Columbine

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF DAVE CULLEN

Award-winning writer and journalist Dave Cullen has worked as an infantry soldier, computer systems analyst, and undergraduate instructor, and has reported from twenty-six countries around the globe. Currently a staff writer *for Vanity Fair*, Cullen has written for the *New York Times*, *Buzzfeed*, and *The New Republic*, among other news and culture outlets, and is the author of *Columbine* and *Soldiers First*, two book-length works of investigative reporting. Cullen worked for ten years on the manuscript for *Columbine*—he was on the scene of the attack within an hour of the first shots fired, and his years of tireless research, interviews, and writing led to the creation of a text which humanizes and complicates two of the most notorious killers of the twentieth century, while clearing away the fictions surrounding the massacre to get at the truth and the facts. For *Columbine*, Cullen won the Mystery Writers of America's Edgar Allan Poe Award, a Barnes & Noble Discover Award, and was a finalist for the LA Times Book Prize. Cullen currently lives in New York City.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Cullen describes the "plague" of school shootings that descended upon America, seemingly out of nowhere, in the mid-1990s. Following school shootings all across the country, the 1998-99 school year saw not one school shooting come to fruition—until Columbine, which was, of course, the largest and most sensationalized of its kind. While most other school shootings were over before the media could descend upon the school's campus, the Columbine shooting—originally thought to be a hostage situation—unfolded slowly, and in real time, as a horrified America watched. The students themselves could see the coverage on the classroom TVs, and the magnitude of the event spiraled out of control once the media began speculating as to the whys and hows of the situation before any reliable eyewitness testimony had been obtained or any crime scene reconnaissance had been done. By the time of the book's publication, it had been nearly ten years sine Columbine. The tenth anniversary of the massacre was marked by a candlelight vigil at the school and a "lie-in" in support of gun control reform. The public Columbine Memorial had been dedicated early in September of 2007, and Cullen himself notes that the repetitious anniversaries and milestones have begun to wear on, or fade away from, the survivors of the attack.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Dave Cullen's meticulously-researched and –written tome has been compared to similar investigative endeavors of shocking, high-profile murders—most specifically Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* and Vincent Bugliosi's *Helter Skelter*. Like those two renowned texts, *Columbine* combines thrilling, detailed, and intense reportage of a highly-sensationalized American atrocity with a conscious effort to call out the very sensationalism that makes the success of such a book possible. Also of note is the fact that many individuals associated with Columbine have made their own forays into literature: Sue Klebold's *A Mother's Reckoning*, Misty Bernall's *She Said Yes: The Unlikely Martyrdom of Cassie Bernall*, and Brooks Brown's *No Easy Answers: The Truth Behind Death at Columbine* all offer personal accounts and remembrances of the incident, from the perspective of one of the killer's mothers, one of their victim's mothers, and one of their one-time friends, respectively.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Columbine*
- **When Written:** 1999-2009
- **Where Written:** Denver, CO, USA
- **When Published:** April 2009, ahead of the tenth anniversary of the massacre
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Nonfiction, reportage, true crime, sociological study
- **Setting:** Jefferson County, CO, USA
- **Climax:** The book's intertwining, non-linear timelines converge around Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold's horrific, violent attack on Columbine High, a failed-bombing-turned-shooting which they had been planning for the better part of two years.
- **Antagonist:** Eric Harris, Dylan Klebold
- **Point of View:** Third-person omniscient

EXTRA CREDIT

Textbook. Cullen's book, now in its third edition, is widely used as a textbook in high school English and Social Studies classrooms across America, and was a finalist for the American Library Association's Alex Award for Young Adult Readers. The expanded edition offers comprehensive classroom guides, detailed maps of the Columbine campus and scans of both Dylan and Eric's journals. The impact of using the book in classrooms is, hopefully, to start a conversation about depression, anger, violence, and school safety, and to demonstrate the sanctity of schools as safe places for all students.

PLOT SUMMARY

Decorated investigative journalist Dave Cullen researched the Columbine shooting for ten years in order to compose a highly-detailed, exquisitely-researched tome which toggles back and forth between the years leading up to the shooting and the months that followed it. In the sections set in the past, Cullen delves into the lives and minds of killers Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, with the help of the boys' personal diaries, interviews with their friends and acquaintances, as well as the FBI investigator, Dwayne Fuselier, who served as the chief psychologist in the investigation and became an expert on both the boys. Eric Harris was a charming, egomaniacal psychopath who longed for the annihilation of the human race, and Dylan Klebold was a lost depressive subject prone to outbursts of anger. Together, they created a "tornado." Bound by their hatred of those they deemed "inferior" to themselves, the two planned meticulously for over a year, all along "leaking" the revelations that they were in possession of both firearms and explosive devices to several of their close friends. On April 20th, 1999, Eric and Dylan, dreaming of glory, fame, and recognition of their "godlike" superiority over the rest of the human race, perpetrated one of the most violent and iconic terrorist attacks in American history. Originally planned as a bombing, the attack was a "failure"—the shooters claimed thirteen lives rather than the five-hundred-plus they hoped to take, and the large explosives they worked to build never even detonated. Nonetheless, the shooters conducted an execution-style massacre in the school's library, taunting their classmates and cheering each other on the entire time. When they became bored with their spree, they attempted once more to detonate their two large propane bombs in the cafeteria, then returned to the library and committed suicide side-by-side.

In the aftermath of the attack, the Columbine High community—which dominated the population of the tight-knit, borderline-rural Jefferson County, just ten miles from Denver—grieved and struggled to understand the reason for the attack. The influence of the media on the public's eagerness to believe erroneous motives—bullying, Goth culture, and the influence of violent video games and films—was unprecedented. Parents and families of the victims and survivors struggled to handle issues of blame, compensation, and conflicting information coming out of the county sheriff's office. The shooters had both been in the Jeffco system for a variety of crimes and felonies, and many felt that not only could the attack have been prevented, but also that, during the attack, the sheriff's office had made significant errors that led to tremendous loss of life by failing to breach the perimeter around the school for hours after the first shots were fired.

Cullen focuses on the survivors of the attack and the families of the deceased as a way of magnifying the unique trauma of the event. Through detailed accounts of the survivors' recoveries and the grieving process of the bereaved, which span, in some cases, more than ten years, Cullen reveals an enduring failure to understand why gun control in America is unaffected by such horrific, large-scale violence; why "spectacle murder" and performative violence continue to motivate large numbers of shooters and killers each year; and why placing the blame on just one—or, in the case of Columbine, two—individuals in the wake of a mass murder is both comforting and problematic. Cullen tackles big issues such as the debate over how to handle mental health treatment in the case of potentially dangerous psychopaths, how shared grief and post-traumatic stress can both divide and solidify a community, and how the mythologizing and sensationalizing of national crises makes each attack to hit America—or any country in the world—more and more difficult to process, understand, overcome, and prevent from occurring again.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Dave Cullen – A journalist who was present on the first day of the Columbine shootings, Dave Cullen has dedicated over ten years of his life to the meticulous, skillful research of Columbine—all that happened before, during, and after the momentous attack, which changed the way the American public thought about—and the way the media covered—school shootings forever. Through interviews with friends of the killers, survivors of the attack, tireless local and FBI investigators, and the families of the shooting's victims, Cullen has assembled a tome which manages both to convey the brutal, horrific details of the attack—many of which had been glossed over by the media or hidden from the American public—while also delving into and humanizing the minds of the killers, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold. Eric was a hateful psychopath, Cullen asserts, but his partner in the attack, Dylan Klebold, was a suicidal depressive, a "lost" and inwardly angry young man who was swayed toward accelerated hatred and extreme violence by a very powerful friend. Cullen's extensive interviews and intricately detailed accounts of private moments in the lives of the killers, the victims, and the survivors alike converge into a difficult inquiry into the state of American culture and values. Gun control, mental health and teen depression, predatory media, and corrupt government and police officials all combine, Cullen argues, into the creation of a landscape which effectively condones "spectacle murder"—mass-murderers are given glory, fame, and longevity, which are the very things they desire. Without a fundamental change to the systems which attempt to explore and explain the horrors of murder and mass murder in America, Cullen argues, the country is doomed to repeat and bear witness to a series of ongoing and escalating spectacle killings, many of which cite the execution-style shootings of Columbine—now

unrecognizable as the bombing it was intended to be—as inspiration. Cullen describes "cring[ing]" for Columbine survivors every time a new attack occurs, and though a member of the press corps himself, wants to advocate for a rethinking of how the American media reports on the horrors it is charged with relaying to the worried, watching public.

