

This passage demonstrates that the Vigils have deep and old traditions that structure the way their “assignments” are carried out. They maintain their traditions in order to keep up their “secrets” and move stealthily throughout the school, remaining blameless in anything that goes wrong as a result of their missions.



Archie orders The Goober to get his hands on a screwdriver and, next Thursday afternoon, arrange to be free for the entire afternoon and evening. The Brothers will be off at a conference in Maine, and the school will be entirely empty—there will be no one in the building but The Goober and his screwdriver. Archie instructs The Goober to loosen the screws on every piece of furniture in Brother Eugene’s classroom. The Goober nervously accepts the assignment, and then Archie braces himself for the next step.

This strange and unique prank—essentially harmless, but physically taxing for The Goober and designed to create chaos on the next day of classes—demonstrates the weird way Archie’s brain works, and the mix of psychological and physical violence he enjoys enacting upon his classmates and even his teachers.



The president of the Vigils, Carter, pulls a small **black box** out of a desk. Inside the box, Archie knows, are six marbles: five white, one black. Someone years before Archie's time realized that an assigner could go "off the deep end" if there wasn't some kind of control, and instituted the box. If the assigner draws a white marble, the original assignee carries out the assignment as intended; if the assigner draws the black marble, he himself must take on and carry out the assignment.

Archie has always beaten the **black box** for three years running, but every time he reaches into it he fears that his luck will run out. Now, he reaches in and selects a marble; it is white, and Archie feels a renewed burst of invincibility. Carter snaps his fingers, and the meeting is adjourned. Archie gets an empty feeling inside. He looks over at The Goober, who looks as if he is about to cry. Archie almost feels sorry for the kid, "but not quite."

CHAPTER 6

In Brother Leon's class, Jerry can tell that Leon is about to "put on [a] show." Leon is a flamboyant and charismatic teacher, and enjoys shocking and playing "games" with his students. Now, Brother Leon singles out a boy named Bailey and calls him to the front of the class. Brother Leon accuses Bailey of cheating in class, and points out that Bailey's perfect grades mean he must be either a genius or a cheater. Bailey insists he doesn't cheat, but Brother Leon insists that Bailey cannot be perfect—"only God is perfect," he says.

As Jerry watches Brother Leon torment Bailey, he begins feeling tense and ill. He longs to be out on the football field, but knows that until class is over, he must endure Brother Leon's "show." As Brother Leon continues toying with Bailey, he catches him in an intellectual trap: if Bailey denies cheating, he is claiming to be perfect, and thus sacrilegious, and still deserving of punishment. Finally, someone at the back of the class speaks up, urging Leon to leave Bailey alone.

The bell rings, signaling the end of class. The boys begin gathering their things, but Leon instructs everyone to stay put. He calls the class "idiots" and "fools," and says that Bailey is the only brave one among them—he stood his ground and denied cheating. The rest of the class let Bailey suffer, and turned the room into "Nazi Germany" for just a few moments. Leon congratulates Bailey on remaining true to himself, and tells Bailey that it is the rest of the class who are the cheaters—they cheated Bailey in doubting him, while Leon never did.

The black box is a mechanism meant to enforce control within the realm of potential chaos the assignments create. Because Archie knows that there is always a slight chance he will have to take on his own assignments himself, Cormier implies, every task he gives out is a slightly watered-down version of what he'd really like to do. This allows the reader to see that there are unexplored depths to Archie—and likely very dark ones at that.



The black box is the only thing that ever trips Archie up—and as he seemingly always beats it, only ever for a moment. Archie, having beaten the box yet again, feels a renewed wave of invincibility, and now begins looking forward to watching the Goober complete the assignment in earnest.



In this passage, Brother Leon entraps an innocent student in one of his calculated psychological games. This moment serves to show the parallels between Brother Leon and Archie, and to demonstrate the cruelty both are willing to engage in in pursuit of maintaining their own power.



Brother Leon expertly traps Bailey within a psychological catch-22. He makes it so that Bailey has no way to take himself out of the spotlight—and no way to claim innocence not only in the eyes of Brother Leon, but in the eyes of God himself. This is true psychological torture—a controlled way of producing chaos and turmoil within an individual.



Brother Leon was toying with Bailey all along, of course, trying to impress a lesson about self-assuredness and the perils of groupthink upon his students. Despite this fact, Brother Leon will, as the novel goes on, behave in ways directly antithetical to this lesson that he himself thought up. Leon is a slippery character who has no allegiance to the things he himself preaches—only to maintaining and securing power over others.



CHAPTER 7

Archie watches as a boy named Emile Janza siphons gas from a classmate's car. Archie asks Emile what he would do if he were caught, but Emile just smiles. Even Archie knows that no one would defy Emile Janza—Emile is, despite his ordinary stature, a true brute. He harasses teachers and students alike, preying upon the fact that most people want to avoid trouble and confrontation at any cost, and more often than not simply let Janza get his way.

Archie tells Emile that he is a “beautiful” person for doing something so bold and reckless in broad daylight, and then begins to walk away. As he does, Emile asks Archie about “the picture.” Archie feigns ignorance at first, but then slyly notes that the picture is “beautiful,” too. Archie leaves, knowing that things like the picture are “money in the bank” against “animals” like Janza. Emile watches Archie go, dreaming that someday he, too, will be a member of the Vigils.

This introduction to Emile Janza shows him to be reckless and pompous—he is coasting through school on the strength of his reputation as a bully, and enjoying the psychological and physical power he has over his classmates and the authorities that govern the school.



Though Archie and Emile appear to have a friendly interaction, there is tension and distrust simmering below the surface. Archie is clearly blackmailing Emile—though he thinks Emile's way of doing things is “beautiful,” he is self-aware enough to see that underneath it all Emile is an “animal” who would stop at nothing to get what he wants. Emile, desperate to become a Vigil, will do whatever Archie tells him—both to save himself from whatever the “picture” threatens to reveal, and to suck up to Archie in hopes of one day being inducted into the school's secret society.



CHAPTER 8

The Goober loves to run. When he runs, he feels beautiful—he forgets about his insecurities and is able to think more sharply. He is having an okay time on the football team, and enjoys playing with Jerry Renault, but it is running he really loves. The Goober isn't running right now, though—right now he is in Brother Eugene's classroom, terrified because it is past dark and he knows he is never going to finish the Vigils' assignment in time. He wishes he could pack his things up and simply run away, but knows there would be dire consequences.

Right at that moment, The Goober hears a noise in a corridor, and after a minute someone whispers his name from the door. A masked figure advances into the classroom, and asks The Goober how he's doing. The Goober admits he's having trouble. The masked boy grabs The Goober by the shirt and reminds him of how important the assignment is—“more important than you, me or the school.” For this reason, the boy says, the Vigils are going to help The Goober out. He warns The Goober not to tell anyone else he has received help with his assignment, and The Goober agrees. A group of masked students file into the classroom and begin helping; it takes all of them three more hours to finish the task.

The Goober is trapped in Brother Eugene's classroom, struggling to complete his difficult and taxing assignment in a race against the clock. The Goober's love of running—a solitary pursuit in which one's only master is one's own strength and speed—shows that he has an individualistic streak, though it is easily quashed by bullies and powerful entities such as the Vigils.



The masked figure—who may or may not be Obie in disguise—had the foresight to realize that the assignment might fail in the hands of just one boy. The Vigils come to help, knowing that the assignment is bigger than any of them—to fail an assignment would be both to break with tradition and to risk exposing the Vigils as weak, vulnerable, and thus prone to defeat or control at the hands of the Brothers or even other students.



CHAPTER 9

Jerry's mother died in the spring after a long battle with cancer. Her death left Jerry feeling a confusing blend of emotions—he was surprised by how angry he felt, and surprised even further to find that his anger left no room for sorrow. In the weeks after his mother's funeral, Jerry and his father rarely spoke; Jerry's father moved through their house "like a sleepwalker" and Jerry felt alone and abandoned. Apart from one tearful moment of connection right after the funeral, Jerry and his father never discussed their loss, and quickly settled back into their routines.

Jerry comes home from school to find his father napping on the sofa in the den of their new apartment. Jerry's father is a pharmacist, and often works odd hours and night shifts, leaving him tired at strange times of day. Jerry's father senses his son's presence and wakes up, asking Jerry how his day was. Jerry tells his father about football practice, and then asks his father how his day was. Jerry's father answers only that his day was "fine."

Jerry, perturbed that every day when he asks his father how his day was his father only answers with "fine," attempts to dig deeper. He asks his father if there are ever wonderful days or terrible days, and his father answers that his life at the drugstore is "pretty much the same all the time." Jerry is disappointed to hear this, and when he thinks of his own life turning into an endless succession of days that are just "fine," he becomes upset. Jerry's father gets up and starts preparing dinner. Jerry wants to talk to his father more about what it means to live a life, and what the point of it all is, but is afraid of sounding "crazy."

That night, as Jerry gets ready for bed, he looks at himself in the mirror, seeing himself for the first time as the hippie in the Common saw him: "Square Boy." Jerry wants to "do something" and "be somebody," but doesn't know what he wants to do or who he wants to be.

CHAPTER 10

Brother Leon calls a special assembly at chapel. After prayers and a dramatic speech about school spirit, Brother Leon has a couple of students bring up to the pulpit ten large cardboard posters bearing, in alphabetical order, the names of every student in school. Leon explains that as each student sells his quota of **chocolates**, the boxes next to each name will be filled. Archie thinks that the assembly has been one of Brother Leon's "great performances."

This passage serves to clue readers into the turmoil haunting Jerry below his affable exterior. He has a lot of anger within him, and feels deeply alone. Unable to connect with his father or get fully in touch with his own emotions, Jerry is drifting, worried about his place in the world and how to become a man.



Jerry and his father are drowning in pain, sorrow, and anger, and yet dance around one another as if everything is fine. Jerry's father's excessive sleeping may be tied to his odd hours, or it may be a result of depression in the wake of losing his wife—either way, it is disorienting for him and for Jerry alike, and creates a dreamlike texture to their relationship.



Jerry is still clearly perturbed by his interaction with the hippie—he is afraid of being "square," of mindlessly following a routine, and of ending up alone and depressed at the end of it all, just like his father. Jerry wants to connect more deeply with his father discuss these fears, but is too afraid that expressing them will render him "crazy." Jerry is just as afraid of going against the grain as he is of going with it.



Jerry is afraid to amount to nothing, but at the same time is unsure of who he wants to be, or how he wants to live his life. This tension is creating a chaos with him that will soon be tested in ways he cannot imagine.



