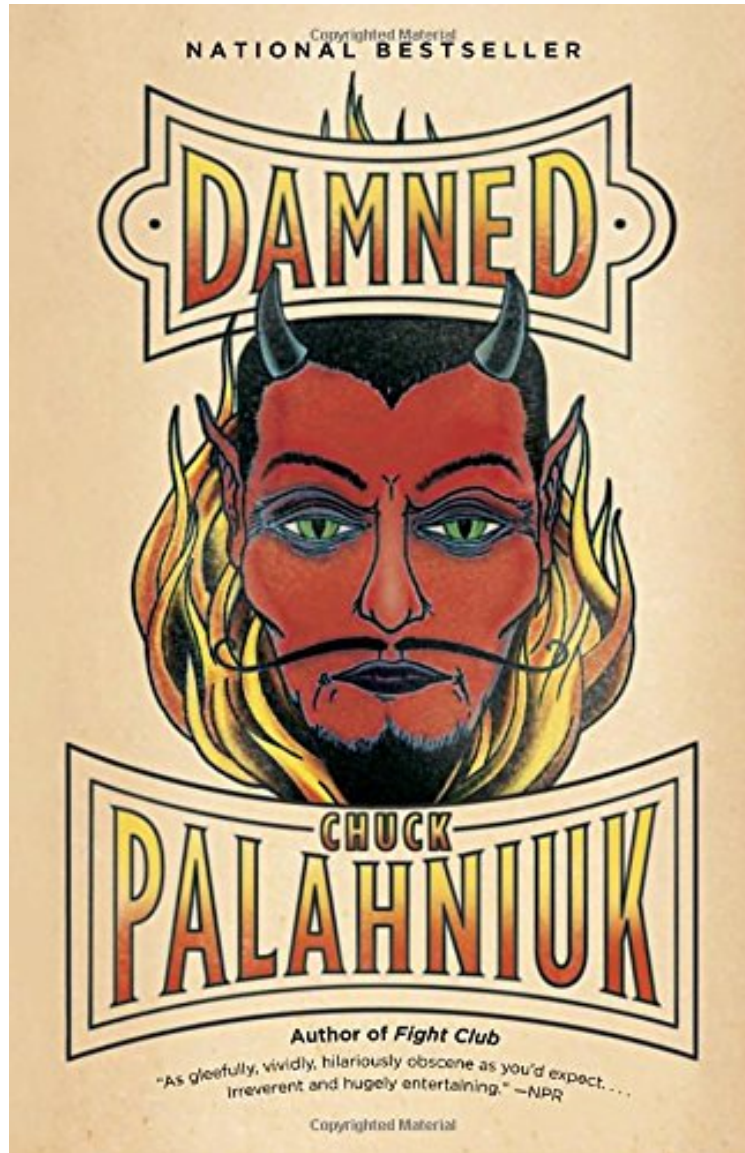


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Damned

Chuck Palahniuk

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Chuck Palahniuk : Damned before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Damned:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Funny as HellBy mvI laughed non-stop through the book. Today, I spent two hours on the phone with a bank's customer service and knew Maddy worked for them. I liked Damned more than Fight Club, and look forward to reading Doomed. I'll never clip my toenails again without thinking about this book.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Chuck trying as hard as he can.By Django R BohrenChuck

Palahniuk has written some great novels. And some great short stories. And nobody can deny that *Fight Club* led to an amazingly well-crafted film. But *Damned*, with its cliffhanger ending and sudden character reversal, and vivid descriptions of an almost childish hell seemed like Palahniuk doing his best to shock us. To gross us out. To find a twist in the plot that would make us say, "ohhhhhh!" After slogging through page after page of descriptions of exactly the kind of disgusting toenail mountain locations you might expect from the 13-year-old main character's vision of hell, we get to the meat of the story. The part that doubled the number of stars I'm willing to give this book (and honestly, if I could do half stars, I'd throw one on the pile). SPOILERS AHEAD. The scene where the protagonist rips Hitler's mustache off and puts it around her belt seems like the scene that inspired the rest of the book. It's vivid. Gross. Well-written. And it makes you want more. Unfortunately, it's just before the end of the novel which ends in a cliffhanger, and I'm honestly thinking that the sequel, *Doomed*, is going to be the first Chuck P. book I don't bother reading. My recommendation? Go read one of his earlier books. Or *Rant*. *Rant* was great. This one ain't. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Unique perspective on characters that usually get overshadowed. By Customer If there's one thing Palahniuk does well it's taking the characters that become "supporting" in most stories and focuses them as the main characters in his book. This shows us the gritty details of their life that often times become overlooked. In this book Palahniuk challenges himself by writing through the eyes of a middle school celebrity child. The plot is simple, girl goes to hell and tries to get out. Like most Palahniuk books, the commentary on our culture is the real reason you read it. Palahniuk reveals the darker parts of our culture and of us, and points out things that make you go "Wow, I never thought of it like that". It's definitely a book that will make you think with many quotes to pull from when you experience them throughout your life.