Eric Harris – Eric Harris, the psychopathic ringleader of the Columbine shooting, kept meticulous journals for a year and a half prior to Columbine, planning the attack and describing his motive for carrying it out: his burning, undying hatred of the human race and his desire for its total annihilation. An overachiever in school and a "charming" young man with an active social life, Eric was not the bullied outcast the media attempted to cast both him and Dylan Klebold as. Rather, Eric—according to Dave Cullen and to Columbine investigator and FBI psychology expert Dwayne Fuselier—was a "full-blown psychopath," a charming but cunning and manipulative individual incapable of experiencing empathy for another human being. As Eric's high school career progressed, he experienced several failures, the most notable being first the falling out of his friendship with Brooks Brown, which threw him into a tailspin of spewing hatred on his own personal blog and repeated threats and attacks against Brown and his family; and second, Eric and Dylan were arrested for felony theft and forced to enter a diversion program in order to avoid being sentenced to prison. These indignations sent Eric Harris into a frenzy, and he began planning a day of judgment, which he referred to as NBK (after the film *Natural Born Killers*,) and which he hoped would bring him the satisfaction and glory of wiping out as many as two thousand people—the entire student population of Columbine—in one afternoon. A lifelong lover of explosives, Eric began building pipe bombs and smaller "cricket" bombs made from fireworks, as well as recruiting his friend Dylan's prom date, Robyn Anderson, to help the boys acquire guns. Eric steadily convinced Dylan to take part in the killings, though Dylan privately showed a great deal of resistance. As the date of the attack grew closer, Eric developed a fascination with wearing all-black outfits, Nazi ideology and the life of Adolf Hitler, and obsessively recording—alone in journals and together with Dylan in a series of videotaped addresses to their "audience"—his hatred of humanity, desire for its destruction, and plans for the earth-shattering attack which he hoped would bring him glory, fame, and eternal recognition. Eric sadistically and indiscriminately murdered twelve classmates and one teacher before growing tired of the massacre. After failing twice to explode massive propane bombs he'd shoddily constructed in his parents' home, Eric and Dylan both retreated to the school's library and committed suicide together. Though Eric's method of suicide—a gunshot through the mouth—left behind nothing to scan, experts believe that, had a brain scan been performed, Eric's would have shown levels of activity barely recognizable as human—the most conclusive sign of psychopathy.

Dylan Klebold – The second of the Columbine killers, Dylan Klebold was a "born genius" who, despite a sensitive disposition, experienced explosions of rage (most often brought on by failure or humiliation,) suicidal tendencies, a disdain for the "zombie"-like human race, and a suggestibility upon which the psychopathic Eric Harris, between 1997-99, consistently preyed. Dylan did not share Eric's desire for total annihilation, though he at times gleefully parroted back Eric's dreams of laying waste to all of humanity. He was torn between love and suicide—he felt that girls, especially, rejected him at every turn, and he used alcohol to soothe the pain of his loneliness. After joining Eric on a series of "missions," which began as petty, harmless pranks and eventually escalated to felony theft which forced both boys into a diversion program in order to avoid jail time, Eric and Dylan began acquiring ordnance—buying guns and building pipe bombs and other small explosives. Dylan and Eric planned a large-scale bombing of their high school, hoping to take out five hundred lives in seconds and top the record for deadliest terrorist attack in American history. Eric's understanding of circuitry was shaky at best, though, and the bombing was a failure. With no Plan B in place—the boys had not even considered that they might fail—the two of them advanced on their school and began shooting at classmates and teachers and launching smaller explosive devices throughout the school. After a massacre which culminated in a shootout in the school's library, the boys returned once more to the explosive devices they'd placed in the cafeteria, and attempted to detonate them. Unable to do so, they returned to the library and committed suicide side by side. Dylan's weapons were fired far fewer times than Eric's, and in general Cullen finds himself more able to empathize with the "lost" Dylan than the psychopathic Eric, but both boys were caught up in a "dyad"—a murderous pair which feeds off one another, and which, in the case of Eric and Dylan, led to "mutually assured destruction."

Dwayne Fuselier – The head of the FBI's domestic terrorism unit in Denver at the time of the attack. His son, Brian, was inside Columbine during the shooting, though he was unharmed. Fuselier, a master hostage negotiator and a veteran of the standoff at Waco, Texas, volunteered his services to the Jeffco sheriff's department and quickly became an essential member of the investigative team charged with unraveling what, exactly, had caused Eric and Dylan to commit such a horrific act. Fuselier became known as an "expert" on the boys' psychological states in the years, months, and days leading up to the shooting, and was the first person to float the theory that Eric Harris had suffered from psychopathy. Because of the FBI's restriction on his talking to the press, Fuselier often found himself, in the aftermath of the shooting, in possesion of valuable information which could have set the record straight on many things, but he was forced to hold his tongue so as not to step on the toes of the Jeffco sheriff's department.

Frank DeAngelis / "Mr. D" – The principal of Columbine high

school at the time of the shooting. A former coach, "Mr. D" was a loving, caring administrator and became a beacon of hope for many students in the wake of the attack. Frank was criticized in the aftermath of the shooting for having been blind to the issues of bullying that plagued Columbine, though his status as an outspoken, caring member of the Columbine community endured.

Dave Sanders – A teacher and coach at Columbine who was the only non-student to die in the attack. After shepherding students to safety, Dave was shot and sustained horrific injuries to two major arteries, resulting in a major loss of blood over the several hours during which the police refused to breach the Columbine perimeter. Dave's death, moments after the first SWAT teams to breach the perimeter arrived, became a hot-button issue after the attack—his family, like many families whose children succumbed to their injuries inside the school, believed that the sheriff's department mishandled their response to the shooting.

Patrick Ireland – A survivor of the Columbine attack who rose to national attention after dropping, bloodied and wounded, from the library window on to the roof of a SWAT vehicle. After a lengthy recovery from a debilitating brain injury that robbed him briefly of both language and motor function, Patrick went on to become valedictorian of his class at Columbine and an active, vocal member of the community of Columbine survivors.

Robyn Anderson – Dylan's prom date, Robyn was a "sweet little church girl" who was infatuated with Dylan, and who helped both him and Eric to purchase guns at a local gun show. Robyn eventually confesses her role in the attack to the police, though she swears—seemingly truthfully—that after she purchased the guns she never saw them again, and that she had no idea what the boys were planning.

Nate Dykeman – One of Eric's friends who was off-campus at the time of the shooting. Once he hears that the shooters inside Columbine are wearing trench coats, he becomes "terrified" that Eric and Dylan are responsible. While the attack is still going on, Nate calls Tom Klebold, Dylan's father, to ask him to check Dylan's closet for a trench coat—the coat, Tom finds, is missing. Nate, like Zack Heckler and Chris Morris, was aware that Eric and Dylan were building pipe bombs in the months leading up to the attack, and also noticed that both had been cutting school and sleeping in class, but had no idea that the two of them had been planning anything so drastic.

Chris Morris – One of Eric and Dylan's friends and a coworker at Blackjack who, out of fear and guilt, reported himself to 911 directly after learning about the attacks. Chris knew that the boys were messing around with pipe bombs, and that Eric had asked to store napalm at his house, but had no idea that they were planning an attack. Chris eventually helps investigators to implicate Phil Duran in the sale of the firearms used in the attack through agreeing to a wiretap. Chris was a member of the Trench Coat Mafia, the Columbine clique which was erroneously believed to be behind the attacks.

Brooks Brown – A former friend of Eric Harris. The two, after experiencing a falling out, behave antagonistically toward one another, though Eric was the perpetrator of most of the threatening behavior. Eric threatened Brooks' life on his website, and harassed him during a snowball fight—he also, allegedly, sent threatening anonymous emails to Brooks and defaced the Brown family's garage. Brooks encountered Eric as Eric and Dylan were on their way into Columbine on the day of the shooting; rather than harming Brooks, Eric told him to "get out of here," and Brooks headed off-campus for lunch.

Cassie Bernall – One of the victims of the Columbine shooting, Cassie Bernall recovered from a troubled youth during which her mother, Misty, believed her to be possessed by Satan, and went on to become a member of the Evangelical community in Jeffco. Cassie transferred to Columbine from a private Christian school in order to convert and recruit nonbelievers. A victim of the library massacre, a rumor spread shortly after the attack describing Cassie's "martyrdom"—allegedly Eric Harris, with a gun to Cassie's head, asked her if she believed in God. When she said "yes," he shot her. Craig Scott, who first recounted this story, was actually confused due to trauma and the early stages, perhaps, of PTSD, and was referencing another student's profession of her faith in God—Val Schnurr, who was not killed. Cassie was shot, point blank, without exchanging a word with Eric Harris. Before the truth came to light, though, Cassie was hailed throughout the Evangelical community as a martyr and a symbol of hope, and was the subject of a book written by her mother—*She Said Yes: The Unlikely Martyrdom of Cassie Bernall*—which has sold, as of the present day, over one million copies.

Craig Scott – The older brother of Rachel Scott, the first victim of the shooting, Craig was a "jock" who started a false rumor about Cassie Bernall's martyrdom, believing it to have been the truth but too confused and disoriented in the wake of the attack to have known that his account was inaccurate.

Wayne Harris – Eric's father, once a "decorated air force test pilot" who, as of the events of Columbine, had been retired from the military for twenty-three years. As a disciplinarian with his children, he was a typical military man—calculating and thoughtful—and he often kept lists or notes in his journal about Eric's worrisome behavior, as well as the conversations and punishments that arose from Eric's frequent troublemaking. Though he attempted to "put the fear of God" into his youngest son, he failed to see through Eric's calculated mask of remorse to the ruthless, psychopathic interior behind it.

Don Marxhausen – The leader of a large Lutheran congregation near Columbine, Don Maxhausen took a controversial stance on Eric and Dylan in the wake of the attacks. Rather than describing the boys as tools or

manifestations of Satan, Marxhausen saw the boys as having "hate in their hearts and weapons in their hands." When Tom and Sue Klebold approached him and begged him to discreetly perform a funeral for Dylan, Marxhausen agreed, and used the opportunity to humanize the Klebods to the press and give them some much-needed closure and redemption during the service for their son. However, he paid for his compassion, Cullen says; a year after the massacre, Marxhausen, once one of the most "revered" ministers in Jeffco, was forced out of his congregation and unable to find a job.