Brother Leon seeks to control the narrative around the chocolate war with a much larger audience here. Whereas with Archie, he was shifty, nervous, and desperate, in front of an audience he is authoritative and confident. This demonstrates the battle between chaos and control going on within Brother Leon as he prepares for the sale to start.



Brother Leon tells his students that he knows each of them will easily be able to sell fifty boxes and do his part for Trinity. Archie squirms in his seat, recalling how the Vigils were vexed to hear that Archie had pledged their support to Brother Leon and his insane **chocolate** sale. As Archie looks toward the front of the chapel and the posters, he thinks of who he will get to sell his chocolates for him this year; he never, ever sells his own boxes himself. The kids he selects to do his dirty work for him, he knows, feel “special to be singled out by The Assigner of The Vigils.” Feeling comfortable and self-satisfied, Archie leans back in his seat.

In this passage, Archie goes back and forth between a few competing mental states. First, he is admiring of Brother Leon's confidence, and yet also contemptuous of the teacher— he knows that beneath the surface Leon is tense and afraid. Then, he feels tense and afraid himself when he remembers the Vigils' disapproval of his involving them in the chocolate sale. He quickly recovers, though, feeling satisfied that even if the Vigils are upset, the rest of the student body still fears him.



CHAPTER 11

Later that morning, as Brother Eugene's homeroom files into class, the furniture in the room begins falling apart. It is “bedlam” in the room, as even the slightest touch of a desk or chair collapses it. The boys are excited, and scramble around the room “merrily” testing each desk and each chair. Someone calls out “The Vigils,” knowing that the secret society is behind the prank.

The controlled atmosphere of The Goober's painstaking assignment gives way to chaos as class is called to order. Students delight in the pandemonium, and are excited by the fact that the Vigils have sneakily visited their classroom—this shows that for all their allegiance to tradition and structure, Trinity boys also long for chaos and madness.



Archie stands in the doorway and times how long it takes for the room to completely fall apart: all of thirty-seven seconds. Archie feels a “sweetness” in his chest as he watches the destruction. He feels that this assignment is one of his “major triumphs” and will become a Trinity legend. He takes special note of Brother Eugene's “horror-stricken expression.”

Archie delights in seeing the chaos he has orchestrated come to fruition, and gleefully notes the psychological “horror” he has brought down upon the poor Brother Eugene.



Brother Leon appears behind Archie, seizes him by the shoulders, and accuses him angrily of being behind the prank. At this point, students from other classes have started gathering in the hall to see what all the commotion is. Leon is furious as he reminds Archie that he wanted “no funny business” from the Vigils, but Archie calmly insists he didn't do anything. Brother Leon furiously storms away, and Archie massages his shoulders, sore from where Leon grabbed him. He looks back into the classroom and sees Brother Eugene standing in the rubble of his classroom, crying. “Screw Brother Leon,” Archie thinks; his handiwork is a beautiful sight to behold.

Brother Leon is angry with Archie—by involving himself with the Vigils, Brother Leon worries that he has given Archie too much free reign. The code between the Vigils and the Brothers seems to be that if the Vigils don't step on the Brothers' toes, the Brothers will not step on the Vigils'; this prank clearly involves a teacher and thus violates the unspoken contract that allows the Vigils to exist. Archie doesn't care, though; he has triumphed, and that's all that matters to him.



CHAPTER 12

Jerry is playing in a scrimmage with other freshmen against a few members of the varsity football team—and is doing poorly. The coach is frustrated with the freshmen, but is nonetheless using them as a way to design better plays for the older varsity players. Jerry, as quarterback, gears up for one more play, determined to get it right—and get past Carter, who is a larger, older, better football player.

As Jerry runs the play, one of his own teammates topples Carter miraculously, and with a “sudden sense of freedom,” Jerry passes to The Goober. Carter tackles Jerry to the ground, having recovered, but the ball is already out of Jerry’s hands, and The Goober has scored. The coach congratulates Jerry on the play, and even Carter slaps Jerry on the buttocks—a sign, at Trinity, of approval and congratulations. Jerry is on a high the rest of the practice—when he returns to school, however, he finds a summons from the Vigils taped to his locker: he has been selected to carry out an assignment.

Jerry is bucking tradition by playing quarterback—though the coach originally thought him ill-suited to the position, Jerry is nonetheless determined to prove in this scrimmage that he has what it takes, even up against a golden boy like Carter.



Jerry’s elation at finally proving himself—and even winning the congratulations of his older, more accomplished classmates—is tempered when he returns to school and finds that his break with tradition has been met with being pulled back into one of the school’s oldest and nastiest ones: an assignment from the Vigils.



CHAPTER 13

The next day, in Brother Leon’s class, Leon calls roll and each student accepts his quota of **chocolates**. Leon is in rare form, delighted that everyone is showing off their school spirit; The Goober, meanwhile, is vaguely depressed, and has been since the fiasco in Brother Eugene’s room. Though in the days right after the incident, The Goober was treated as a kind of “underground hero,” Brother Eugene has been absent from school since that morning, and many students are saying he had a nervous breakdown because of it.

When Brother Leon calls The Goober’s name, he accepts his **chocolate**. Brother Leon observes, though, that The Goober seems in low spirits, and asks if The Goober is really up to the task of the sale, which goes beyond a mere school project. The Goober once again accepts his boxes of chocolate, this time in a more eager tone of voice. The Goober returns to his worries about Brother Eugene, but is shocked out of his reverie when he realizes that Jerry Renault has refused to accept his chocolates.

The Goober’s guilt over his role in the psychologically cruel assignment in Brother Eugene’s classroom is weighing heavily on him. Even as excitement builds about the chocolate sale, The Goober feels apart from the rest of his classmates—his individualistic streak has turned into feelings of intense isolation.



This passage shows how deeply Brother Leon wants all of his students to get on-board with the chocolate sale. Just the acceptance of one’s chocolates is not enough; Brother Leon wants his students to be enthusiastic and committed to the sale. Leon isn’t committed to school spirit, though; has his own nefarious reasons for needing the students to be so committed to moving the chocolates.



Brother Leon is astounded to hear a “No” from Jerry when he reaches his name on the roll, and indeed the entire class begins murmuring in confusion. Brother Leon asks Jerry to clarify his “No”—he reminds Jerry that though the sale is voluntary, a “No” will separate him from “every other student” at Trinity, who have all agreed to sell their chocolates. Jerry confirms that he is not going to accept his boxes. The Goober is stunned. He looks to Brother Leon, who looks furious as he makes a mark beside Jerry’s name on the roll.

Jerry’s “no” is an astounding break with tradition. The chocolate sale—though technically voluntary—is, in the eyes of the student body and the control-hungry Brother Leon, all but mandatory.



Brother Leon makes his way down the rest of the roll, and, after calling everyone’s name, reminds the boys that they can pick up their **chocolates** in the gym—those of them who are “true sons of Trinity,” that is.

Brother Leon is clearly furious with Jerry, and wants to let him know that in denying the chocolates he is denying his very place at Trinity High.



CHAPTER 14

John Sulkey, a Trinity senior, mentally makes a list of everyone in his family and neighborhood he can count on to buy **chocolates**. Last year, Sulkey won the prize for selling the most tickets in a school raffle, and now he wants to excel in the chocolate sale as well in order to win the admiration of his parents and the Brothers at Trinity alike. Despite the higher quota this year, Sulkey is confident in his ability to make good on the sales and come out on top. He continues plotting his sales plan, knowing that though it won’t always be fun, he’ll do anything “for the sake of Service To The School!”

In this chapter and the chapters that follow, Cormier will show how tertiary characters—average Trinity boys—feel about the chocolate sale. Their feelings range from spirited and excited to glum to even rebellious, and as Jerry’s influence spreads throughout the school, even students like John Sulkey, who would do anything for Trinity, are tested.



Brother Leon calls roll again, asking each student to answer to his name with how many boxes of **chocolate** he has sold so far. Some have only sold one or two, but some have sold as many as ten already. It is the fourth day of the sale, and The Goober waits tensely for Jerry’s name to be called, knowing that Jerry will refuse the chocolates again, as he has each day this week. After Jerry’s “No,” The Goober watches Brother Leon’s hand begin to tremble.

Though Brother Leon congratulates those who have been participating in the sale and feigns excitement, beneath the surface, The Goober can see a furious chaos overtaking Leon not just psychologically but physically as well.



A student named Tubs Casper scurries through his neighborhood, lugging his **chocolates** door to door. He has only sold three boxes, and is worried about not being able to sell any more this evening. He is obsessed with making money—he needs to be able to take his girlfriend out to the movies. She is a nice, beautiful girl, and Tubs—an overweight, average boy—worries about losing her affections. He is using the chocolate sale as a way of earning money for himself so that he can buy his girlfriend a bracelet that costs nearly twenty dollars.

Tubs Casper is excited about the sale, but for personal reasons; he does not feel motivated by school spirit to sell the chocolates, and is instead spurred on by the idea of being able to bring himself closer to his girlfriend by bringing her a gift. Cormier shows how even individualistic desire, when applied to a group goal, allows traditions to carry on and even grow and spread.



Paul Consalvo is not having much luck with the **chocolate** sale either, and has not sold a single box all afternoon. He has been focusing on selling within tenement buildings—though the buildings smell awful, one can visit many households in quick succession.

Some students are having poor luck with the chocolate sale, and are growing frustrated by the seemingly outdated tradition requiring students to put themselves in undesirable situations in pursuit of an obscure goal.



Brian Cochran has been chosen by Brother Leon for the position of Treasurer of the **Chocolate** Sale. Brian hates the job, as he “lives in fear of Brother Leon.” Leon makes him uncomfortable; the man’s unpredictability unsettles Brian. Now, as Brian tallies the sales totals and double-checks them, he finds that there is a discrepancy between chocolates reported as sold and money received. This is normal—many students hold onto the money they get from the sales until the last minute, using the revenue as a kind of “loan” to go out on a big date or buy themselves something special. This year, though, Brother Leon is obsessed with how much money is coming in—every dollar is treated as “a matter of life and death.”

Brian Cochran has uneasily taken the job of treasurer—not out of any real desire to do so, but out of fear of Brother Leon’s strange power. Brian Cochran is nervous from the get-go, seeing how committed Brother Leon is to the sale, nearly to the point of mania. Brian is under a lot of pressure, and is being tightly controlled by the worried Leon.



Brother Leon treats Brian’s daily tallies and reports as major events; Brian has never seen Leon so edgy or nervous. Today, Brian is especially concerned, as Leon has released a false sales report to all the home rooms. Leon reported total sales at over 4,500 boxes, when really fewer than 4,000 have been sold and fewer than 3,000 have been paid for. Brian figures that Leon probably wants to hype the sale up, and goes on tallying as best he can. When he comes to Jerry Renault’s name and sees a zero beside it, he is shocked; he wonders who would ever want to go against Brother Leon.

