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Damned



Par Chuck Palahniuk
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Par Chuck Palahniuk : Damned
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteur'Are you there, Satan? It's me, Madison'Meet Madison, whip-tongued daughter of a narcissistic film star and a billionaire, abandoned at a Swiss boarding school over Christmas while her parents are off adopting more orphans. Madison dies of a marijuana overdose and awakes to find herself in Hell, sharing her cell with a motley crew of young sinners that's almost too good to be true. Welcome to the afterlife as only Palahniuk could imagine it - he makes eternal torment, well, simply divine.ExtraitI.Are you there, Satan? Its me, Madison. Im just now arrived here, in Hell, but its not my fault except for maybe dying from an overdose of marijuana. Maybe Im in Hell because Im fat--a Real Porker. If you can go to Hell for having low self-esteem, thats why Im here. I wish I could lie and tell you Im bone-thin with blond hair and

big ta-tas. But, trust me, Im fat for a really good reason. To start with, please let me introduce myself. How to best convey the exact sensation of being dead... Yes, I know the word convey. Im dead, not a mental defective. Trust me, the being-dead part is much easier than the dying part. If you can watch much television, then being dead will be a cinch. Actually, watching television and surfing the Internet are really excellent practice for being dead. The closest way I can describe death is to compare it to when my mom boots up her notebook computer and hacks into the surveillance system of our house in Mazatlan or Banff. Look, shed say, turning the screen sideways for me to see, its snowing. Glowing softly on the computer would be the interior of our Milan house, the sitting room, with snow falling outside the big windows, and by long distance, holding down her Control, Alt and W keys, my mom would draw open the sitting room drapes all the way. Pressing the Control and D keys, shed dim the lights by remote control and wed both sit, on a train or in a rented town car or aboard a leased jet, watching the pretty winter view through the windows of that empty house displayed on her computer screen. With the Control and F keys, shed light a fire in the gas fireplace, and wed listen to the hush of the Italian snow falling, the crackle of the flames via the audio monitors of the security system. After that, my mom would keyboard into the system for our house in Cape Town. Then log on to view our house in Brentwood. She could simultaneously be all places but no place, mooning over sunsets and foliage everywhere except where she actually was. At best, a sentry. At worst, a voyeur. My mom will kill half a day on her notebook computer just looking at empty rooms full of our furniture. Tweaking the thermostat by remote control. Turning down the lights and choosing the right level of soft music to play in each room. Just to keep the cat burglars guessing, shed tell me. Shed toggle from camera to camera, watching the Somali maid clean our house in Paris. Hunched over her computer screen, shed sigh and say, My crocus are blooming in London.... From behind his open business section of the Times, my dad would say, The plural is crocuses. Probably my mom would cackle then, hitting her Control and L keys to lock a maid inside a bathroom from three continents away because the tile didnt look adequately polished. To her this passed for way-wicked, good fun. Its affecting the environment without being physically present. Consumption in absentia. Like having a hit song you recorded decades ago still occupy the mind of a Chinese sweatshop worker youll never meet. Its power, but a kind of pointless, impotent power. On the computer screen a maid would place a vase filled with fresh-cut peonies on the windowsill of our house in Dubai, and my mom would spy by satellite, turning down the air-conditioning, colder and colder, with a tapping keystroke via her wireless connection, chilling that house, that one room, meat-locker cold, ski-slope cold, spending a kings ransom on Freon and electric power, trying to make some doomed ten bucks worth of pretty pink flowers last one more day. Thats what its like to be dead. Yes, I know the word absentia. Im thirteen years old, not stupid--and being dead, ye gods, do I comprehend the idea of absentia. Being dead is the very essence of traveling light. Being dead-dead means nonstop, twenty-four/seven, three hundred sixty-five days a year... forever. How it feels when they pump out all of your blood, you dont want me to describe. Probably I shouldnt even tell you Im dead, because no doubt now you feel awfully superior. Even other fat people feel superior to Dead People. Nevertheless, here it is: my Hideous Admission. Ill fess up and come clean. Im out of the closet. Im dead. Now dont hold it against me. Yes, we all look a little mysterious and absurd to each other, but no one looks as foreign as a dead person does. We can forgive some stranger her choice to practice Catholicism or engage in homosexual acts, but not her submission to death. We hate a backslider. Worse than alcoholism or heroin addiction, dying seems like the greatest weakness, and in a world where people say youre lazy for not shaving your legs, then being dead seems like the ultimate character flaw. Its as if youve shirked life--simply not made enough serious effort to live up to your full potential. You quitter! Being fat and dead--let me tell you--thats the double whammy. No, its not fair, but even if you feel sorry for me, youre probably also feeling pretty darn smug that youre alive and no doubt chewing on a mouthful of some poor animal that had the misfortune to live below you on the food chain. Im not telling you all of this to gain your sympathy. Im thirteen years old, and a girl, and Im dead. My name is Madison, and the last thing I need is your stupid condescending pity. No, its not fair, but its how people do. The first time we meet another person an insidious little voice in our head says, I might wear eyeglasses or be chunky around the hips or a girl, but at least Im not Gay or Black or a Jew. Meaning: I may be me--but at least I have the good sense not to be YOU. So I hesitate to even mention that Im dead because everyone already feels so darned superior to dead people, even Mexicans and AIDS people. Its like when learning about Alexander the Great in our seventh-grade Influences of Western History class, what keeps running through your head is: If Alexander was so brave and smart and... Great... whyd he die? Yes, I know the word insidious. Death is the One Big Mistake that none of us EVER plans to make. Thats why the