Val Schnurr – After being shot in the Columbine library, Val Schnurr "dropped to her knees" and prayed to God—when Dylan asked her if she believed in God, she replied that she did, and he reloaded his gun in preparation to shoot her again, but then became distracted and walked away. Val ultimately comes forward to refute the story of Cassie Bernall's martyrdom, though it is painful and frightening for her to do so. In interviews with Dave Cullen ten years after the shooting, Schnurr describes herself as happy, healed, and in love with life.

Mark Manes – A drug dealer who provides Eric with both a semiautomatic handgun-- a TEC-9—and a bounty of ammunition. He ultimately makes a full confession to investigators and is charged as a conspirator. He assures the judge in his trial that he had "no idea" what Eric and Dylan were up to, and receives a relatively light sentence.

Phil Duran – A former Blackjack employee who once went to a shooting range with Eric and Dylan. Eventually, after investigators (with the help of Chris Morris) lock onto Duran, it is revealed that Duran put the boys in touch with Mark Manes—the man who sold them the TEC-9. Duran told investigators that though he "relay[ed] some of the money," he earned nothing on the deal.

John Stone – The newly-elected Jeffo sheriff who bungled the first press conference about the attacks by citing erroneous facts and making wildly speculative remarks at a crucial moment. When it is revealed that the Jeffco sheriff's office "had some knowledge of Eric and Dylan's activities in the years prior to the shootings," Stone is "visibly angry" and seems to believe the investigation into the sheriff's department to be "politically motivated."

Steve Davis – The chief spokesman for the Jeffco sheriff's department at the time of the attacks. The leader of the first press conference after the attack, he cautioned against repeating "rumors" that could erroneously describe the number of fatalities or the status of the suspects—Sheriff John Stone, however, did not heed Davis's warnings, and in his question-and-answer portion doubled the death count and spread incorrect word of a possible third shooter, among other falsehoods.

Brian Rohrbough – Danny Rohrbough's father. Awash in anger after his son's death, Brian removes the crosses dedicated to the shooters which are erected at a makeshift memorial for all the victims of Columbine. When families of the victims receive their settlements, Brian pushes back, appalled by the "criminal[ly]" small payments made to teachers and insistent upon the symbolic weight of the settlements' values. He eventually becomes president of Colorado Right to Life, and submits for his quotation to be included in the permanent Columbine memorial "an angry rant blaming [the shooting] on a godless school system in a nation that legalized abortion," and which ends with the biblical quote "There is no peace for the wicked." Though the committee has the power to stop the quote from being included, they do not—"nothing trump[s] a grieving dad."

Misty Bernall – Cassie Bernall's mother. After her daughter's death in the Columbine shooting—which she believes to be one of martyrdom—she writes and publishes a book called *She Said Yes: The Unlikely Martyrdom of Cassie Bernall*, which will go on to sell more than million copies. Misty and her husband, Brad, are hailed as "blessed parents of the martyr" within their deeply religious community until two Columbine survivors—Emily Wyant and Val Schnurr—come forward to refute the story of Cassie's martyrdom.

Brad Bernall – Cassie Bernall's father. In the wake of Cassie's death, he urges local teens to join youth group and get involved in their church, and struggles with his daughter's loss much more visibly than his wife, Misty. Both of them are shaken when Emily Wyant, through the *Rocky Mountain News*, comes forward to refute the myth of Cassie's martyrdom—the only thing about her death which had brought either of the Bernalls any semblance of comfort.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Zack Heckler – Dylan's former best friend, and a close friend of both Dylan and Eric at the time of the shootings. Zack was clueless about the guns at the time of the attack, but knew the boys had been making pipe bombs.

Tom Klebold – Dylan's father. "Very communicative" with the police in the wake of the attack, Tom, like his wife, was blindsided by Dylan's involvement in the shooting, having believed himself to be "extremely close" with Dylan.

Sue Klebold – Dylan's mother. A Jewish woman and an intellectual who had believed herself relatively well in touch with her "sensitive son," she was "shocked" by her son's violent end and his association with Nazism, anti-Semitism, and desire for annihilation.

Kathy Harris – Eric's mother, who remained close-lipped toward both the press and the authorities after the attack and so is "murky" in the eyes of the American public.

Emily Wyant – Emily Wyant was under the table with Cassie Bernall in the library, and witnessed Cassie's tragic—but silent—death. Conflicted about whether or not to come

forward with the truth after the story of Cassie's valiant martyrdom "mushroomed," Wyant eventually decided to tell her story to the *Rocky Mountain News*.

Robert Kirgis – The twenty-nine-year-old owner of the Blackjack Pizza where Eric and Dylan worked. He enjoyed hanging out with the boys on the roof, drinking and shooting off fireworks, once the restaurant had closed.

TERMS

Jeffco – A local nickname for Jefferson County, the county of which Columbine is a part. Though the shooting is often attributed to Littleton, Colorado, Littleton is actually a small suburb near Denver which most of the attendees of Columbine do not consider themselves residents of. The area which sprang up around the sprawling Columbine school is referred to by locals either as "Jeffco" or even just as "Columbine," so entrenched in the community is the high school.

Trench Coat Mafia – A clique of students at Columbine who dressed in trench coats and considered themselves outcasts. As the Columbine massacre was still unfolding, student witnesses erroneously identified the shooters as members of the Trench Coat Mafia (TCM, for short) and described them as "Goth" and "obsessed with death." Though the Trench Coat Mafia did exist at Columbine, neither **Eric Harris** nor **Dylan Klebold** was involved with the clique. The "trench coats" that they wore during the murders were not even technically trench coats—they were long black dusters. The mystique and darkness of the phrase "Trench Coat Mafia" caught on in the media and the public, and became one of the "myths" of Columbine often associated with the attack, despite its proven falsehood, to this day.

Ordnance – A word for artillery, arms, or ammunition.

Leaking – A phenomenon commonly observed in young assailants in which the perpetrators intentionally "leak" details of their attack to friends, adults, teachers, or other acquaintances—either out of nervousness or an egotistical desire to see how far they can push their luck at getting away with (often literal) murder right under the noses of everyone around them.

Psychopath – **Cullen** notes that "in popular usage, any crazy killer is called a psychopath." The term, however, is far more nuanced—it references a very specific mental condition marked by lack of empathy and "coldhearted manipulat[ion.]" Psychopathy is not synonymous with psychosis—psychosis includes diagnoses such as paranoia and schizophrenia, disorders which disorient and delude the sufferer. Psychopaths, on the other hand, are marked by a cold rationality, a gift for calculating behavior, and a charming, callous, cunning, egocentric personality. Psychopaths have a "ruthless disregard" for others and an "astonishing gift for deception [and] for disguising" their cold, detached disregard. This second trait is essential to masking the first in order to deceive their potential victims of emotional of physical violence. Experts now believe that **Eric Harris** was not just a "budding" psychopath, but a full-blown, textbook case of the disorder. Psychopathic brains function differently than healthy brains—though Eric Harris's method of suicide left no brain for medical personnel or investigators to scan, experts believe that Harris's brain scan would have revealed physical evidence of a psychopathic brain.

NBK – The abbreviation for *Natural Born Killers*, a murder-romance film starring Woody Harrelson and Juliette Lewis which was part of the Columbine shooters' inspiration for their attack—so much a part, in fact, that they often referred to the event during the planning stage only as "NBK."

Natural Selection – The evolutionary process by which the variations in characteristics that give an organism the best chance of survival are preserved and multiplied, leading to evolution of those favorable traits. Natural selection "weeds out" organisms whose weak or undesirable traits do not support survival. Charlies Darwin made the term popular in the mid-1800s. **Eric Harris** "loved" the concept of natural selection, and his sense of superiority over other members of the human race led him to believe that he could be an arbiter, or judge, of survival. This belief is reflected in the execution-style shootings that took place inside Columbine, and especially in the fact that Eric wore a shirt reading "NATURAL SELECTION" during the massacre.

THEMES

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

VIOLENCE AND SPECTACLE

The horrifically violent shooting at Columbine High School in 1999 was the most high-profile school shooting of the nineties. In a spree that claimed the lives of twelve students and one teacher, seniors Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold brought several firearms and homemade bombs into the school and began picking off their classmates, culminating in a cold-blooded massacre within the school's library. The spectacle of the act was unlike anything America had witnessed, and the psychopathic Eric Harris meant it to be so—he sought to dwarf the bombings, shootings, and terrorist attacks that had come before it. Analyzing the horrific details of the violence, journalist Dave Cullen argues in support of sociology professor Mark Juergensmeyer's theory of

"performance violence"—that "spectacle murders" such as Columbine are "constructed events" of "mind-numbing, mesmerizing theater."

"Eric planted bombs in his high school, but his target was TV," Cullen writes. He means that Eric Harris's desire for "fame"—his need to assert his superiority over the rest of the human race—led him to orchestrate a spectacle of unthinkable violence that the world would never forget. The two boys were inspired by cinema. They referred to their spree, when discussing it in journal entries and in conversations with one another, as "NBK" (a reference to the 1994 murder-romance film *Natural Born Killers*) just as often as they called it "Judgment Day," a term which they borrowed—perhaps unwittingly or unintentionally—from the Bible. Harris and Klebold "scripted [the massacre] in three acts, just like a movie." It would begin with a massive cafeteria bombing, followed by a shooting spree to pick off any survivors, culminating in their own suicide-by-cop, and then massive explosions in their cars to injure any media, police, and paramedics who were on the scene. The glitzy Hollywood framing of mass murder as a cool, sexy route to both love and attention no doubt contributed to Eric's "egotistical, empathy-free" view of what he planned to do.