Brian knows that Leon is not just odd—he is sneaky, underhanded, and will stop at nothing to ensure the chocolate sale goes off without a hitch. Brian’s astonishment over Jerry’s refusal to participate demonstrates just how tight a hold Leon has on much of the student body; the idea of going against the man is actually frightening to Brian, and surely to many other Trinity boys as well.



CHAPTER 15

Emile Janza approaches Archie and asks him if he still has “the picture.” Archie feigns ignorance at first, but then admits that he does still have the photo. Emile asks if it’s for sale. Archie replies that it’s not—and even if it were, it’s “not the greatest picture ever taken” of Emile, who has a “funny look on [his] face” in the photograph. Emile, not amused, asks Archie where he keeps the picture. Archie assures Emile that the picture is safe. One day, Archie teases Emile, Emile might be able to get the photograph back without paying for it.

This passage elaborates on Janza and Archie’s earlier interaction. Where there was a tense pleasantry to their last exchange, this one is completely dominated by Janza’s very palpable fear and apprehension. Archie clearly has something Janza desperately wants, and the power imbalance between the two will continue to inform much of the narrative as the book progresses.



Though the tone of the conversation is light and teasing, Archie knows that Emile is deadly serious about getting the picture back. The “terrible irony,” Archie thinks, is that there is no picture in the first place—Archie is simply blackmailing Emile. One day, Archie cut class and found a camera dangling from a coat hook on someone’s open locker. He didn’t intend to steal it, but instead just misplace it and send the owner on a wild goose chase. Archie stepped into the men’s room with the camera to have a quick smoke; when he opened one of the stall doors, he found Emile inside, masturbating. Archie pretended to take a picture of Emile, and then hurried out of the lavatory.

Now, Archie watches as Emile, apparently feeling secure enough that his secret is safe with Archie, begins to pick on a freshman. He orders the freshman—who is running to class, clearly worried about being late—to go across the street and buy him a pack of cigarettes. The freshman protests that he has no money, but Emile insists the freshman find a way to purchase the cigarettes by lunchtime—or else. Archie lingers with Emile, knowing that there are two kinds of people in the world: those who are victims, and those who victimize others. He knows there is no doubt about which kind of person Emile is—or, for that matter, which kind Archie himself is.

CHAPTER 16

David Caroni is meeting privately with Brother Leon after having received a failing mark on a test. Caroni, normally a straight-A student, is surprised by the unusually low mark; Brother Leon says the failure shocked him, as well. Brother Leon explains that the test was a particularly difficult one, and pass-fail to boot. Brother Leon admits that while grading Caroni’s test, he found Caroni making some good points, but that the argument ultimately didn’t add up.

Brother Leon then begins talking about how teachers are humans, too—they have good days and bad days, and sometimes their judgement is impaired. Caroni listens intently, unsure of what Brother Leon is trying to get at. Brother Leon admits that he has been distracted with his other duties he has taken on in the Head of School’s absence—namely, the **chocolate** sale. Brother Leon congratulates Caroni on doing so well in the sale, but laments that some other students don’t have Caroni’s spirit, and are not doing as well. Brother Leon mentions Jerry Renault, who has not sold a single box of chocolate.

Archie is revealed to know that there is no actual picture with which he can blackmail Emile. Though Archie has been putting up a brave, confident front where the “picture” is concerned, it is now suggested that lurking beneath that smooth exterior, Archie is perhaps also insecure when he thinks about the supposed photograph.



Archie and Emile are two sides of the same coin. Both are victimizers who enjoy feeling a sense of power and control, and love to see those they’re controlling squirm and even suffer. The uncomfortable ballet the two are caught up in surrounding the picture has the potential to turn either into a victim, though. If Janza discovers the photograph is false, he will surely be angry and even violent; if Archie threatens Janza with the photo in any real way, Janza will be forced to serve Archie in any way Archie wants.



David Caroni has been brought into a meeting with Brother Leon on suspicious pretenses. Caroni’s out-of-the-blue failure—and Leon’s admission that Caroni was close to passing—shows that Leon wants something out of Caroni, and is attempting to leverage Caroni’s disappointment for his own advantage.



As Brother Leon waxes poetic about the difficulties of being a teacher, and of applying “good judgement” to everyday duties, Caroni begins to realize that something strange is going on. When the chocolate sale and Jerry Renault are brought into the equation, Caroni knows for sure that he is being used.



Suddenly, Caroni realizes that Brother Leon is attempting to blackmail him. Caroni feels sick to his stomach, devastated to realize that teachers are just as corrupt as anyone else in the world. Caroni had thought, watching Brother Leon call Jerry's name each day, that Jerry was Brother Leon's victim—but now he realizes that it is Brother Leon who is disturbed by Jerry's refusal to participate in the sale.

Treading carefully, Caroni tells Brother Leon that Jerry Renault's refusal to participate in the sale is widely known to be a Vigils assignment, and that after ten days, Jerry is due to give in and accept the **chocolates**. Brother Leon smiles as he realizes out loud that tomorrow marks ten days since the start of the sale. He dismisses David Caroni abruptly, but Caroni reminds Leon that they never came to a conclusion about what to do about his failing grade.

Brother Leon suggests that at the end of the term, before marks close, he will review Caroni's score—perhaps then, he says, he will be feeling “fresher,” and will see “merit that wasn't apparent before.” Brother Leon warns Caroni, though, that it's possible the F will stand. Caroni despondently realizes that there are no heroes in life, and nobody can be trusted. He leaves the classroom hurriedly, feeling sicker than ever.

CHAPTER 17

On the morning of the sale's tenth day, Brother Leon calls roll gleefully. The Goober has learned that Jerry's refusal was part of a Vigils assignment, and anxiously waits for Jerry to finally accept and dispel the tension that has pervaded their classroom for nearly two weeks. When Leon gets to Jerry's name, though, Jerry calls out a defiant “No!” The Goober watches shock spread across Brother Leon's face. Leon repeats Jerry's name once more, and, once again, Jerry answers no; “I'm not going to sell the **chocolates**,” he says, and an “awful silence” falls over the room.

Caroni realizes that he is being targeted for blackmail—and, at the same time, sees that Brother Leon is more frightened of his students, particularly Jerry Renault, than he lets on. Once again Brother Leon reveals himself to be extremely petty and corrupt, with no qualms about abusing his power.



Caroni gives Leon what he wants, and is relieved to see that he has delivered the very information Leon was after. But when Leon dismisses Caroni without a second thought to the student's failing grade, Caroni fears he has gotten the short end of the stick.



Brother Leon continues blackmailing Caroni, seeming to imply that if the chocolate sale goes well—and if Renault consents to participate in it—the grade will be reversed. This puts a burden on Caroni to somehow involve himself in the underhanded power play, but Caroni is sickened when he realizes that he is a victim of chance—a random casualty in Brother Leon's power grab.



Though the Vigils' assignment is over—and everyone in the classroom, including Leon, knows it—Jerry continues to refuse selling the chocolates. As silence falls over the room, it is as if the world has come to an end. Bucking one tradition for the sake of upholding another is controversial but understood, but going against both the chocolate sale and the imposing, powerful Vigils is unheard of.



CHAPTER 18

That night in bed, Jerry himself is still completely uncertain as to what made him say “No” despite his assignment having ended; he interrogates himself, beating himself up for being so stupid. He feels sick and sweaty, and is unable to find the answer within his own mind as to why he refused the **chocolates**. He had been planning to accept them, ready for the embarrassing assignment to end and for life to go back to normal. He has dreaded facing Brother Leon each morning, and was looking forward to being able to see his teacher, who has been eyeing him with hatred for nearly two weeks, as a normal man again.

Jerry tries to settle down in bed and fall asleep. He worries that he is, like his father, sleeping his life away, fulfilling the prediction of the hippie in the Common, and “missing a lot of things in the world.” Jerry tries to dismiss the voices in his head and summons an image of a pretty girl he saw downtown earlier in the week. He reaches into his underwear to masturbate, but finds that he cannot get aroused.

CHAPTER 19

The next morning on the bus, Jerry feels sleep-deprived and sick. He tries to cram for a geography test, but cannot focus. A boy from school slips into the seat next to Jerry and tells him he has guts—he really let “Leon that bastard” have it. Jerry realizes, for the first time, that the struggle he’d seen as being exclusively between himself and Leon has also had a farther reach. The boy, a transfer student, admits that he is sick of selling **chocolates**, too, and admires Jerry’s ability to just say no. He tells Jerry that he is “cool,” and yet even as Jerry relishes the compliment, he is sickened by the thought of facing Brother Leon, and the terrible roll call, this morning and for many more beyond it.

The Goober is waiting for Jerry outside the school’s entrance, looking concerned. Jerry worries that his friend is not the cheerful, happy-go-lucky boy he was when school started up. The Goober asks Jerry why he refused the **chocolates** even after the assignment, and Jerry admits that he isn’t sure. The Goober tells Jerry that he is asking for trouble, and warns Jerry that Brother Leon won’t let him get away with abstaining from the sale. As the first bell rings, two more students walk past Jerry and the Goober, and one slaps Jerry on the buttocks, congratulating him on his bravery; the other urges Jerry to keep it up.

Jerry himself is also blindsided by his decision to continue refusing to sell the chocolates. Clearly, the novel has been building to this decision; Jerry’s fear of becoming a square, following mindless routines, and becoming just another cog in the Trinity machine has been palpable since the novel’s early pages. Jerry, however, seems surprised by his own impulses, and is clearly not in touch with the motivating factors in his decision to make himself an outcast for the sake of preserving his individuality.



In spite of having stood up to Brother Leon and the Vigils, Jerry still worries that he is in danger of missing out on life. He is so preoccupied by the drama at school that he cannot focus on himself or his own desires. He wants to be in control of his destiny, but in fact is being controlled by the repercussions of his choices.



Though Jerry is preoccupied with his decision and worried sick over his own actions, it seems as if other students in the school are actually admiring of Jerry’s small rebellion. Even this newfound popularity, though, is not enough to distract Jerry from the very real terror of facing down Leon, whose vendetta against Jerry is certain to be stronger than ever now.



Jerry and The Goober have both shown their individualism throughout the novel thus far. Jerry, however, has taken up his desire to be seen as an individual and run with it; The Goober is trapped within his own fears of being made a pariah, and wants for Jerry to conform to tradition no matter the personal cost. For The Goober, it is easier to blend in and go with the flow, even if it has its own psychological ramifications. Both boys are clearly stressed and struggling—they have taken different paths, but neither path is serving them.