bran muffins and the colonoscopies. Its how come you take vitamins and get Pap smears. No, not you--you're never going to die--so now you feel all superior to me. Well, go ahead and think that. Keep smearing your skin with sunblock and feeling yourself for lumps. Dont let me spoil the Big Surprise. But, to be honest, when you're dead probably not even homeless people and retarded people will want to trade you places. I mean, worms get to eat you. Its like a complete violation of all your civil rights. Death ought to be illegal but you dont see Amnesty International starting any letter-writing campaigns. You dont see any rock stars banding together to release hit singles with all the proceeds going to solve MY getting my face chewed off by worms. My mom would tell you Im too flip and glib about everything. My mom would say, Madison, please dont be such a smart aleck. Shed say, You're dead; now just calm down. Probably me being dead is a gigantic relief to my dad; this way, at least, he wont have to worry about me embarrassing him by getting pregnant. My dad used to say, Madison, whatever man ends up with you, hes going to have his hands full.... If my dad only knew. When my goldfish, Mister Wiggles, died we flushed him down the toilet. When my kitten, Tiger Stripe, died I tried the same deal, and we had to call a plumber to snake the pipes. What a big mess. Poor Tiger Stripe. When I died, I wont go into the details, but lets say some Mr. Pervy McPervert mortician got to see me naked and pump out all my blood and commit God only knows what deranged carnal high jinks with my virginal thirteen-year-old body. You can call me glib, but death is about the biggest joke around. After all the permanent waves and ballet lessons my mom paid for, here I am getting a hot-spit tongue bath from some paunchy, depraved mortuary guy. I can tell you, when you're dead, you pretty much have to give up your demands about boundaries and personal space. Just understand, I didnt die because I was too lazy to live. I didnt die because I wanted to punish my family. And no matter how much I slag my parents, dont get the idea that I hate them. Yes, for a while I hung around, watching my mom hunched over her notebook computer, tapping the keys Control, Alt, and L to lock the door of my bedroom in Rome, my room in Athens, all my rooms around the world. She keyboarded to close all my drapes after that, and turn down the air-conditioning and activate the electrostatic air filtration so not even dust would settle on my dolls and clothes and stuffed animals. It simply makes sense that I should miss my parents more than they miss me, especially when you consider that they only loved me for thirteen years while I loved them for my entire life. Forgive me for not sticking around longer, but I dont want to be dead and just watching everybody while I chill rooms, flicker the lights, and pull the drapes open and shut. I dont want to be simply a voyeur. No, its not fair, but what makes earth feel like Hell is our expectation that it should feel like Heaven. Earth is earth. Dead is dead. Youll find out for yourself soon enough. It wont help the situation for you to get all upset. II. Are you there, Satan? Its me, Madison. Please dont get the impression that I dislike Hell. No, really, its way swell. Tons better than I expected. Honestly, its obvious youve worked very hard for a very long time on the roiling, surging oceans of scalding-hot barf, and the stinking sulfur smell, and the clouds of buzzing black flies. If my version of Hell fails to impress you, please consider that to be my own shortcoming. I mean, what do I know? Probably any grown-up would pee herself silly, seeing the flying vampire bats and majestic, cascading waterfalls of smelly poop. No doubt the fault is entirely my own, because if Id ever imagined Hell it was as a fiery version of that classic Hollywood masterpiece *The Breakfast Club*, populated, lets remember, by a hypersocial, pretty cheerleader, a rebel stoner type, a dumb football jock, a brainy geek, and a misanthropic psycho, all locked together in their high school library doing detention on an otherwise ordinary Saturday except with every book and chair being blazing on fire. Yes, you might be alive and Gay or Old or a Mexican, lording that over me, but consider that Ive had the actual experience of waking up on my first day in Hell, and youll just have to take my word for what all this is like. No, its not fair, but you can forget about the fabled tunnel of bright, spectral-white light and being greeted by the open arms of your long-deceased grandma and grandpa; maybe other people have reported that blissful process, but consider that those people are currently alive, or they remained living for sufficient time to report on their encounter. My point is: Those people enjoyed whats clearly labeled a near-death experience. I, on the other hand, am dead, with my blood long ago pumped out and worms munching on me. In my book that makes me the higher authority. Other people, like famous Italian poet Dante Alighieri, Im sorry to say, simply hoisted a generous helping of campy make-believe on the reading public. Thus, disregard my account of Hell at your own peril. First off, you wake up lying on the stone floor inside a fairly dismal cell composed of iron bars; and take my stern advice--dont touch anything. The prison cell bars are filthy dirty. If by accident you DO touch the bars, which look a tad slimy with mold and someone elses blood, do NOT touch your face--or your clothes--not if you have any aspiration to stay looking nice until Judgment Day. And do NOT eat the candy youll see scattered everywhere on the ground. The exact means by which I arrived in the