In addition to cinema, Harris and Klebold were inspired by media coverage of similar acts of violence: other school shootings, the siege on Waco, and the Oklahoma City bombing. Eric's desire to be "heralded as a mastermind" and to earn the "awe [and] respect" of millions is, Cullen writes, "baffling from our point of view, logical from his." Thus the media response to Columbine—unprecedented and seemingly without end—was just what Eric (and, to some degree, Dylan) had hoped for. Despite the failure of many aspects of their plan, the media response to Columbine was a success for the killers, as it made them famous, planting the seed of camera-ready violence in a new generation of mass-murderers, many of whom have explicitly cited Klebold and Harris as inspiration.

The desire for self-elevation, grandeur, and notoriety that Eric felt stood in stark contrast to Dylan's depressive nature and introspective demeanor. Nevertheless, Dylan's ambivalence about fame didn't temper the massacre's effects: the perfect storm of the sheer scale of the violence, new technologies in media, and the twisted, collective, public desire to bear witness to the "theater" of a spectacle (be it Columbine coverage or a violent film) made the massacre exactly as notorious and widely-witnessed as Eric Harris dreamed it would be.

MEMORY, BEARING WITNESS, TRAUMA, AND TESTIMONY

In a school of over two thousand students, fifteen members of the Columbine community died from injuries sustained in the attack. The incident left behind many more survivors—and potential witnesses—than it did fatalities. Though being a witness, Dave Cullen argues, is a difficult and complicated role to play in any situation of gravity, in the Columbine attack—the traumatic nature of which actually made reliable eyewitness testimony nearly impossible to obtain—the role of witness was an even harder one. Cullen makes the argument that though not every student was a witness in the legal or investigative sense of the term, every member of the Columbine community was, in a way, witness to a unique and in many ways unprecedented American horror.

In the wake of the Columbine attack, "student" did not necessarily equal "witness," Cullen argues. Not every student present in the high school saw the shooters. Even those who did often were still unable to provide fully accurate testimony due to the interference of trauma, because during moments of terror, the brain is unable to form new memories. The "universal-witness concept"—or the false equivalency that the media and some police officials drew between "student" and "witness"—then fed into the media circus that came to pervade Jeffco, and contributed to a deepening of the trauma that had set in to the daily lives of many students, regardless of whether or not they were also witnesses in the truest sense of the word. This cycle of mayhem, trauma, and the idea that every student could potentially have held the key to unraveling the "why" of the attack had the effect of turning everyone involved in Columbine into a witness—if not to the actual events of the attack, then to the never-before-seen level of lingering trauma, intrigue, and chaos which made Columbine, even in its aftermath, such a devastating phenomenon.

Those who bore witness to—or unwittingly assisted in—Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold's preparations for the murder had a particularly difficult role in the aftermath of the attacks. Dylan's prom date Robyn Anderson, who'd helped the killers purchase the guns used in the attack, was both wracked with guilt and terrified to come forward. Several of their friends, including Nate Dykeman, Zack Heckler, and Chris Morris, also had to reckon with the fact that Eric and Dylan had told them about acquiring ordnance and experimenting with building pipe bombs and napalm-powered devices. Warning their friends of their impending attack through divulging small bits of information gave Eric and Dylan feelings of excitement and power. Through ultimately providing investigators with as detailed testimony of their friends' behavior as they could, these witnesses found solace and redemption in exorcising their guilt over having been witness to a different kind of horror than those who witnessed the attacks, but had no personal connection to the killers.

The burden of having witnessed such spectacular violence, and how it affected the students at the time of the attack as well as throughout the course of their adult lives, is at the crux of much of Cullen's reportage. His intimate interviews and correspondences with several of the victims and their families reveal, however, an overwhelming resilience and desire to

prevent the killers from "winning." Being a witness to horror even tangentially, Cullen argues, can ultimately be transformed into a source of strength and not just a burden. He then illustrates this radical point through accounts from several survivors—both legal "witnesses" and those who are not—who have gone on to draw strength from the healing power of delivering their own testimony, from one another, from their own perseverance in the face of injury and post-traumatic stress, and from the grace of forgiveness.

FAILURE

A wide array of sad, sinister, and spectacular failures defined the Columbine shooting. From the killers' failures in empathy to the self-perceived failures in their own lives (romantic and academic) to the failures of their homemade bombs, their journey was marked by humiliation and failure. Other people related to the shooting also experienced failures of many kinds: the shooters' parents failed to notice the signs of depression and psychopathy that plagued their sons; the police department failed to extract the injured from the crime scene in time to save valuable lives; Jeffco officials who'd been tipped off to the shooters' disturbing behavior in the months before the attack failed to investigate them, and let a dangerous psychopath and a depressive who felt he had nothing to lose slip through the cracks of the justice system. The threat and realization of failure was a recurring fear for many of the individuals involved, even marginally, in the Columbine shooting, and Cullen argues that failure and humiliation, when combined, can prove a lethal catalyst for unstable—or merely dishonest—individuals and entities.

Cullen describes Dylan Klebold's lifelong struggle with failure and humiliation. As a child on a picnic, Dylan fell into a creek, and the family friend who witnessed his fall described a rage-filled outburst which revealed, even at such a young age, a deeply toxic relationship to failure. A "born genius," Dylan's success in school was, he felt, inconsequential next to his failure to find love or self-acceptance. Dylan's overwhelming feeling of having failed at life at just seventeen contributed to his complicity in the attack—he had no idea, however, that the massacre would be yet another failure. Cullen describes Columbine as a failed bombing—it was never intended to be a shooting. Eric Harris envisioned blowing the cafeteria sky-high, and picking off survivors with the firearms he and Dylan had acquired. When the bombs failed, the boys began shooting; after killing several classmates in the library, the killers returned to the cafeteria in an attempt to once again set off their faulty bombs. After no success there—and another failure to provoke a "death by police fire"—they retreated to the library and committed suicide side-by-side.

Failure extended beyond the boys' botched bombing: the Jeffco community failed to notice, or give any real weight to, the warning signs that both boys exhibited. After breaking into a van and stealing a hefty amount of electronic equipment, both Dylan and Eric entered "diversion" programs, which included compulsory psychological visits and community service. Eric kept a website which described his violent hatred of humanity and a journal which relayed his fascination with Nazi ideology, and both boys were slowly acquiring firearms and building and setting off small pipe bombs. Eric harassed a classmate, Brooks Brown, and when Brown's parents filed upwards of fifteen police reports about Eric, the county turned a blind eye. All of these factors, Cullen says, pointed to psychopathy in Eric's case and severe disturbance and depression in Dylan's. Had the legal system not failed to correctly assess and deal with the boys, Cullen argues, Columbine might not have occurred at all.

Cullen does note that Eric, especially, was a master of deception—a textbook quality of a true psychopath. Eric's role as ringleader of "NBK" or "Judgment Day," his influence over Dylan, and his ability to convince psychologists, social workers, and judges—as well as his own parents—of his ability to feel remorse and learn from his mistakes all contributed to his failure to be apprehended and properly prosecuted for his crimes and violent actions before the attack. Cullen himself describes Columbine—perhaps controversially, but nonetheless factually—as a "colossal failure." Though it is one of the most well-known mass shootings in American history, it was ultimately a failed plot which dissolved into a disorganized, desperate contingency plan.

MEDIA: MISINFORMATION AND SENSATIONALISM

Dave Cullen, a decorated journalist, wrote *Columbine* over a period of ten years with the intention of "setting [the facts] right." He describes the "great media blunders" that plagued the initial coverage of the Columbine shooting: as "the narrative unfold[ed] on television, the media was not about to [wait]" for accurate facts. This reliance on speculation and conjecture created a new kind of media sensationalism. It fed on the accounts of frightened, disoriented victims emerging from the building, combined with rumor and hearsay, in order to create a rapidly-escalating firestorm of inaccuracy and sensationalism that changed the American news cycle forever.

The gross misinformation that infiltrated the media coverage of the attack led to a slew of common misconceptions that, despite being debunked, are still pervasive today. The media reported that the murderers targeted jocks, that they had been horrendously bullied, that they were gay, that they were members of the "dangerous" Goth subculture which romanticized death and the grotesque, that they were members of the Trench Coat Mafia (a group of students at Columbine who wore trench coats and considered themselves outcasts), and that there was a vast conspiracy whose many hidden members still needed to be rustled up. None of these

things were true, but the misinformation proliferated due to its shock value, and false rumors continue to be part of the "mythology" of the Columbine attacks today.

Sensationalism in reporting occurs when accuracy erodes in favor of shocking, provocative storytelling meant to hook an audience, and Columbine was prone to sensationalism both by the very nature of the tragedy and because it happened during a decade marked by high-profile media scandals that reinvented the way Americans expected to consume their news. The O.J. Simpson trial, the murder of Jon-Benet Ramsey, the Lewinsky Scandal, and the several high-profile school shootings in the years leading up to Columbine all confirmed it: Americans wanted their coverage live, dramatic, and in living color. The sensationalist coverage of the Columbine shootings sacrificed fact for fiction, both out of a desperation to deliver Americans the information they wanted, and, of course, to create riveting, nonstop TV (which Eric anticipated as part of his planning).