As the boys head into school, The Goober begs Jerry to take the **chocolates**. Jerry says he can't—he is “committed now.” The Goober heads to class, while Jerry stops off at his locker. He opens it and sees the **poster** inside—it depicts a man standing on a beach, and features the quotation “Do I dare disturb the universe?” Jerry considers the poster, and the “mysterious” pull it has always had. It is traditional for Trinity boys to decorate their lockers, and Jerry chose this one. The bell rings, and Jerry hurries to class.

Jerry's poster bears a line from a T.S. Eliot poem, and fittingly asks the question of whether one person can ever “dare” to disturb the universe—interrupting the natural order of things and inserting oneself into the processes of nature. Jerry has kept with the Trinity tradition of hanging a poster, but has chosen for his poster something with an anarchist message, something that inspires him to take on a “dare” of his own alongside the “dare” of the Vigils.



In homeroom, Brother Leon calls roll. When Leon gets to Jerry's name, Jerry hesitates. It would be so easy, he thinks, to say yes, and to be just like all his other classmates. Instead, Jerry again answers “No,” and feels himself swept by a “deep and penetrating” sadness, which makes him feel completely alone.

Though Jerry has been feeling emboldened by the poster's message, as he denies the chocolates yet again he feels sad and isolated. The true nature of being a “disturbance” is being an outcast—not a celebrated hero.



CHAPTER 20

Brother Jacques delivers a lecture to his students. Every time he says the word “environment,” the boys all jump out of their chairs and perform an “insane jig,” then sit down again, stone-faced, as if nothing had happened. Brother Jacques, of course, does not know that “environment” is the trigger word for the large-scale Vigils prank; but Obie, who is a member of the class, of course does. Obie's own special assignment is to make certain that if Brother Jacques doesn't utter the word *environment* during a class period, a question that triggers the word is asked. Obie resents Archie for giving him this assignment “at this stage of the game,” in Obie's senior year.

This prank by the Vigils is a more harmless one—but still, it manages to be a sinister blend of physically and psychologically taxing to the students forced to undertake it. Obie is still indignant about Archie's power over him, and resentful of the fact that despite his seniority he, too, is still getting roped into Archie's strange and sinister psychological manipulations.



Over the course of the next fifteen minutes, Brother Jacques uses the word “environment” five times. He has clearly figured out the trigger word, and is torturing his students playfully without acknowledging that he is any the wiser. Obie wonders if Jacques has figured it out on his own, or whether Archie tipped him off; either way, it is the teacher, not the students, now in command. As class files out, Obie sees Archie lingering in the doorway, smirking, and vows to get the “bastard” back.

Brother Jacques is shown to be a canny teacher who gives as good as he gets; unlike Brother Leon, who is desperate to insert himself into student drama, or Brother Eugene, who is demoralized and shaken by it, Jacques is ready to fight back against the Vigils in small ways. He clearly disagrees with their existence, and wants to point out to his students how embarrassing and even painful things can be for them if they succumb mindlessly to the Vigils' commands.



CHAPTER 21

Kevin Chartier has been struggling to sell his **chocolates** for days, refused by neighbors and chased down the street by stray dogs. He complains over the phone to his best friend, Danny Arcangelo, who isn't faring much better. Danny has only sold one box—to a diabetic aunt who'll never eat them. Kevin wonders aloud to Danny if the "Renault kid" has the right idea in refusing to sell the chocolates. Danny asks if Jerry is still carrying out a Vigils assignment, but Kevin tells him that Jerry has gone rogue—he's doing "something else" now.

Elsewhere, two more Trinity boys—Howie Anderson and Richy Rondell—discuss how they, too, are fed up with the **chocolate** sale. Howie dramatically states that he is not going to sell any more chocolates. He is sick of paying to go to a school that just wants to turn its students into salesmen. Richy, seeing Howie's point of view, vows that he won't sell any more chocolates either.

Back at school, Archie waits in the stinking gymnasium for a meeting with Obie. Obie knows that Archie hates the gym and always finds ways to get out of physical education class, and Archie realizes that Obie really must hate him. Obie walks in, and Archie asks him what he wants—Archie says he's short on time, and has other places to be. Obie tells Archie that what they have to discuss, though, is very important. Obie tells Archie that Jerry Renault is still not selling chocolates, even after the end of his assignment. Archie doesn't seem to see the big deal in Jerry's refusal, and even calls his resistance to Brother Leon and the whole **chocolate** scheme "beautiful."

Obie points out that the student body, seeing clearly the clash between Jerry and Brother Leon, has begun taking sides in the issue. Something bigger is brewing, and the Vigils are involved whether they want to be or not, since they started the entire war. Archie, realizing the gravity of the situation, reassures Obie that "nobody defies The Vigils [...] and gets away with it." Archie tells Obie to arrange to have Jerry appear before the Vigils, and asks Obie to be prepared with all of the sale's facts and figures.

CHAPTER 22

Brian Cochran cannot believe his eyes—**chocolate** sales are dropping "at an alarming rate." Yesterday saw the sharpest drop of all, and Brian nervously worries what Brother Leon will say when he sees the dismal figures. Leon gives Brian the creeps, and Brian worries that Leon will punish him even though he is simply the bearer of bad news.

Jerry's influence is clearly beginning to spread throughout the school. Other Trinity boys, indignant about the small humiliations and frustrations they have to suffer on behalf of the chocolate sale, see Jerry and his refusal to participate as a beacon of hope—and an exciting break with the traditions that control their lives at school.



Throughout Trinity, the arguments against the chocolate sale are becoming more nuanced; students are beginning to see how the chocolate sale undermines them and distracts them from their studies, piling on coercion and guilt to get them to participate in something that does not directly serve their own educations at all.



Obie, resentful of Archie's power over him, seeks to get back at the boy in small ways—like getting him to attend a meeting in the stinky gym. Though Obie wants to go against Archie at every turn, even Obie must admit that Jerry's refusal to sell chocolates is threatening the Vigils' stronghold over the school. Archie, however, admiring as he is of any psychological manipulation, is enjoying seeing Brother Leon squirm—even though he himself has pledged the Vigils to Brother Leon.



Obie wants Archie to see how unamusing Jerry's rebellion actually is. Archie, a connoisseur of psychological games, has been seeing Jerry's refusal to sell chocolates as "beautiful," but has seemingly forgotten that Jerry's rebellion threatens the Vigils directly. Once he realizes the deeper potential of Jerry's insurrection to create chaos within the school, though, he is ready to fight back.



Brian Cochran is afraid of Brother Leon on a good day. On a bad day, which brings news Brother Leon will not like, Brian is downright terrified of facing Leon's wrath.



When Leon enters the room, Brian warns him right away that the figures are bad. Leon asks Brian to read off the names of the boys who have reached or surpassed their quota; there are only five of them, including David Caroni. Leon asks Brian to continue reading down the list in descending order of the number of **chocolate** boxes sold, and Leon listens intently as Brian does so.

When Brian at last reaches the bottom of the list and reads off “Renault...zero,” Brother Leon becomes incensed. He tells Brian that the other boys have become “infected” by Jerry’s apathy—at least, he says, the “carrier of the disease” is known. Brian looks on in horror as Leon whispers Jerry’s last name to himself, over and over, “like a mad scientist plotting revenge in an underground laboratory.”

Leon seems to relish hearing the names of those who are still committed to the sale, and is perhaps even taking mental notes of those who have remained loyal to him even in the face of Jerry’s rebellion.



Brother Leon is allowing Jerry to get under his skin in an unhealthy and even disturbing way. The way he speaks about Jerry is reminiscent of the very thing Leon cautioned his students against becoming in an earlier chapter—Nazis, or fascists—and his “mad,” unsettling repetition of Jerry’s name demonstrates just how unhinged and potentially violent Leon truly is.



CHAPTER 23

On the way to the bus stop on a no-practice afternoon, The Goober tells Jerry that he’s going to quit the football team. Jerry asks why, but rather than answer Jerry’s question, The Goober suggests the boys run the rest of the way to the stop. As they run, Jerry demands to know why The Goober is quitting. The Goober at last asks Jerry if he has heard what happened to Brother Eugene. Jerry answers that the Brother was transferred. The Goober counters that Brother Eugene is actually out on sick leave—according to rumor, he hasn’t been himself since the day of The Goober’s assignment.

Jerry, winded, stops running and asks The Goober what Brother Eugene has to do with football. The Goober answers that there is something “more than rotten” at Trinity—something “evil.” He then refuses to elaborate, saying that his choice to quit football is “personal.” Jerry, now truly concerned, asks The Goober what the matter is. The Goober answers that the school does terrible things to its students, breaks them down, and tortures them. The Goober points out that Jerry, too, is suffering due to his refusal to participate in the **chocolate** sale. Jerry insists that “it’s all a game,” but The Goober believes that there is something more sinister at work. He begs Jerry to sell the chocolates; Jerry asks The Goober to stay on the football team. The Goober insists he’s not giving anything else to Trinity.

In a moment of intense discomfort, The Goober seeks comfort in the one thing he still loves—running. The Goober is clearly deeply perturbed by his role in Brother Eugene’s disappearance from the school, and cannot shake the guilt he feels. The Goober is an individualist like Jerry, but also seems to be a more sensitive character, who tries to avoid trouble altogether rather than enduring it.



The Goober’s distaste for Trinity goes deeper than shame over his own actions—The Goober realizes that the way Trinity functions is through cruelty and coercion, and that Trinity boys become inured to both physical and psychological violence as their educations there continue. The Goober does not want to be a part of it any more—he attempts to warn Jerry of the discord and corruption he senses, but Jerry is still convinced that his rebellion is a small and inconsequential “game.” The Goober is not going to give into Trinity’s controlling mechanisms any more, even if he can’t convince Jerry to do the same.



CHAPTER 24

Brother Leon calls Archie on the telephone to tell the boy that he is in trouble—the **chocolates** are not selling, the sale is in jeopardy, and it is all Archie's fault. Archie asks if the sale's finances are bad—Archie has been tipped off by Brian Cochran, who believes that Leon is in deep trouble and that there is “more than chocolate” involved in the sale. Brian revealed that he overheard Brother Jacques and Leon talking, and Jacques accused Leon of “abusing his power of attorney” and “overextend[ing] the school's finances.” Brian told Archie that he believes Leon bought the chocolate with money he wasn't supposed to use.

Leon ignores Archie's question about finance and asks why Archie and his “friends” aren't able to exert more influence on the sale. Archie protests that the sale is not his problem, but Leon insists that it is—ever since Archie involved Renault and his protest, the assignment (and the sale) have backfired. Archie insists that Trinity boys are simply sick of selling **chocolates** every year. Leon menacingly warns Archie that the chocolates must be sold.