underworld remain a little unclear. I recall a chauffeur standing curbside somewhere, next to a parked black Lincoln Town Car, holding a white placard with my name written on it, MADISON SPENCER, in all-caps terrible handwriting. The chauffeur--those people never speak English--had on mirrored sunglasses and a visored chauffeur cap, so most of his face was hidden. I remember him opening the rear door so I could step inside; after that was a way-long drive with the windows tinted so dark I couldn't quite see out, but what I've just described could've been any one of ten bazillion rides I've taken between airports and cities. Whether that

Town Car delivered me to Hell, I can't swear, but the next thing is I woke up in this filthy cell. Probably I woke up because someone was screaming; in Hell, someone is always screaming. Anyone who's ever flown London to Sydney, seated next to or anywhere in the proximity of a fussy baby, you'll no doubt fall right into the swing of things in Hell. What with the strangers and crowding and seemingly endless hours of waiting for nothing to happen, for you Hell will feel like one long, nostalgic hit of DJ Vu. Especially if your in-flight movie was *The English Patient*. In Hell, whenever the demons announce they're going to treat everyone to a big-name Hollywood movie, don't get too excited because it's always *The English Patient* or, unfortunately, *The Piano*. It's never *The Breakfast Club*. In regard to the smell, Hell comes nowhere near as bad as Naples in the summertime during a garbage strike. If you ask me, people in Hell just scream to hear their own voice and to pass the time. Still, complaining about Hell occurs to me as a tad bit obvious and self-indulgent. Like so many experiences you venture into knowing full well that they'll be terrible, in fact the core pleasure resides in their very innate badness, like eating Swanson frozen chicken potpies at boarding school or a Banquet frozen Salisbury steak on the cook's night out. Or eating really anything in Scotland. Allow me to venture that the sole reason we enjoy certain pastimes such as watching the film version of *Valley of the Dolls* arises from the comfort and familiarity of its very inherent poor quality.