It wasn't until two weeks after Columbine that the *New York Times* printed an issue that did not feature the massacre as its page-one story. The attack's capacity for shock value was as bottomless as the media's capacity to yield answers was fruitless. The repetition of misinformation created enduring public misconceptions about the facts of the attack, and also triggered survivors who could not handle the incessant news cycle, the melodramatic headlines, and the gratuitous reproductions of the violence that had taken the lives of their classmates. Cullen writes that in any large-scale tragedy, there are instances of misreported facts and foggy details, but the nature of our modern technological landscape ensures—and ensured even in 1999—that inaccuracies were magnified by a sensationalist, breaking-news approach to unraveling the story. Furthermore, Cullen argues that Columbine coverage was unique in the magnitude of its bad facts, which were, in Cullen's opinion, so widely-believed precisely because of the incomprehensible scale of violence and hatred that marked the incident.

RELIGION: ESCAPISM, EVANGELISM, OPPORTUNISM

Dave Cullen describes Colorado—and Jeffco in particular—as "the heart of Evangelical country." As the attack on Columbine unfolded, the intense religious atmosphere in the community contributed to the spread of rumors of martyrdom and warrior-like defiance in the name of God occurring during the attack. The escapism provided by religious narratives was a comfort to many witnesses and victims alike, not to mention their friends and families. By recounting the ways in which the area megachurches pandered to suffering survivors in order to grow their congregations, Cullen demonstrates the opportunism that exists not just within religious organizations, but in all of society after an attack of Columbine's magnitude. When people are at their most vulnerable, Cullen argues, they are desperate for answers. Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold left no answers in their wake, and the opportunistic churches in the area had their chance—just as the media had theirs—to claim they could provide the answers people sought.

Cassie Bernall, one of the thirteen victims of the shooting, was an Evangelical Columbine student with a troubled past who had transferred there from a private Christian school in order to "enlighten nonbelievers." In the aftermath of the attack, Cassie became a major recruiting tool of the churches who sought to "pack [the] ark with as many people as possible." Craig Scott, a survivor of the library massacre and the older brother of Rachel Scott (one of the first victims,) professed to have heard Eric Harris ask Cassie whether or not she believed in God. When Cassie answered "yes," Craig said, Eric shot her. The story gained enormous traction in the local Evangelical community. Cassie's status as "the martyr of Columbine" nearly led to her official martyrdom within the church. Her mother, Misty Bernall, wrote and published a book based on her daughter's life and terrifying final moments which has—as of 2017—sold over one million copies. The story of Cassie's martyrdom, however, was false.

At least two witnesses tell a different story—Emily Wyant testified that Eric Harris approached the desk Cassie was hiding underneath, ducked his head to her level, said "peekaboo," and shot her in the head, killing her almost instantly. Another student in the library, Val Schnurr, did actually profess her faith in God to the killers—they left her alive, though, after becoming distracted by a far-off noise. The anecdote of Cassie's martyrdom thus ties in with themes of misinformation and sensationalism, as Cassie's story symbolized hope, redemption, and grace in the face of unspeakable violence. People desperate for a glimmer of hope clung to her tale. Because of this, the story became difficult to debunk—even when stripped of its factual value, its emotional value (judging by the book's continued sales and the story's existence throughout the Evangelical community to this day) could not—or would not—be so easily purged.

"The kids are turning to God!" one member of the Denver clergy exclaimed during a service in the aftermath of the massacre. He was speaking opportunistically, but not incorrectly. In the wake of the attacks, Columbine students did "pour" into local churches, which were "just a place to go" for some. Church, for many survivors, became a neutral space that wasn't home and wasn't school, and that offered free snacks to boot. Many members of the local clergy—specifically non-Evangelicals—were actually appalled by the blatant opportunism, though several still believed that if the "recruitment" in the wake of the massacre was "truly [being] done for God," it was more than acceptable. The cornerstone of Evangelical belief is recruitment of others in the name of Jesus

as the "only way" to salvation—so despite the Evangelicals' opportunism, they were behaving opportunistically out of "obligation" to the tenets of their religion.

Dylan Klebold's funeral was arranged by Reverend Don Marxhausen after the Klebolds begged him for their help. The redemptive nature of the rite allowed Marxhausen, when interviewed by the media, to describe the Klebolds as "the loneliest people on the planet"—an opportunity to humanize the confused and grieving but publicly reviled Klebold family. While the Evangelical community may have behaved opportunistically, their mission of recruitment was indeed given a tremendous opportunity after the attacks—an opportunity that many believed just could not be "wasted." The church's insistence that it could provide community, refuge, and understanding in the wake of the attacks—and even the answers as to why the attacks occurred—was a port in the storm to many. Cullen never offers his opinion as to whether a symbiotic relationship between the grieving public and the crusading Evangelicals was morally beneficial, or whether it reeked too heavily of blind opportunism. However, just as "awe is proportional to grandeur" in the case of spectacle killings and mass murders, he implies, grief is proportional to vulnerability and desperation.

SYMBOLS

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

"ARLENE"

Eric Harris, the hate-filled teen psychopath who was, for all intents and purposes, the engineer of the attack on Columbine High School, acquired his first shotgun on November 22nd, 1998, just about five months before the shooting. He had been looking forward to having a gun for at least a year, and reverently named the gun "Arlene." The acquisition of the gun was a major milestone in the planning of the attacks—in Eric's own words, recovered from the detailed journal he kept in the year prior to the attack, it represented a "point of no return." After a series of setbacks and failures when it came to bomb-building and the recruitment of other conspirators, the acquisition was a rare triumph for both Eric and his conspirator, Dylan Klebold as they maneuvered their way around the law that prevents minors from purchasing guns. Eric would have turned eighteen about a month before the planned April date of the attack, but felt it was important to acquire the gun early in order "to keep the plan on track." Using his signature charm and cunning, Eric recruited Dylan's prom date, Robyn Anderson—who was infatuated with Dylan—to purchase Arlene, and Dylan's shotgun as well, on the boys' behalf. The boys had been building pipe bombs and "crickets" made from fireworks, but the shotguns represented the potential to actually take a life—Eric was thrilled and motivated by the power Arlene represented.

Though Eric's journal is the only record that remains of his thought process in the months leading up to the attack, it is rife with violent hate speech, detailed plans for the attack, and records of his meticulous preparation. The plan was all dream and conjecture until the acquisition of Arlene, which, in all likelihood, symbolized to Eric the impending realization of his greatest dream—the torturous annihilation of his "inferiors." In "The Basement Tapes," a series of video recordings the shooters made in the months leading up to the attack, Eric cradles Arlene in his lap as he drinks whiskey and rants about his hatred of "blacks, Latinos, gays, and women," lists "kids who'd pissed [him] off [and] every girl who had ever refused his advances," and plots the deaths of hundreds of his classmates. Eric points Arlene at the camera as he threatens his audience—whoever they may be—with the promise that they will "all die fucking soon," and brags of his "revolution[ary] declar[ation of] war on the human race." Arlene symbolizes the final push of confidence the already egomaniacal, psychopathic Eric needed to realize his long-stoked dream of violent retribution against all those he felt had wronged him simply by existing.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Twelve edition of *Columbine* published in 2010.

Chapter 14 Quotes

The fundamental experience for most of America was *almost* witnessing mass murder. It was the panic and frustration of not knowing, the mounting terror of horror withheld, just out of view. We would learn the truth about Columbine, but we would not learn it today. The narrative unfolding on television looked nothing like the killers' plan. It looked only moderately like what was actually occurring. It would take months for investigators to piece together what had gone on inside. Motive would take longer to unravel. It would be years before the detective team would explain why. The public couldn't wait that long. The media was not about to. They speculated.

Related Characters: Dave Cullen (speaker), Dylan Klebold, Eric Harris

Related Themes:

Page Number: 67

Explanation and Analysis

As the Columbine shooting unfolded on the morning of April 20th, 1999, the American media landscape began to change irreversibly. The spate of school shootings that had shaken America in the years prior were never televised—they were such short-lived affairs that the media didn't really descend on the scene, or begin their coverage, until after the event had ended. Columbine, however, was a larger-scale shooting, and—due to the establishment of a perimeter around the school—an impenetrable, ongoing "active shooter" situation. Though Dylan and Eric shot themselves at 12:08 p.m., and the first SWAT teams had entered at 12:06 p.m., there was a long "quiet period" during which the two roamed the school, shooting aimlessly and hitting no one. In those crucial minutes, the media speculated endlessly as to what was going on inside the building—and confused and traumatized students' unreliable eyewitness testimony pointed to several erroneous facts: that there were more than two killers, that the killers were members of the "Trench Coat Mafia," that they were shooting exclusively at jocks. None of these things were true, but the media, desperate for answers, repetitiously reported these facts about the killers, albeit with disclaimers such as "believed to be" or "reported as." Cullen writes that this repetition of erroneous facts directly influenced the public's incorrect understanding of the events of Columbine—a spectacle killing which had been a failed bombing turned desperate shootout.

Chapter 22 Quotes

❝ For investigators, the [discovery of the] big bombs changed everything: the scale, the method, and the motive of the attack. Above all, it had been indiscriminate. Everyone was supposed to die. Columbine was fundamentally different from the other school shootings. It had not really been intended as a shooting at all. Primarily it had been a bombing that failed. [When] officials announced the discovery, it instigated a new media shock wave. But, curiously, journalists failed to grasp the implications. They saw what happened at Columbine as a shooting and the killers as outcasts targeting jocks. They [continued to] filter every new development through that lens.