Archie asks Leon how he suggests Archie breathe new life into the sale, and Leon suggests Archie “begin with Renault,” and make him agree to sell his share. Leon is worried that discontented students will “rally around a rebel,” and urges Archie to have the Vigils throw their full weight behind the sale. If the sale goes down the drain, Leon warns, so will the Vigils.

Brother Leon and Archie are locked in a game of wits and psychological manipulation. Unfortunately, as they both love such games, they seem destined to circle one another endlessly in escalating displays of power and control. Brother Leon doesn't know that Archie knows Leon is in deep—but Archie leverages this information against Leon in order to squeeze more favor from the powerful Brother, who is in charge of the entire school in the Head's absence.



Leon is attempting to psychologically manipulate Archie into feeling responsibility for the sale, and to take the onus off of himself and his own poor financial decision-making.



Leon knows that Jerry's protest represents a challenge to the Vigils, as well as to Leon's own chocolate sale. By preying on Archie's fear of losing hold of any power, he blackmails Archie into directly confronting Jerry, hopefully putting an end to his rebellion against Leon and the sale.



CHAPTER 25

Jerry receives a ransom-note-like summons from the Vigils, ordering him to attend a meeting in half an hour. At the appointed time, he meets with the Vigils in a storage room off the gymnasium. On the lone table in the room, Archie has placed a single box of **chocolates**. Archie tauntingly asks Jerry if he would like to eat one, or even buy a box—at only two dollars, the chocolates are a “bargain.”

Archie is using a spare box of chocolates—a symbol throughout the novel for the desire for power and control—in order to attempt to physically tempt Jerry into heeding the Vigils' commands.



Archie asks the other members of the Vigils how many **chocolates** they've sold—they have all unloaded over twenty boxes each. Archie asks Jerry why he hasn't sold any at all, and Jerry contemplates how he should answer. Knowing he cannot win against the Vigils, he simply replies, "It's personal." Jerry wistfully thinks of how well things were going before all the chocolate drama—he'd even gotten a girl at the bus stop, Ellen Barrett (whose name he learned from reading her school notebook over her shoulder) to smile at him two days in a row. Jerry had been planning to look her up in the phone book tonight and give her a call, but now he is overwhelmed with a terrible feeling that he will never experience happiness again.

Archie tells Jerry that nothing is personal in the Vigils. To demonstrate the Vigils' sworn allegiance to one another, Archie asks one of the members how many times a day he masturbates, and he quickly answers "twice." There are no secrets in the Vigils, Archie says, and urges Jerry to tell them all why he won't sell the **chocolates**. The President of the Vigils, Carter, lets out an exasperated breath. He is bored with "this chocolate stuff," not to mention Archie's campaign of psychological torture—Carter prefers boxing, where "everything [is] visible."

Jerry says he simply doesn't want to sell the **chocolates**. Archie laughs at this, and asks Obie if Obie wants to come to school each day. Obie says he does not. Archie points out to Jerry that even though sometimes people don't want to do things, they have to. Archie then gives Jerry a new assignment: tomorrow, he tells Jerry to respond to his name during roll call with the statement, "Brother Leon, I accept the chocolates." Jerry is stunned, but Archie assures Jerry he's "getting off easy" since all they're doing is asking him to sell the chocolates—punishment for disobeying the Vigils is usually much worse.

At the use of the word "asking," Obie observes that Archie seems desperate, and even scared. He feels as if he has won a victory over Archie—Jerry has finally gotten to Archie and screwed him up. Obie knows that Jerry is not going to sell the **chocolates**—he is steadfast, whereas Archie is caving by simply "asking" him to give in. Archie dismisses the meeting, and Carter bangs the gavel, officially adjourning things. He thinks to himself that what Jerry needs is a quick blow to the jaw—he is contemptuous of Archie's desire to avoid physical violence.

Though Jerry has been in what is essentially open rebellion against the Vigils for weeks now, when actually confronted with their insidious might, he worries that his life as he knows it is about to come crashing down around his ears. He knows he has no real ammunition against the Vigils. For all his resistance against their reign and the chocolate sale, he is just one boy, and has no claim to power against the Vigils themselves.



Archie wants to demonstrate to Jerry how complete his control over the Vigils is—and how allegiant the Vigils are to a mission larger than themselves. Jerry understands that the Vigils sacrifice comfort, privacy, and indeed their individualism in order to be a part of the society.



As Archie's attempt to psychologically manipulate Jerry into selling the chocolates goes on, it seems as if Jerry will at last comply. Jerry is indeed cowed by the might of the Vigils, and the nebulous threat of "punishment" at their hands, but whether he will actually comply when he is so set on his mission of "disturbance" remains to be seen.



Obie—portrayed as the most observant and emotionally astute member of the Vigils—sees that Archie's power is waning. Moreso, he understands that Archie's fall is directly connected to Jerry's rise. As the Vigils squabble amongst themselves about what the best way to wrest control over the other students is, it becomes clear that they, too, understand that their grip on the school has begun to loosen.



CHAPTER 26

Jerry has called Ellen Barrett, but can't bring himself to say anything on the phone. Ellen's agitated voice asks if "Danny" is calling her. Jerry croaks out a "No," but when he asks if he is indeed speaking with Ellen, she doesn't answer. Jerry says that though Ellen doesn't know who he is, they smile at each other every day. Ellen asks if Jerry is a pervert, but Jerry says he's just the boy from the bus stop. Ellen seems confused, and asks, "What bus stop?" Jerry apologizes for bothering her and hangs up.

Jerry's heart beats wildly, and he wonders if he actually is some kind of pervert—refusing to sell the **chocolates** for so long, he thinks, must be some kind of perversion. Even after the Vigils' warning, Jerry reveals, he refused to sell the chocolates—and for the first time, his "No" brought him a sense of satisfaction. Jerry, suddenly hungry, goes into the kitchen to get some ice cream. He says out loud to no one: "My name is Jerry Renault and I'm not going to sell the chocolates."

Jerry's failure with Ellen Barrett directly parallels his failures at school. Jerry, for all his bravado and deliberate resistance, is still unable to exert power over others—especially over girls, the one thing he truly desires.



Jerry fears that he is just as morally bankrupt as the other boys in school—and perhaps even deviant or repellent. His self-assuredness is battered at by the Vigils, by Ellen's rejection, and by Brother Leon's hatred—but Jerry, in the face of all this, shows that he is committed to following through with what he has started.



CHAPTER 27

The Vigils have called a meeting—they have an assignment for a junior named Frankie Rollo. Archie regrets choosing Rollo, though—he is a troublemaker and a loner who does not participate in any school activities. His only talent is cheating. Archie asks Rollo to state his name before the Vigils, and Rollo protests. Archie asks Rollo if he's a big shot, and then admits that the Vigils actually like big shots—they love turning big shots, he says, into little shots.

Rollo urges Archie to "cut the shit"—he is not scared of the Vigils. The group, he says, can't even scare a "punk freshman" into selling **chocolates**. Carter strikes Rollo in the jaw, and Rollo recoils in pain. Carter punches Rollo once more, in the gut, and then orders the Vigils to get him out of the meeting. Archie is disappointed in the way Carter stole the spotlight from him, but admits to himself that Rollo was just the "curtain raiser" for the meeting; its real purpose is to discuss Jerry Renault.

As the Vigils call Frankie Rollo to a meeting and prepare to conscript him into their service, Archie has doubts about having chosen such a rebellious individual. Their group has already suffered enough humiliation through Renault's rebellion, and are playing with fire in choosing someone so volatile.



Archie's fears come true as Rollo mouths off against the Vigils, and points out that their inability to restrain and control Renault has made the rest of the student body question the Vigils' power. Carter attempts to control Rollo through physical violence, demonstrating his belief in the power violent masculinity holds.



Before Archie can get talking, however, Carter warns Archie that it is dangerous for them when students like Rollo start challenging the Vigils. Something is wrong, Carter says—and it's the Vigils themselves, for letting their name get swept up in the **chocolate** sale, and for letting Jerry Renault get away with defying them. Carter asks Obie to show the group what he found on a bulletin board this morning. Obie holds up a poster which reads "SCREW THE CHOCOLATES AND SCREW THE VIGILS." Obie pulled the sign down before many people got to see it. Carter doesn't think Jerry put the poster up—which means that more students than Jerry are questioning the Vigils' rule. Carter then asks Archie, the "brains of the outfit," what they should do.

Archie knows he must show Carter—and the rest of the group—that he alone can take care of Renault and the chocolates. Archie suggests the Vigils work double-time to ensure that the sale is over as quickly as possible. He points out that Renault will look foolish—traitorous, even—once the whole school devotes itself anew to the **chocolate** sale. Archie suggests the Vigils make it "cool" to sell chocolates, and bring school spirit back en vogue. Archie predicts that the school—Brother Leon, especially—will be grateful to the Vigils for turning the sale around, and the Vigils will once again enjoy power and immunity.

Carter assents to Archie's plan, and adjourns the meeting—but then warns Archie that his plan had better work, or Archie is out of the Vigils. Carter places Archie on probation until the last **chocolate** is sold. Archie is humiliated, but smiles at Carter anyway.

CHAPTER 28

At football practice, Jerry finds himself struggling. As he attempts to execute plays, his teammates tackle him to the ground angrily. Jerry can never see who it is who's attacking him, as they always come from behind, but knows that someone is trying to wipe him out on purpose.

That afternoon, when Jerry gets home from school, the phone is ringing. Jerry answers it, but there is only silence on the other end. When Jerry says "Hello" again there is a soft, menacing chuckle, and then a dial tone. That night, at eleven, the phone rings again—Jerry figures it is his father, calling from the late shift at the pharmacy. When Jerry answers the phone, though, there is silence and chuckling again.

Carter and Obie confront Archie with the reality of the Vigils' loosening grip on the school before Archie can talk and wheedle his way out of trouble. They still concede that Archie is the smartest in the group, and allow him the chance to offer a solution to the humiliation they have suffered—but they have made it clear to Archie that things are bad for the Vigils because of his own actions.



Archie scrambles to think of a solution that will solve the Vigils' problem, but also ensure that his own reputation is uncontested and untarnished. The chocolate sale is a way to satisfy Carter and the Vigils as well as Brother Leon, and keep himself out of hot water with everyone around him.



Despite his best efforts, Archie is losing power within the Vigils, and thus control over the school.



A new kind of assault begins against Jerry at this football practice. Though he is confused as to why it's happening, he realizes that he is being singled out and punished intentionally.