Revue de presse Praise for *Damned*: "Palahniuk's 12th novel is just as gleefully, vividly, hilariously obscene as you'd expect and it's also a hell of a lot of fun. [He] has always been known for his pitch-dark satire, and it's evident here in his depiction of the underworld.... As a young adult novel, it's surprisingly sweet, hopeful and empowering; as a satire, it's funny, irreverent and hugely entertaining. 'Hell is other people,' mused Sartre. Leave it to Chuck Palahniuk to tell us that might not be such a bad thing after all." Michael Schaub, NPR "Damned is as lively as a book about the dead can be.... the Judy Blume book from hell, just as Mr. Palahniuk intended." Janet Maslin, the New York Times "And now, from the Well, What Did You Expect file: Chuck Palahniuk imagines a great hell. His matter-of-fact underworld is the charming setting of *Damned*, a...very funny coming-of-age (after-you're-dead) novel.... Palahniuk's descriptions of hell are inspired, crafted with great comic flair and the brilliant satirical stipulation that the Christian fundamentalists are right: Hell is literal, dinosaur bones were faked by Satan and among the unspeakable demons slurping about is Robert Mapplethorpe.... [A] winning and funny book, and near the end, when Maddie seems to be ascending toward a sequel (Purgatory, anyone?), you'll likely want to read that one, too." Jess Walter, Washington Post "Damned is gross, sick, nasty, silly, all the things you want from the merry madman of American letters, Chuck Palahniuk. How can you not be instantly transfixed by an opening like this?: 'Are you there, Satan? It's me, Madison. I'm just now arrived here, in Hell, but it's not my fault except for maybe dying from an overdose of marijuana.' And so begins the kind of goofy, but hypnotically endearing tale of a 13-year-old girl who, completely lost in life, finally starts to discover herself in Palahniuk's demented version of the afterlife.... With *Damned*, [he] opens the fire hose to full bore again, stripping away the veneer on American society and showing us the yucky parts we don't want to see." Chris Talbot, AP "...[T]horoughly original...satiric and horrifying, enough so you'll want to repent after you read." Christian DuChateau, CNN "Some Fight Club trademarks--youthful disaffection, violence, gross-out humor, a dystopic setting, cultural satire as an extreme sport, a decent helping of third-act pathos--can be seen in...*Damned*. Even prepubescent Madison Spencer, the protagonist of *Damned*, has traits that could be seen as Tyler Durdenesque. She's disaffected from society (i.e., those still alive), she kicks serious butt and is a cultural critic who becomes an unlikely leader.... It's hard to pitch the broadly satirical *Damned* as a useful replacement narrative of life after death, but it's a rollicking adventure of Swiftian proportions, a Valleyfair of the Underworld that, incidentally, shows an overweight teenage girl bringing Satan himself down a peg." Claude Peck, Minneapolis Star-Tribune "Damned is typical of Palahniuk's work: a scathing satire that is unfiltered, caustic and smart.... [His] descriptions of hell are priceless." Rege Behe, Pittsburgh Tribune "Even just its first few chapters reveal several layers of satiric humor, social commentary, Grand Guignol violence and heartbreaking insight.... The narrator's blend of snark, precocious wit and unconcealed vulnerability and need

is a combination as refreshing as the book is hard to put down."Bill O'Driscoll, Pittsburgh City Paper