Related Characters: Dave Cullen (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 124

Explanation and Analysis

Due to confusion and misinformation in the early coverage of the attack, Columbine was erroneously categorized as a school shooting only. In reality, the killers had been planning to bomb their school in an attempt to take hundreds of lives within seconds and rival the Oklahoma City bombing of 1995, which in 1999 was still recognized as the deadliest-ever terrorist attack on American soil. Even after the bombs were discovered as investigative teams sifted through the wrecked halls of the high school, the media continued to perpetuate its report of the incident as a shooting. The killers weren't outcasts, either—they themselves described bullying and harassing younger classmates in their personal diaries, which were also filled with hate-filled rants, in Eric Harris's case, and extensive passages describing suicidal longing in Dylan Klebold's. But because the media had "filter[ed]" all of their information through the "lens" of one set of facts, they found themselves unable—or unwilling, though it's unclear which outlets were motivated or constrained by which factors—to reset or rewrite the narrative they'd already begun to spin.

Chapter 28 Quotes

❝ The crowds kept growing, but the students among them dwindled. Wednesday afternoon they poured their hearts out to reporters. Wednesday evening they watched a grotesque portrait of their school on television. It was a charitable picture at first, but it grew steadily more sinister as the week wore on. The media grew fond of the adjective "toxic." Apparently, Columbine was a horrible place. It was terrorized by a band of reckless jock lords and ruled by an aristocracy of snotty rich white kids in the latest Abercrombie & Fitch line. Some of that was true—which is to say, it was high school. But Columbine came to embody everything noxious about adolescence in America.

Related Characters: Dave Cullen (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 159

Explanation and Analysis

The attack on Columbine transformed it from a place that many—arguably, most—Americans had never heard of into a microcosm of "everything noxious" about life as a high-schooler in America. Though it is true, Cullen writes, that there were issues of bullying and cliques at Columbine, the massacre had not been directly related to or born out of those issues. Framing the attack as the result of them forced the problems at Columbine under a microscope, and suddenly the media had locked onto another erroneous view of what had transpired at Columbine on April 20th,

1999. Furthermore, this particular view put more of the blame on the victims and survivors of the attack, assuming that they had somehow driven Eric and Dylan to mass murder.

Chapter 40 Quotes

❝ Because dyads, murderous pairs who feed off each other, account for only a fraction of mass murderers, little research has been conducted on them. We know that the partnerships tend to be asymmetrical. An angry, erratic depressive and a sadistic psychopath make a combustible pair. The psychopath is in control, of course, but the hotheaded sidekick can sustain his excitement leading up to the big kill. "It takes heat and cold to make a tornado," Dr. Fuselier is fond of saying. Eric craved heat, but he [easily grew bored and] couldn't sustain it. Dylan was a volcano. You could never tell when he might erupt.

Related Characters: Dave Cullen , Dwayne Fuselier (speaker), Dylan Klebold, Eric Harris

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 244

Explanation and Analysis

As Dave Cullen investigates what, exactly, drove Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold to commit such an atrocity, he cites research which explores the dyad dynamic. Though Eric was ready and eager to carry out a mass murder, Dylan's energy was both more inwardly-directed and less sadistic by far, though he still dreamed of retribution and destruction. To explain the gap between the boys' mindset—and how that gap steadily closed in the months leading up to the massacre—Cullen uses the example of the dyad. Famous dyads include Bonnie and Clyde, and the intense, symbiotic nature of the dyad relationship does explain how the "hotheaded" Dylan was seduced by the cool, sadistic machinations of Eric—who remained, for more or less the entirety of the boys' friendship, dominant and steadily in control.

Chapter 44 Quotes

❝ Eric didn't have the political agenda of a terrorist, but he had adopted terrorist tactics. Sociology professor Mark Juergensmeyer identified the central characteristic of terrorism as "performance violence." Terrorists design events "to be spectacular in their viciousness and awesome in their destructive power. Such instances of exaggerated violence are constructed events: they are mind-numbing, mesmerizing theater."

Related Characters: Dave Cullen (speaker), Eric Harris

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 277

Explanation and Analysis

Performance violence and spectacle murder are two descriptors of the massacre that occurred at Columbine. These terms describe an attack that is engineered, or "constructed," meticulously and intentionally, with the goal of creating a "mind-numbing, mesmerizing" display. Columbine—though technically a failure, in that it was a bombing gone awry which deteriorated into a shooting—did succeed as an act of performance violence. Eric Harris carefully constructed a plan that would maximize carnage and confusion while the attack was going on, and assured the obsession and fascination of his local community, the greater American public, and the media, all at once. Columbine was sensationalized in the media, to be sure, but the visceral horror of the spectacle—the worst school shooting America had seen—was genuine, and it was more through repetition and speculation that the attack was sensationalized.

Chapter 48 Quotes

❝ Now [Eric] had to concentrate on getting Dylan a second gun. And [he] had a whole lot of production work. If only he had a little more cash, he could move the experiments along. Oh well. You could fund only so many bombs at a pizza factory. And he needed his brakes checked, and he'd just had to buy winter wiper blades, and he had a whole bunch of new CDs to pick up.

Related Characters: Dave Cullen (speaker), Dylan Klebold, Eric Harris

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 306

Explanation and Analysis

This quotation highlights the banality of Eric's brand of evil, and the fact that he was, in the final years of his life, a psychopath attempting to fit into the mold of a normal, all-American teenager—whether he was doing so out of genuine desire or as part of one of his many deceptions, Cullen does not presume to know. From Eric's journal entries, Cullen is able to access his thoughts, his plans, and his desires, as he put them down in his own words. Eric's eager but cavalier attitude toward the acquisition of ordnance and firearms—firearms which he planned to use in the pursuit of staggering loss of life—along with the banality of his needs is highlighted in this passage. Eric was planning a large-scale terrorist attack, which he hoped would set the record for the deadliest attack in American history—but he still had to live his life in the months, weeks, and days leading up to the event, and the contrast between his desires and reality creates a disturbing, uncanny, and even slightly comical gulf.

Chapter 49 Quotes

❝ Oddballs are not the problem. They do not fit the profile. *There is no profile.* Attackers came from all ethnic, economic, and social classes. The bulk came from solid two-parent homes. Most had no criminal record or history of violence. The two biggest myths were that shooters were loners and that they "snapped." A staggering 93 percent planned their attack in advance. "The path toward violence is an evolutionary one, with signposts along the way," the FBI report said. Cultural influences appeared weak. Many perps shared a crucial experience: 98 percent had suffered a loss or failure they perceived as serious—anything from getting fired to blowing a test or getting dumped. Of course, everyone suffers loss and failure, but for these kids, the trauma seemed to set anger in motion. This was certainly true in Columbine; Dylan viewed his entire life as failure, and Eric's arrest accelerated his anger.

Related Characters: Dave Cullen (speaker), Dylan Klebold, Eric Harris

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 322

Explanation and Analysis

Tied in with themes of misinformation and sensationalism in the media, as well as the ramifications of an inability to cope with failure, this quotation debunks the idea that there is a "profile" of a school shooter. Though Columbine was initially reported as an incident in which two boys who had been horribly bullied took revenge against their school's jocks—allegedly the perpetrators of the bullying—in reality, Columbine was an attack whose only motive was its psychopathic ringleader's hatred of humanity. The fact that many attacks are not perpetrated by "oddballs" or "outcasts"—and that school administrators' treatment of students struggling socially can actually be harmful if they are singled out, further isolated, or "profiled"—is still somewhat revolutionary when it comes to thinking about school shootings. Despite hard data that confirms the premeditated nature of over ninety percent of shootings—as well as the influence of blows to the ego and the desire for retribution in the face of failure on the attacks—many in both the public and the press still perpetuate the myth that Columbine and other shooters of its ilk were perpetrated by "loners who snapped," rather than deeply unstable individuals who carefully planned their attacks to spite anyone who, in the attacker's view, failed, slighted, or offended them.

Chapter 50 Quotes

❝ "More rage, more rage!" Eric demanded. He motioned with his arms. "Keep building it."
Dylan hurled another Ericism: "It's humans I hate."
Eric raised Arlene, and aimed her at the camera. "You guys will all die, and it will be fucking soon," he said. "You all need to die. We need to die, too."
The boys made it clear, repeatedly, that they planned to die in battle. Their legacy would live. "We're going to kick-start a revolution," Eric said. "I declared war on the human race and war is what it is."
He apologized to his mom. "I really am sorry about this, but war's war."

Related Characters: Dylan Klebold, Eric Harris (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 327

Explanation and Analysis

This exchange is taken from Cullen's experience of viewing "The Basement Tapes," a series of confessional, talk-show style videos which Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold recorded in the weeks leading up to the Columbine massacre, and it demonstrates several key components of Eric and Dylan's twisted but mutually needful relationship. As noted earlier,

experts describe the relationship as a "dyad"—a murderous pair whose destruction is mutually assured. Cullen describes Dylan beginning to speak in "Ericisms," and, at another point in this chapter, describes the boys as using "one voice"—Eric's voice. Dylan was a depressed and suicidal young man whose explosive tendencies spoke to both a sensitive and angry interior. Dylan's anger was initially directed inward, toward himself. Eric Harris, on the other hand, directed his rage outward, toward all of humanity. He was egotistical, narcissistic, and self-aggrandizing—and as his repetitious desires for mass murder, "natural selection," and annihilation of both the landscape of the world as well as the people inhabiting it began to rub off on Dylan Klebold, the necessary "hotheaded sidekick," Dylan's speech began to mirror Eric's, and his desire for violence expanded outward to mimic Eric's desires as well.