The next phase of the Vigils' attack against Jerry is psychological violent rather than physical; the disturbing phone call with a lewd, terrible chuckle at the other end serves to rattle Jerry and make him feel unsafe and watched even in his own home.



The next morning, Jerry gets to school to find that his locker has been vandalized—someone has smeared his **poster** with ink or paint, obliterating the question “Do I dare disturb the universe?” More than that, Jerry can see that his new gym sneakers have been slashed. Jerry realizes that the attacks on the field, the phone calls, and the vandalism are all deliberate and orchestrated. He feels nervous and ashamed.

That night, Jerry is awoken in the middle of the night by the phone ringing. His father has answered the phone, and urges Jerry to go back to sleep. Jerry knows that his father does not know that the phone calls are targeting him, and does not tell him the truth; he gets back into bed and falls into a strange, dreamless sleep.

In art class, Brother Andrew tells Jerry that he has not received an important project for a large percentage of the class grade. Jerry insists he already turned his project in, but Brother Andrew tells Jerry that the project was not on his desk. When Jerry is adamant that he already completed the assignment, the Brother agrees to look through his stack again, and to check the teacher’s lounge—but if he doesn’t find it, Brother Andrew warns, Jerry will fail the class.

Jerry, back at his locker, considers the damage inside. He ponders the question “Do I dare disturb the universe?” once more, and decides that he *does* dare. He feels that he understands the **poster** in a new way, and deeply identifies with the lone man on the expansive beach.

CHAPTER 29

Brian Cochran gleefully adds up the totals from the **chocolate** sale, excited to report the “staggeringly” inflated sales to Brother Leon and give him good news at last. Brian is uncertain as to how the numbers changed so quickly, but has witnessed the feverish salesmanship all over school and has heard rumors that the Vigils are behind the resurgence of interest. Brian knows that “more prominent” Vigils members have been bullying kids into selling chocolates, and loading up their own cars with chocolates and going off selling after school.

The “creepy” thing about the soaring sales, Brian notes, is how the boxes sold are evenly distributed among all the students. Just a few minutes ago, Carter brought in a wad of money, asked to see the roster, and then ordered Brian how to distribute the sales among students’ names. Brian doesn’t think this is quite fair, but also doesn’t want to draw attention to himself.

Jerry’s poster—one of the inciting factors in his rebellion against the chocolate sale—has been vandalized, as if to warn Jerry that if he continues to “disturb” the “universe” of Trinity any further, there will be even more dire consequences.



The assault extends to Jerry’s father, who does not realize what is going on. Now that others are involved, Jerry realizes that the Vigils will stop at nothing to demoralize him and conscript him into their service and traditions.



The assault is no longer on Jerry’s physical or psychological well-being, but on his very ability to succeed at school. The Vigils have demonstrated their intent to leave no corner of Jerry’s life untouched by their campaign.



Rather than being demoralized or cowed by any of this torture, Jerry is instead renewed in his determination to continue being a “disturbance” at Trinity, even if it means standing alone against waves of assault.



Brian Cochran can see very clearly what is happening—the Vigils are manipulating the chocolate sale and attempting to get the entire school back on board—but is too afraid of compromising his own new good standing within the school and within Brother Leon’s good graces to say anything.



Brian Cochran is a weapon of the Vigils, too, without knowing it. He is part of their campaign against Jerry through his reluctance to stand up for what is right—he is just part of another cruel Trinity tradition.



Brother Leon arrives in the classroom, and together the two double-check the figures. Fifteen thousand and ten boxes have been sold—there are roughly five thousand to go. Brother Leon is practically giddy. After their meeting, when Brian walks into the assembly hall to post the latest figures, he is met with cheers from the other students. Brian feels like a “hero.”

Any chance that Brian would stand up for what is right is demolished when Brian finds himself enjoying a newfound popularity amongst his classmates. He does not have to be afraid anymore due to his important role within the now-popular chocolate sale.



CHAPTER 30

Though most students are bringing their returns directly to Brian Cochran, there is no need for the **chocolate** roll each day—but Brother Leon continues calling it. The Goober notices how Leon takes an odd delight in the process, excessively praising the boys who have sold impressive numbers of chocolates. Leon still calls Jerry’s name every day, and every day, Jerry answers “No.”

Brother Leon is continuing to call roll in order to bring attention to Jerry’s insurrection, and hopefully turn his classmates against him.



One afternoon, after Jerry replies to the roll, a student raises his hand and asks Brother Leon to ask Jerry why he isn’t selling **chocolates** like everybody else. Brother Leon asks why the student wants to know. The student says it’s his “right” to know why Jerry isn’t doing his part for the school. Brother Leon asks Jerry if he would care to answer the question; Jerry replies that “it’s a free country,” and the other boys laugh. Leon instructs Jerry to be more specific.

Brother Leon’s psychological manipulation of his students has succeeded—or he has at least blackmailed yet another one of them into his service.



Jerry points out that Brother Leon did, at the start, say the sale was voluntary, and thus Jerry doesn’t feel he has to sell the **chocolates**. Someone asks Jerry if he thinks he’s better than everyone else, and Jerry replies that he doesn’t. “Who do you think you are,” someone asks, and Jerry answers that he is Jerry Renault and he is not going to sell the chocolates. The bell rings, but the boys don’t gather their things up right away. After a moment, they begin filing out.

Though Jerry points out that the sale is voluntary, this technicality does not matter—the sale is, for all intents and purposes, mandatory, considering how steeped in tradition and rote routine Trinity High is.



Later that afternoon, The Goober heads to the assembly hall to watch Brian Cochran post the latest **chocolate** returns. He is surprised to see the number fifty pop up next to his own name—though the other students applaud him, The Goober knows he has only sold twenty-seven. Rather than speak up, The Goober shrivels into the shadows—he doesn’t want any trouble. The Goober feels hardly anything, but for some reason he finds himself crying all the way to his locker.

The Goober is being roped into the Vigils’ assault against Jerry’s character whether he wants to be or not. Feeling completely helpless and powerless—not to mention unheard and disregarded by the very person he is trying to save—The Goober at last breaks down, unable to bear the manipulation any longer.



CHAPTER 31

As Jerry is leaving school, he hears a voice ask him what his hurry is. Several feet ahead of him, he sees Emile Janza. Janza begins taunting Jerry, and though Jerry attempts to deflect Janza's questions, he knows that what he says doesn't matter—Janza is looking for an opening, and he will find it; guys like him always do.

Jerry is tired—he has just come from a terrible football practice, and does not want to deal with Janza. Nevertheless, when Janza accuses Jerry of being a “wise guy,” Jerry asks why Janza thinks that of him. Janza replies that though Jerry puts on a “sincerity act,” he is not fooling Janza. Jerry, Janza says, lives in the closet. When Jerry asks Janza what he means, Janza touches Jerry's cheek and accuses Jerry of hiding the “deep dark secret” that he is a “fairy” and a “queer.”

Jerry does not respond, and Janza teases him for blushing. Janza accuses Jerry of polluting Trinity—not just by refusing to sell **chocolates**, but by spreading deviant homosexuality throughout the school. Jerry at last speaks up, shouting that he isn't a fairy, and calling Janza a son of a bitch. Jerry realizes he has walked right into Janza's trap. Janza begins laughing, and then summons five or six other boys from the nearby bushes and shrubbery. Before Jerry can defend himself or run away, the boys mob him and beat him to the ground until he throws up; only then do they withdraw in disgust.

CHAPTER 32

Jerry lies prone in the sweet, safe dark. He is afraid that if he moves, his body will come apart. He misses his mother intensely, and begins crying. After the beating was over, he managed to make it back to the locker room at school and clean himself up, feeling ashamed. Jerry reflects on how “funny” it is that when someone is violent to you, you're the one who has to hide, “as if you're the criminal.” After cleaning himself up, Jerry rode the bus home and took a warm bath, grateful that his father was working the late shift and would not have to see him in such a state.

Jerry begins falling asleep, but the telephone rings. Though he does not want to, he knows he must answer; to let it ring would be a sign of defeat. Jerry picks up the phone and says, “I'm still here,” then waits for the silence, the “lewd” chuckle on the other end, and the sound of the dial tone.

At just the sight of Janza, Jerry knows he is in trouble. He is wise enough now to realize what is happening to him, and to see that there is no way to escape the carefully-orchestrated, meticulously-controlled assaults against him.



Jerry does not want to rise to Janza's taunts—he knows they are designed to make him angry, and that every aspect of this interaction is being controlled by someone else. Still, when Janza accuses Jerry of being homosexual, the nature of the interaction changes—this is a new kind of assault—one on his fragile, burgeoning masculinity—that Jerry may not be able to stand.



Jerry knows that he is rising to Janza's insults against his better judgement, but once he has spoken out, he begins leaning into the inevitable. What he does not know is that he is not facing Janza alone—and once the others begin attacking Jerry, he is rendered totally vulnerable and powerless against their assault, and, by proxy, the assault of the Vigils.



Just as Jerry felt ashamed when his locker was vandalized, he feels deeply ashamed of having been subjected to such violence. He realizes he has no control over what is happening to him—he is entirely at the mercy of the Vigils, and it is all his fault.



Jerry does not wallow in his pain or lean into his defeat—he wants the Vigils to know that he is still ready to fight and resist their power.



Later that night, as Jerry is eating soup at the kitchen table, voices float up to Jerry and his father's third-floor apartment from the street, calling Jerry to "come out and play." Jerry carefully looks out the window—the street is empty, but the voices are loud and clear. Jerry watches as a neighbor shines his flashlight into the street and threatens to call the police. The voices call out "Bye, bye, Jerry," and dissipate.

Later that night, at two-thirty in the morning, the telephone rings again. Jerry's father answers it, echoing Jerry's earlier thought that allowing the phone to ring just lets the callers "get their kicks." Jerry urges his father to take the phone off the hook, but Jerry's father knows this is just another way of letting them win. Jerry's father asks if Jerry is okay; Jerry replies that he's fine, and then goes back to bed, but the phone rings through his dreams all night long.

CHAPTER 33

Archie, over the phone, chides Janza for recruiting others to beat up Jerry. Janza protests that he thought such a beating would be "psychological," the kind of thing Archie is "always talking about." Archie asks if Janza used "the queer pitch" on Jerry, and Janza replies that he did, and that just as Archie predicted it would, it worked like a charm. Archie replies that the surest way to get under a guy's skin is to accuse him of being something he isn't.

Emile asks Archie what's next, but Archie advises Emile to cool it for now—though he is keeping Janza in "reserve" for other things that are in the works. Emile asks Archie, once more, about the picture; Archie at last admits that there never was any picture, and tells Emile to stick with him. "We need men like you," Archie tells Emile, and Emile becomes excited at the prospect of being asked to join the Vigils at last.