"As gleefully, vividly, hilariously obscene as you'd expect. . . . Irreverent and hugely entertaining." —NPR From the bestselling author of *Fight Club* comes a dark and brilliant satire about adolescence, Hell, and the Devil. Madison is the thirteen-year-old daughter of a narcissistic film star and a billionaire. Abandoned at her Swiss boarding school over Christmas, she dies over the holiday, presumably of a marijuana overdose. The last thing she remembers is getting into a town car and falling asleep. Then she's waking up in Hell. Literally. Madison soon finds that she shares a cell with a motley crew of young sinners: a cheerleader, a jock, a nerd, and a punk rocker, united by their doomed fate, like an afterschool detention for the damned. Together they form an odd coalition and march across the unspeakable landscape of Hell—full of used diapers, dandruff, WiFi blackout spots, evil historical figures, and one horrific call center—to confront the Devil himself.

Praise for *Damned*: "As gleefully, vividly, hilariously obscene as you'd expect. . . . Irreverent and hugely entertaining." —NPR "Brilliant. . . . Palahniuk's descriptions of hell are inspired, crafted with great comic flair. . . . A winning and funny book." —The Washington Post "Hilarious. . . . The Judy Blume book from hell, just as Mr. Palahniuk intended." —The New York Times "When it comes to drawing up a vision of hell, there are few American writers better suited to the job than Chuck Palahniuk." —Los Angeles Times "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 Durden-esque. 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 About the Author CHUCK PALAHNIUK's eleven best-selling novels—*Tell-All*, *Pygmy*, *Snuff*, *Rant*, *Haunted*, *Lullaby*, *Fight Club*, *Diary*, *Survivor*, *Invisible Monsters*, and *Choke*—have sold more than five million copies in the United States. He is also the author of *Fugitives and Refugees*, published as part of the Crown Journey Series, and the nonfiction collection *Stranger Than Fiction*. He lives in the Pacific Northwest. Excerpt. © Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. I. 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. Maybe I'm in Hell because I'm fat--a Real Porker. If you can go to Hell for having low self-esteem, that's why I'm here. I wish I could lie and tell you I'm bone-thin with blond hair and big ta-tas. But, trust me, I'm 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. I'm 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," she'd say, turning the screen sideways for me to see, "it's 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, she'd dim the lights by remote control and we'd 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, she'd light a fire in the gas fireplace, and we'd 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," she'd tell me. She'd toggle from camera to camera, watching the Somali maid clean our house in Paris. Hunched over her computer screen, she'd 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 didn't look adequately polished. To her this passed for way-wicked, good fun. It's 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 you'll never meet. It's 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 king's ransom on Freon and electric power, trying to make some doomed ten bucks' worth of pretty pink flowers last one more day. That's what it's like to be dead. Yes, I know the word absentia. I'm 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 don't want me to describe. Probably I shouldn't even tell you I'm 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. I'll fess up and come clean. I'm out of the closet. I'm dead. Now don't 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 you're lazy for not shaving your legs, then being dead seems like the ultimate character flaw. It's as if you've 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--that's the double whammy. No, it's not fair, but even if you feel sorry for me, you're probably also feeling pretty darn smug that you're alive and no doubt chewing on a mouthful of some poor animal that had the misfortune to live below you on the food chain. I'm not telling you all of this to gain your sympathy. I'm thirteen years old, and a girl, and I'm dead. My name is Madison, and the last thing I need is your stupid condescending pity. No, it's not fair, but it's 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 I'm 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 I'm dead because everyone already feels so darned superior to dead people, even Mexicans and AIDS people. It's 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? why'd he die?" Yes, I know the word insidious. Death is the One Big Mistake that none of us EVER plans to make. That's why the bran muffins and the colonoscopies. It's 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. Don't 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. It's like a complete violation of all your civil rights. Death ought to be illegal but you don't see Amnesty International starting any letter-writing campaigns. You don't 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 I'm too flip and glib about everything. My mom would say, "Madison, please don't be such a smart aleck." She'd say, "You're dead; now just calm down." Probably me being dead is a gigantic relief to my dad; this way, at least, he won't have to worry about me embarrassing him by getting pregnant. My dad used to say, "Madison, whatever man ends up with you, he's 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 won't go into the details, but let's 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 didn't die because I was too lazy to live. I didn't die because I wanted to punish my family. And no matter how much I slag my parents, don't 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 don't want to be dead and just watching everybody while I chill rooms, flicker the lights, and pull the drapes open and shut. I don't want to be simply a voyeur. No, it's not fair, but what makes earth feel like Hell is our expectation that it should feel like Heaven. Earth is earth. Dead is dead. You'll find out for yourself soon enough. It won't help the situation for you to get all upset. II. Are you there, Satan? It's me, Madison. Please don't get the impression that I dislike Hell. No, really, it's way swell. Tons better than I expected. Honestly, it's obvious you've 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 I'd ever imagined Hell it was as a fiery version of that classic Hollywood masterpiece *The Breakfast Club*, populated, let's 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 I've had the actual experience of waking up on my first day in Hell, and you'll just have to take my word for what all this is like. No, it's 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 what's 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, I'm 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--don't 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 else's 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 you'll 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 déjà 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. From the Hardcover edition.