Chapter 51 Quotes

❝ [Eight years later] at [the] Virginia Tech [shooting in 2007,] Seung-Hui Cho killed thirty-two people, plus himself, and injured seventeen. The press proclaimed it a new American record. They shuddered at the idea of turning school shootings into a competition, then awarded Cho the title.

Related Characters: Dave Cullen (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 348

Explanation and Analysis

Continuing to examine the role of the media in the sensationalism—and perhaps in the proliferation—of mass shootings in America, Cullen notes that while the media is repulsed by looking at killings as a "competition," they nonetheless go ahead with "award[ing]" records and "title[s]" to the murderers. The press knows that killers who commit "spectacle murders" are hungry for fame, glory, and an enduring legacy, yet they continue to play into the cycle of obsessive coverage, repetitious naming of the killer, and often gratuitous descriptions or depictions of the violence perpetrated during the attack. Americans are hungry for stories and networks are hungry for ratings—and the killers are hungry for exposure to the limelight. The despicable but seemingly inescapable cycle is at the heart of Cullen's investigation into the Columbine massacre, and one of its most perplexing dilemmas.

Epilogue Quotes

❝ After most tragedies, I confer with some of the great minds on mass murder. That's a privilege. When I write on this subject, I'm responsible for every opinion, but I can rarely claim them as original ideas. Mostly, I'm the messenger. It can be invigorating, getting inside these killers' heads, hashing out ways to outmaneuver them. But the killers have stayed maddeningly ahead. It's begun to feel like failure, failure, and failure for a decade and a half. I used to get angry for an hour or to, then I'd brush that aside to get to work. Lately, it just rages. Because we are not powerless, especially we in the media. We are just acting like it.

Related Characters: Dave Cullen (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 379

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote Dave Cullen, a reporter, reflects on his role as the "messenger" when it comes to relaying stories of massive tragedies. Throughout *Columbine*, Cullen has discussed the role of the media in sensationalizing Columbine and in contributing to inaccurate myths about the attack which have lingered in its shadow to this very day. Here, he reflects on the feeling of "failure" that follows him as he watches the repetitious patterns of mass killings continue to unfold in the papers and on the televisions of millions of Americans who are "almost" bearing witness to murder, tragedy, and loss. Cullen acknowledges that he is complicit in the failures and responsible for committing to making changes in the American media, a uniquely powerful entity and the lens through which the majority of Americans will come to understand the killings that continue to plague the country.

❝ There's another pernicious myth: that Eric and Dylan succeeded. Measured by [the shooters'] own standards, Columbine was a colossal failure so unrecognizable as terrorism that we ranked them first among the school shooters they ridiculed. Killers keep trying to relive the glory and elation at Columbine. There was none.

Related Characters: Dave Cullen (speaker), Dylan Klebold, Eric Harris

Related Themes:

Page Number: 386

Explanation and Analysis

When discussing the pervasive continuation of school shootings in America—and the escalating death tolls of these killings, which are almost always designed as "spectacles"—Cullen notes that many killers directly reference Columbine in manifestos or plans left behind after their attacks. The shooter in the Virginia Tech massacre in 2007 made specific and repeat reference to Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold in his "disoriented" manifesto as well. Yet Cullen makes it clear that the "glory and elation" many mass murderers describe trying to achieve was not a characteristic of Columbine, despite the intense and prolonged media attention Columbine received. Columbine was, in essence, a failure—something that has been obscured by the level of terror that Eric and Dylan managed to instill despite the failure of their efforts at a bombing. Eric and Dylan were attempting to replicate the "glory" of the Oklahoma City bombing themselves, and the desire of murderers to "relive" or recreate the large-scale terror and trauma of the numerous attacks that came before theirs is concrete evidence of the sociological theory of "spectacle killings" which Cullen uses to explore and explain the Columbine massacre.

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: MR. D

Frank DeAngelis, a former coach who is now principal of Columbine High School, addresses the two thousand members of the student body at the end of a prep rally. He tells the students that he loves "each and every one of them" and that "his heart would break to lose just one of them." It is Friday, April 16th, 1999, and the weekend of Columbine's prom is here. Frank, wanting to refrain from "lecturing," tells stories of his college friend and teenage daughter's respective motorcycle and car accidents, imploring his students to be safe over the weekend. He instructs them each to look to their left and then to their right, and to repeat after him the words "I am a valued member of Columbine. I'm not in this alone."

Cullen depicts Columbine before the massacre as a welcoming place where students were told that they were loved and worthy members of their community. Their principal urges them not just to consider but to actively look out for one another, and to see their classmates as individuals despite the very large student body.

Frank, also known as "Mr. D," then leads the students in a rousing chant: "We are… COL-um-BINE!" All two thousand students, says the narrator, journalist Dave Cullen, will return to school safely on Monday. On Tuesday, April 20th, 1999, however, the "worst school shooting in American history" will have occurred on Columbine's campus. "The boys [who were] just then finalizing their plans," Cullen says, would be "appalled" by that "characterization" of their efforts.

Cullen's foresight—and his audience's—allows a window into the very near future, which reveals that though the students of the Columbine community do, perhaps as a result of Mr. D's attention, value and respect their own lives and the lives of their classmates—there are two of them who do not. Also note that the two boys would be "appalled" by the description of their efforts—this is because they were planning something even more horrifying than what actually took place.

CHAPTER 2: "REBELS"

Eric Harris, a senior boy, is desperate for a date to prom. Though dates are not usually difficult for him to secure, he has come up empty this weekend. He is "a brain," but a "cool" brain. He attends parties, "gets chicks," smokes, drinks, listens to hard-core German rock music, and refers to himself—a seasoned rule-breaker—as "Reb," short for Rebel. Cullen says that "Eric outscored much of the football team" when it comes to charm and coolness. He works at a local pizza chain, Blackjack, with his friend Dylan. He is "striking," with an "all-American" look and a "flirtatious" smile.

Eric Harris was not the outcast that the media later came to depict him as. He had a thriving social life and a charming exterior, and was successful in school to boot. He did "measure up" against the jocks he would later be accused of hating and fearing.

Eric is, at the moment, jealous of his close friend, Dylan Klebold, who has a date for prom despite being "meek, self-conscious, and shy." Cullen notes that Dylan "emulate[s]" Eric—Dylan is deeply insecure and is only able to ever see "the worst version of himself." Dylan, unlike the clean-cut Eric, has the appearance of a rebel—he is tall, with long curly hair.

Dylan stands in stark contrast to Eric's "all-American" looks and sunny disposition. Note that even just days before the attack, there was suspicion and resentment between the two killers, despite the ways in which they were bound to one another.

Dylan's prom date is "a sweet, brainy Christian girl" who has "helped to acquire three of the four guns" the boys have between the two of them. Her name is Robyn Anderson, and she "adore[s]" Dylan.

The love-struck Robyn is a cog in the boys' machine, and cannot see yet the role she will play in what is about to happen.

Eric and Dylan are active members of their school community. They attend spirit events, school plays, and football games. Both are into sports, and Dylan is especially obsessed with baseball.

Once again, Cullen illustrates how Dylan and Eric were, contrary to popular opinion, committed and welcome members of the Columbine community.

Eric "fancie[s] himself a nonconformist," but "crave[s]" approval and fume[s] over the slightest disrespect." Dylan's nickname is VoDKa—he is a heavy drinker. "To adult eyes," Cullen says, Eric is the more responsible and obedient boy—however, the reality is that Eric carefully manipulates others to see how much he can get away with, and "suck[s] up like crazy" to get out of trouble anytime he's caught.

Though the boys are not quite what the media will say they are, neither are they quite what they appear to their friends and families. Both boys are putting up facades in order to placate the adults in their lives, and have a totally separate existence when it comes to their friendship.

One adult who is "acquainted with Eric's wild side" is Robert Kirgis, the owner of the Blackjack Pizza franchise where Eric and Dylan work. The three of them sometimes used to go up to the roof after closing time to drink and fire off bottle rockets. Kirgis thinks that both boys are "bright young kids," and observes that Eric is "like a robot under pressure" while Dylan is "unreliable."

Eric's personality tilts toward the "robotic" while Dylan's is more scattered and unpredictable. Robert Kirgis was an adult who was aware of the boys' fascination with fireworks and explosives.

Cullen writes that "nothing separated the boys' personalities like a run-in with authority," noting that Eric was "unflappable" and "calmly calculating," and often kept both himself and Dylan from getting in too much trouble—on the occasions that they were caught, Dylan, caught up in "pure emotions," often "erupted."

The differences between the boys hold even under extreme pressure—Eric keeps up his calm front, but Dylan is unable to disguise his pain and anger when it comes to failure, exposure, or humiliation.

Eric and Dylan are "technology hounds," and have an active life on the internet—they create websites, direct short videos of themselves, and play online games. They look, from the outside, like "normal young boys, a little full of themselves" but not "unusual for high school" kids.

The boys' fascination with catching themselves on camera will later become a crucial aspect of the attack. The boys were skilled in espousing normalcy when they needed to in order to deceive those around them.

Cullen describes the geography around Columbine, which sits at the base of a mesa called Rebel Hill. The Rockies dominate the landscape, and the range just over Columbine "is taller than the highest peaks in all of Appalachia." Columbine itself is a massive, 250,000 square-foot building—practical and spare, "like the people of Jefferson County," which is known locally as Jeffco. Denver is just ten miles to the northeast, but the rural sits in close proximity to the urban.