CHAPTER 34

Suddenly, Jerry is as invisible as a ghost. Everyone at school ignores him, avoids him, and gives him a wide berth in the hallway. Jerry feels as if he is contaminated with a terrible disease. Jerry tries to say hello to a few classmates, but they merely look through him. When Jerry walks through the halls, it is as if he is Moses parting the Red Sea. When Jerry opens his locker, he finds that the **poster** and sneakers are gone, and the whole thing has been scrubbed clean.

The physical threats against Jerry continue, and he starts to wonder, perhaps, if he has in fact gotten in over his head in standing up against the Vigils' might.



Jerry's father is now being roped into the Vigils' assault, but Jerry does not let his father know what is going on—perhaps he wants to protect him, or perhaps admitting the truth of what's happening would be shameful or embarrassing, indicative of how deeply Jerry has lost control of his own life.



Janza longs to impress Archie in order to gain access to the Vigils, and employing a "psychological" attack against Jerry seemed to be the surest way to do so. The revelation that Archie instructed Janza to bait Jerry about being homosexual in order to get under his skin shows just how tightly controlled and prescribed every act of violence against Jerry truly is.



Janza is so desperate for Archie's approval—and the chance to join the Vigils and be accepted by his peers—that he does not even react violently to the news that the picture was always a fabrication. Janza, too, has been roped in and controlled by the Vigils, whether he knows it or not.



Compared to the physical and psychological violence Jerry has faced in the last few days, receiving the silent treatment is a welcome reprieve from the assaults that have been coming his way at all hours of the day. Eerily, the damage done to his locker has been cleaned up—as if Jerry doesn't exist at all anymore. In attempting to erase Jerry from school, the orchestrators of this mass freeze are attempting to erase his influence.



In his classes, Jerry feels as if his teachers, too, are icing him out. Jerry resigns himself to the freeze, and eventually relaxes into his newfound invisibility—he is tired of being afraid, intimidated, and attacked. Jerry looks everywhere for The Goober, but can't find him; he doesn't blame the Goober for wanting to stay home with such chaos going on at school.

Jerry settles into being frozen out by everyone else. Though he longs for The Goober's company, he himself can admit that things are so bad at school that he'd like to stay home, too.



As Jerry walks towards the stairs at lunchtime, he feels himself being suddenly pushed from behind. He begins to fall, but somehow manages to grab the railing. As a group of boys pass him, they laugh, and Jerry knows he is not invisible anymore.

Jerry's false sense of security is interrupted as if on cue when his schoolmates remind him that the violence will be recurrent and unpredictable.



Brother Leon enters the office just as Brian Cochran finishes his final tabulation. Brian excitedly announces that the **chocolate** sale is over—all of the chocolates have been sold, and ninety-eight percent of the money has been turned in. Leon double checks the figures hungrily. Brian speaks up after a moment to admit that he has found something odd in the figures—the total comes to nineteen thousand nine hundred and fifty boxes sold, right on the nose. Usually there is spoilage, or boxes get lost or stolen—but this year, every box minus Jerry's exact quota is accounted for. Leon slowly explains, as if to a young child, that Jerry's boxes are the only fifty missing, and Brian realizes that Leon does not want to see the truth—he is only interested in the sales.

Brian Cochran knows that the Vigils have been manipulating the sale in order to point to Jerry's status as a pariah and even a traitor even more plainly—but when he attempts to raise this concern with Brother Leon, Brian finds that Leon doesn't care who or what is hurt, damaged, or manipulated as a casualty of the sale. All he cares about, at the end of the day, are securing the numbers and getting himself out of financial hot water.



Leon announces to Brian that the **chocolate** sale has “disproven a law of nature”—one rotten apple does not spoil the bunch. School spirit has prevailed, Leon says, and Brian wonders if the brother is actually right. Brian thinks briefly that it's wrong to claim that the school is more important than individuals within it, but gives up this train of thought quickly—he is relieved that the sale is over, and so is his job as treasurer.

Brother Leon reveals that his stake in the chocolate sale is, after all, greater than just his own financial concerns. He also wanted to use the sale, alongside the Vigils, to prove that outsiders, rebels, and iconoclasts have no place at Trinity, and that tradition will always win.



Elsewhere in the school, Archie asks Obie if Obie has set the fifty boxes aside—Obie says he has, and asks what they're for. Archie announces that tomorrow night, on the football field, there is going to be a special assembly—one that is strictly for the student body, and not the Brothers. Obie asks if even Renault will be there, and Archie says that he will—they are giving Jerry one last chance to get rid of his **chocolates** by raffling them off.

Archie is up to something—he is cooking up a scheme to secure power over the student body once and for all, and bring the chocolate sale to its conclusion in a dramatic show of force and the power of tradition and coercion.



CHAPTER 35

The night of the raffle—"a raffle like no other in any school's history"—Archie watches as the stadium seats fill up with students. Archie is the architect of the event, and he stands on an improvised stage—and makeshift boxing ring—that the Vigils erected earlier that afternoon. Archie has arranged for no Brothers to be present by passing the event off as a football rally for students only—all of the brothers are a quarter mile away from the field, in their on-campus residence. Archie marvels at his success in manipulating such an event as he looks at Jerry and Janza, standing alone in the boxing ring on the football field.

Archie had called Jerry on the phone and offered him the chance to get revenge on Janza, and on the entire school. Archie framed the event as an endcap to the **chocolate** sale—a way for Renault to finally move forward. Archie "guarantee[d]" Jerry that after the match, the entire chocolate affair would be over and done with. Now, looking out on the gathered students in the stands, Archie marvels at his own ability to "con anybody."

Even Obie has to admit that Archie has pulled something amazing off. Obie looks at Jerry in the center of the ring and thinks he looks like a "poor dumb doomed kid." Obie knows that Jerry can't win against Archie—no one can.

Jerry is nervous as he waits for the match to start. He knows that agreeing to the fight was a mistake, but it is too late to back out now. Worst of all, Jerry realizes that Archie has been counting on Jerry to feel this way—to get so pumped up about revenge that he would submit himself to a humiliating fool's errand. As Archie explains the rules of the match to both Jerry and Janza, Jerry accepts them. Now is his chance to strike back against Trinity and all the abuse it harbors—including guys like Archie and Janza, who will do horrible things to the world when they leave the walls of Trinity.

Brian Cochran is in charge of selling raffle tickets, and they are selling "like dirty pictures." Wooed by Archie's compliments on how well Brian handled the **chocolate** sale, he allowed himself to be talked into doing the raffle. He knew the premise of the event all along, but is now amazed to see that it is actually coming to fruition.

Archie feels unchallenged power and control as he surveys the historic event he has designed. Having been unable to force Renault to comply with Trinity tradition, Jerry has created a new "tradition" which is in and of itself an innovation—an ordinary raffle that has stakes unlike any Trinity has seen before.



Archie successfully manipulated the stressed, worn-down Jerry into competing in a dangerous tournament. The psychological violence Archie has been enacting upon Jerry for weeks has taken its toll, and Jerry was deeply susceptible to Archie's "con."



For all of Obie's hatred of Archie, he is—and, throughout the novel, often has been—impressed by the command Archie has over the school. Obie seems at last resigned to Archie's uncontested power.



Despite Jerry's bad feeling that he will suffer in the match—and the realization that he has submitted, at last, to Archie's power—he still thinks that he has a chance to fight back against the power structures that allow rotten, even "evil" boys, to flourish at Trinity and also in the world beyond it. This also shows Cormier gesturing to the world beyond the walls of Trinity, reminding the reader that all tyrannical people start out as children, and surely some of them as children like Archie and Janza.



Brian Cochran is a pawn in Archie's grab at power, just as he was a pawn in Leon's. Brian is too afraid of upsetting the status quo to stand up against what he knows is wrong.



Emile Janza, meanwhile, is tired of being treated like a bad guy. He just likes to get under people’s skin every once in a while, and keep people afraid of him. After Janza realized that Archie’s “picture” had been a fabrication all along, he was talked into the boxing match nonetheless by the chance to get back at Renault—in Archie’s estimation, a “square” who regularly screws things up for people like Archie and Emile. Now, Emile looks across the stage at Jerry, hungry for combat—ready to “wreck Renault” no matter what is written on the raffle tickets. In the back of his mind, he wonders if the infamous picture is real after all.

Emile Janza, for all of his bravado and power, is himself insecure in many ways about many things. He does not want his power contested by people like Jerry, and does not want to anger Archie on the off chance that Archie’s blackmail turns out to be real. Janza’s continued questioning of the picture’s existence, even after Archie admitted it was never real, demonstrates how psychologically manipulative Archie’s mind games truly are.



CHAPTER 36

Archie surveys the raffle tickets, which each bear an instruction for one of the fighters: for example, “Janza, right to jaw.” The “unexpected twist” on a traditional raffle came to Archie in what he feels was a stroke of genius—he has placed Renault at the mercy of the school, who will be more united than ever as they control Janza and Renault like automatons. Carter approaches Archie and expresses surprise but excitement at how fast the tickets are selling. Carter tells Archie that he doesn’t know how Archie does it. Archie replies that all people are greedy and cruel: this raffle has been so popular because, as Archie says, everyone present is a “bastard.”

Archie has found a way, at last, to seamlessly blend physical and psychological torture, satisfying all of the Vigils’ desire for blood and chaos. Archie has manipulated both Jerry and Janza into accepting their role in the Vigils’ last grab at power over the student body, and has preyed upon all of the other Trinity students’ basest, most despicable desires in order to create an event that satisfies his own terrible need to torture, humiliate, and denigrate others.



Carter tries to hide his disgust—he feels that Archie is repellent, and always has an uncanny ability to make Carter feel as if there is no good anywhere in the world. Carter has always thought of himself as a “good guy,” but now realizes that perhaps he isn’t. As Carter drifts away to be alone, Brian Cochran tells Archie that the tickets are entirely sold out.

Carter, who has always seen himself as above Archie, somehow—perhaps due to his more conventional popularity and no-nonsense approach to maintaining the Vigils’ power—now realizes that he is just as complicit in all the suffering within Trinity as the despicable Archie.



Archie stands on the platform and lifts his head up to the bleachers—the entire student body quiets down. In front of the platform are the last remaining **chocolates**—fifty boxes—stacked in a pyramid. Carter walks to the center of the platform and gestures for silence. Archie is ready to begin the “raffle,” but is shocked to see Obie walking onto the platform, carrying the **black box** in his hands.

Archie takes the stage, believing he has secured unfettered power over the student body. However, he has forgotten about the failsafe of the black box—the one thing in the school that threatens his control.



Obie smiles maliciously, thrilled to have caught Archie off-guard. He feels that in surprising Archie, he has at last triumphed over him. Carter had expressed doubt about using the **black box** when Obie first broached the idea with him—but, as Obie pointed out, the four hundred students in the stands “yelling for blood” don’t really care whose blood it is at this point.

Obie’s desire to see Archie fall and fail reveals his own hunger for power and control. He knows that there is only one way to get at Archie anymore, and fully intends to milk this last, desperate grab at control over Archie for all it’s worth.



Obie wanted to try and fix the results, filling the **box** with black marbles, but Carter had protested. Carter did insist, though, that Archie be made to pull from the box twice—once for Renault, and once for Janza. Now, at the sight of the black box, the bleachers go completely silent—only members of the Vigils have ever seen it before tonight, and yet it is a legend in the school.

Archie reaches into the box and pulls out a white marble, quickly. He drops it back in, and then selects another. He allows for just a moment of dramatic tension, praying he hasn't come so far to be "denied at the last moment." He opens his palm and holds the marble up for the whole school to see—it is white.

Carter apparently did not echo Obie's fears of Archie's total control enough to manipulate him into losing—but Carter's desire for Archie to pull from the box twice shows that he is just as desirous of Archie getting his just desserts as Obie.



Archie no doubt feels another surge of total invincibility and control flood him as he conquers the black box twice more—in front of the entire school, no less, putting his dominance over fate itself on display for all to see.



CHAPTER 37

The Goober arrives at the last minute and makes his way up the bleachers. He had been reluctant to come, having spent the last three days sick in bed, not wanting either to witness Jerry's humiliation or be reminded of his own betrayals. Now, huddled in his seat, The Goober listens as Carter explains the rules of the "crazy" fight to the gathered crowd: the kid whose blow ends the fight will receive the prize. The crowd is impatient, and some are even chanting "Kill 'em, kill 'em." The Goober is unsettled and worried.

Carter reaches into a cardboard box held by Obie and pulls out the first slip of paper. It instructs Renault to hit Janza with a right to the jaw. Jerry and Janza face each other; in compliance with the rules, Janza lowers his gloves. Jerry hesitates, but the crowd calls out for action. Janza himself begins taunting Jerry, asking if the "fairy" is afraid. Jerry reels back and then strikes at Janza, but barely grazes him.

Carter pulls out another slip; this one instructs Janza to hit Jerry with a right uppercut to the jaw. Jerry plants himself, and Janza strikes him hard. Jerry is in intense pain, and staggers back, tasting blood. Carter calls out another command, instructing Janza to hit Jerry in the stomach. Janza strikes Jerry, knocking the wind out of him. The next slip orders Jerry to strike back at Janza, and it is a palpable hit Jerry makes—he is surprised by his own strength.

The Goober did not want to bear witness to his friend's pain and humiliation any longer, so he skipped school several days in a row. Now, though, at the moment of truth, The Goober cannot hide any longer—he needs to face the evil he senses within Trinity head-on.



As in his earlier fight with Janza, Jerry is riled to anger by the accusation of being gay. It is unclear, though, whether it is the specific insult itself or simply, as Archie said earlier, the insistence that Jerry is something he isn't that incites Jerry to violence yet again. Jerry's blow is so charged with anger that he loses control and misses, surrendering to the chaos within.



As the fight goes on, it appears that Janza and Jerry are more or less evenly matched, despite the chaotic, random nature of the fight they have agreed to partake of.



The next slip is Janza's, as is the one after that—the second slip, however, instructs Janza to deliver a “low blow to the groin.” Carter realizes that he has just delivered a command for an illegal punch, but Janza, all worked up, is already rearing back. Jerry instinctively deflects the blow, and the crowd goes insane. “Kill ‘im, Janza,” someone screams, and then Janza begins whaling on Jerry in earnest, totally ignoring of the rules.

Carter realizes things are out of control, and looks around for help. Obie is nowhere to be seen; neither is Archie. Jerry is having trouble defending himself, and wishes he could just get one more hit on Janza in. When the tired Janza lags for a moment, Jerry takes his opening and swings. Janza stumbles backwards, but the crowd begins booing Jerry. Jerry looks out to the crowd and sees Archie in the stands, grinning. Jerry realizes he has become a violent animal in allowing Archie to do this to him.

Janza begins beating Jerry again. From up in the stands, The Goober counts the blows—fifteen, sixteen, and counting. He leaps to his feet and cries for the match to stop, but the crowd's cheers drown him out: “Kill him, kill him” they are chanting. The Goober watches as Jerry sinks to the ground “like a hunk of meat cut loose from a butcher's hook”—and then, abruptly, the lights go out.

Just before the lights went out, Obie had turned away from the platform, unable to bear the sight of blood. Looking away from the bleachers, his eyes fell upon a small hill; on the hill was Brother Leon, wrapped in a black coat, watching the whole thing unfold. As darkness fell, Obie lost sight of Leon.

Archie stumbles away from the bleachers toward the utility building, but there is a veritable stampede already as students pour from the bleachers, lighting matches and cigarette lighters. Archie falls and gets back on his feet; as he reaches the door of the utility building, the lights go back on. Archie opens the door, and inside Brother Jacques is waiting for him, his hand on the switch. Brother Jacques greets Archie coolly, calling him the “villain” of the entire operation.

Jerry's desire to defend himself is, as in his earlier fight against Janza, so instinctual that he cannot sublimate it. The chaos and confusion of the moment in which Janza attempts the illegal hit excites and riles the students in the stand—who, as per the Vigils' prediction—are desperate for blood no matter whose it is.



Jerry is in deep trouble—danger, even—and is desperate for the chance to reclaim power in the fight with Janza. In the moment he finally does, however, he realizes that his idea of “control” is an illusion. He is completely at the mercy of Archie's control over him, and, by proxy, the Vigils' traditions of violence and manipulation.



As the students cheer for Janza to “kill” Jerry, it seems for a few terrible moments like he actually might be able to. Jerry is no match for Janza after all, and his physical defeat is symbolic of the emotional and psychological defeat in his realization that he too is now contributing to the “evil” traditions upholding Trinity.



Brother Leon has been longing for Jerry's defeat for months now, and the chance to witness his fall is his reward for all his strife over the sale. Leon is so malicious and unstable that he has forgotten that his students are children—he sees them only as threats to his power, and inappropriately longs for their suffering in retaliation for his own discomfort.



It seems, in this moment, as if Archie has lost control not just over his meticulously-planned rally, but perhaps stands to lose his power within the Vigils and over the school more broadly, as well.



CHAPTER 38

Jerry awakens out of a black, wet darkness to someone calling his name. He can hear that whoever is calling him is scared—after a moment, he feels intense pain, and opens his eyes. He realizes that The Goober is cradling him. The stands are empty—Brother Jacques and a few other teachers have chased everyone away. The Goober and Obie have called for a doctor, and The Goober assures Jerry that everything will be okay, but Jerry knows it won't be. From deep inside his own pain, he wishes he could warn the Goober to play football, sell **chocolates**, and do “whatever they want [him] to do.” He wants to warn Goober not to disturb the universe—“otherwise, they murder you.”

As an ambulance approaches, Brother Jacques asks Archie why he did all of this to Jerry. Archie says he doesn't know what Jacques is talking about, but Jacques does not let Archie off easy. He informs Archie that the students were about to riot, and that if someone hadn't fetched him and the other brothers from the residence, something truly terrible could have happened to Jerry. Archie doesn't answer Jacques—he feels the brother has “spoiled the evening.”

Leon approaches and puts an arm around Jacques's shoulder. He asks if Jacques has everything under control, and Jacques answers coldly that a disaster was “barely averted.” Leon sunnily tells Jacques that “boys will be boys.” Turning to Archie, Leon says that though Archie did not use his best judgement tonight, Leon knows Archie did what he did “for Trinity.” Brother Jacques turns and stalks away. Archie smiles, knowing that with Brother Leon on his side, it is going to be a great year.

CHAPTER 39

Archie and Obie are sitting in the bleachers. Obie realizes that this is where the two of them first saw Jerry Renault, the day they selected him for the **chocolate** assignment. Obie attempts to reprimand Archie, but Archie insists that Jacques already lectured him—luckily, he was rescued by Leon. Obie calls Leon a “bastard,” and tells Archie that Leon was watching the whole fight from a distance. Archie reveals that it was he who tipped Leon off about the fight—he figured the brother would “enjoy himself.” Obie warns Archie that someday, Archie will get what he deserves.

Jerry has been beaten both physically and psychologically. He wants to warn The Goober to conform to whatever is asked of him in order to avoid facing the kind of pain Jerry is dealing with now. Jerry's spirit has been broken—a dark and unlikely ending for a young adult novel, but one that feels inevitable in the wake of all the humiliation and torture Jerry has suffered. Whereas getting “murdered” at football tryouts was once a point of pride and inspiration for Jerry, he has been so thoroughly worn down that he now feels as if his spirit truly has been killed.



Jacques attempts to demonstrate to Archie the grave nature of his actions, and the serious damage he could have done. Archie, however, sees Jacques only as a threat to his power—and his fun.



Brother Leon, having had the success he wanted both in the chocolate sale and in his humiliation and defeat of Jerry Renault, is firmly in Archie's service—as Archie is in his. Together, the two stand to wreak devastating havoc on the school—a prospect which delights Archie and, seemingly, Leon as well. Evil has apparently won—the “rotten” fabric of Trinity High has prevailed.



Obie's ineffectual resistance against Archie echoes, ironically, Brother Leon's “demonstration” involving Bailey earlier in the novel. Obie has the power to stand up to Archie and contest the violence he does each day to teachers and students alike, but he is too nervous to take a stand, too afraid of losing his own power, and too mired in tradition to take any real action against Archie.



Archie tells Obie that he's going to forget what he and Carter did earlier with the **black box**. Obie hopes aloud that perhaps, the next time, the black box will work—or maybe another kid like Renault will come along. Archie doesn't answer, and instead asks what happened to the chocolates. Obie replies that the students raided them in the confusion. Archie is hungry, and asks Obie if he has "a **Hershey** or anything." Obie says he doesn't. The lights go off again, and Obie and Archie sit in silence for a while before making their way home in darkness.

Archie's strange, unsettling craving for chocolate—a metaphor for his desire for power and control—has not been slaked even by his victory over Jerry and his renewed claim to power over the school. The book's ending in total darkness represents the darkness that has overtaken Trinity, and which the students will have to feel their way through every day from now on, until something or someone else comes back to hopefully unseat the "rotten" hierarchy at place within the school.





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