Columbine looms over Jeffco, a large, stark, and imposing structure rising out of the similarly stark landscape of the Rocky Mountain foothills.

Dylan and Eric's friends have noticed that the two of them are cutting class and falling down on their schoolwork—Dylan keeps falling asleep in class, too. At lunch one day, one of Eric's friends takes a video of their group. In the video, someone the boys don't like walks into the cafeteria, and one of Eric's "buddies" remarks that he "hates" the random guy. Eric replies that he "hate[s] almost everyone," but especially wants to "rip [that guy's] head off and eat it." None of his friends find his violent language, or flat affect while delivering it, unusual. When a "busty" girl walks by, Eric waves her over to their table, and the boys flirt with her.

The boys' lives as the date of the attack approaches are both different and similar to what they have been—the boys are failing to participate in school, but continue to put up a playful front for their friends. Even violent language and the expression of murderous desire doesn't rattle the boys' school friends, illustrating that this kind of language is "normal" for Eric despite his "all-American" vibe. Life before the attacks is banal, but tinged with a fiery hatred just under the surface.

CHAPTER 3: SPRINGTIME

Springtime has filled Columbine with excitement. Everyone is looking forward to summer, and seniors—80% of whom, according to Columbine's superb statistics, will go on to college—are looking forward to the next steps in their lives. Cullen describes the cafeteria, which is known as "the commons" by members of the Columbine community. Lunch is divided into shifts, and "A" lunch is the most popular. The commons are always packed for a few minutes at the beginning of lunch before students settle down or trickle out to go off-campus for lunch.

Cullen describes the logistics of Columbine in the weeks before the attack, in order to fully set the scene for his readers and to demonstrate that it was a seemingly normal place, unaware of and unprepared for the violence that was to come its way.

Mr. D is on lunch duty—he loves the task, seeing it as a chance to really engage with his students. He is a stickler for cleanliness—so much so that he has surveillance cameras installed in the commons to monitor student activity and look out for those who disrespect the environment of the commons. A custodian reloads the tapes each morning just past 11am. The cameras record "banal" footage each and every day.

Cullen uses the cameras as an unsettling example of dramatic irony. He and his audience know what the cameras will witness in just a few weeks, but students and school officials do not.

Meanwhile, a "terrifying affliction" has stricken America: school shootings. Many have already been widely reported on in newspapers and on TV since the phenomenon "materialized inexplicably" in 1997. Shootings in Alaska, Mississippi, Kentucky, Arkansas, and more states have rocked the nation. The violence is worst in the springtime, which is referred to by the media as "shooting season." The perpetrators, Cullen notes, are always "white boy[s]," and each attack ends relatively quickly—TV news "never [catches] the turmoil [live,]" and the country sees only the aftermath. During the 1998-99 school year, there has not been a single shooting. As chaos erupts in Central Europe in March of 1999, America is at "war," and no one is thinking about "the suburban menace of the school shooter" for the time being.

Cullen sets up the atmosphere of the moment in time surrounding the Columbine shooting. Though school shootings had been bad enough in recent years to be deemed an "affliction," the rate at which the incidents are occurring has died down. If Columbine had never happened, Cullen leaves his audience to speculate, perhaps the incidence of school shootings would never again have risen to its present-day numbers.

CHAPTER 4: ROCK 'N' BOWL

On Friday, April 16th, Eric Harris has two goals: acquire ammo and a prom date. Though he and Dylan both plan to be dead within a few days, for now they have a shift at Blackjack to work. Eric has no career plans or college goals, and never has. Dylan has been accepted to the University of Arizona, but hasn't mailed his tuition deposit yet. Eric has been speaking with a Marine recruiter—to appease his air-force pilot father—but is only using it as a "cover."

Cullen illustrates the gulf between the banal, or the boring, and the exceptional and the violent which marked Eric and Dylan's lives in the days and weeks before the attack. Eric appears to have two competing desires—to be a "normal" teen boy, and to be a glorified, legendary mass murderer.

Eric and Dylan's friends Chris Morris, Nate Dykeman, and Zack Heckler have all worked at Blackjack before—it pays decently and offers the boys lots of opportunities to socialize with "hotties." Eric has been flirting for months with Susan, a girl who works in another store in the same strip mall. When she comes in to pick up an order that Friday night, Eric gets her number. At Blackjack, Kirgis has sold the franchise, and Blackjack's new owner announces that Eric is being promoted to shift manager. At the end of their shift, Eric and Dylan both ask for advances, and are paid a total of $320 in cash.

Eric and Dylan were preparing for their "Judgment Day" attack in earnest at this point—seeking cash advances to fund their last grabs at ammo and ordnance, and Eric was attempting to make things happen with Susan—one of the only things on his to-do-before-the-attack list that he had not yet accomplished.

After work, both boys head together to Belleview Lanes to bowl—their regular Friday night activity. Both boys take early-morning bowling classes three days a week, too. Lately, Eric has been getting into "German shit," quoting Nietzsche and Freud as often as he quotes Adolf Hitler. He listens to hardcore German rock and "punctuate[s] his high fives [at the bowling alley] with 'Sieg Heil' or 'Heil Hitler.'" Cullen notes that "reports conflict [as to] whether Dylan followed [Eric's] lead" when it came to the Nazi obsession.

Once again, the gulf between the banal and the horrific emerges. Eric and Dylan were having a normal Friday night—bowling with friends—but the outing was marked by overt and repetitious references to murder, hatred, and genocide.

The boys head home early. Eric calls Susan, but her mother answers. When she tells Eric that Susan is sleeping at a friends' house, Eric gets angry—rejection, "especially by females," is his weak spot. Even though she is struck by his quickness to anger, Susan's mother offers Eric Susan's pager number, and he writes her a message. Susan calls Eric from her friend's house, and the two of them talk on the phone for half an hour. Eric asks Susan if she is busy Saturday night, and she says no. Eric finally has a date to the prom.

Eric's façade slips in this passage, and he reveals his violent inner self to a complete stranger in an instant at the smallest perceived slight or failure. Eric then returns to his "normal" self when he gets what it is that he wants.

CHAPTER 5: TWO COLUMBINES

This Friday night, as he is on most Friday nights, Coach Dave Sanders is at the Columbine Lounge, which is "an ass-kicking strip-mall honky-tonk." Coach Sanders has lived in Jeffco since 1974—he moved from a rural community in Indiana to find that Jeffco was also pretty rural. Now, however, it has been suburbanized, and the affluent community that has risen up has been deemed "New Columbine." The Harrises and the Klebolds are in that category.

Through Dave Sanders's journey to Columbine and his witnessing of how it changed over the years, Cullen sets the scene for what the community looks like now—a well-to-do suburban enclave that revolves around the high school.

Columbine High was built in 1973 as the community "brace[d] for an influx." It was renovated and expanded in 1995—"curving green glass" now covers the face of the commons, and the new library is only four years old. Jeffco has "no main street, no town hall, library, or name." Littleton, though often cited as the location of Columbine High, is a "quiet suburb where the massacre did not actually occur." The "thirty thousand" new residents of Jeffco who have "clustered around" the school have adopted "Columbine [as] the name of their home."

Jeffco is a blend of the rural and the suburban, and the high school is such an intricate part of the county that the actual names of the suburbs have been more or less erased in favor of referring to the area around the school simply as "Columbine." Cullen paints a picture of how large and influential an institution Columbine is, and what an integral part of life it is for residents of Jeffco.

Dave Sanders teaches typing, keyboarding, and economics at Columbine—he does not have a particular interest in these subjects, but they allow him to coach. He coaches seven different sports, and is a quiet but insistent motivator. His daughter, Angela, "grew up" at Columbine, attending practices with her father from the time she was a toddler. Dave is divorced from his ex-wife and has married another woman named Linda Lou, who had two nearly-grown daughters of her own at the time of their marriage. Linda's daughters, Cindy and Coni, live together with Dave and Angela—all three girls call Dave "Dad." They are a tight-knit family, and Angela's children love and idolize Dave, their grandfather, as well.

Dave is a family man with a strong, solid foundation. He is an important member of his community and is beloved by all around him. His tight-knit family is a source of strength and pride, and they too are members of the larger Columbine community. All this positive portrayal of Dave then makes the later tragedy of his death seem all the more heartbreaking.

As prom approaches, many students have struggled to find dates—one of them is Patrick Ireland, who is in love with his best friend Laura. An athlete who plays basketball, baseball, and water skis while maintaining a 4.0, Patrick is "unfamiliar" with indecision and insecurity. Not wanting to make things awkward with Laura—whom he'd had a falling-out with when they were children together—Patrick asks another girl, Cora, to attend the dance with him as friends. At the prom, which is in downtown Denver, Patrick enjoys himself, and even gets to slow-dance with Laura just once. Meanwhile Cassie Bernall, an Evangelical student, was not asked to the prom. She and her friend Amanda choose to attend the after-party together, where "dates [are] optional." They dance until the sun comes up.

Patrick Ireland is introduced as a truly all-American high school jock—but he struggles too, on occasion, with failure and indecision. Cullen peppers the narrative with accounts of the actions of many of the students who will prominently feature in the Columbine massacre in order to give a three-hundred-and-sixty-degree view of the incident, and humanize and bring to life the students who will be affected by Eric and Dylan's violent actions.

CHAPTER 6: HIS FUTURE

Dylan enjoys his night out at prom—his date is beautiful, his friend group takes a stretch limo to Denver, and Dylan is in a "great mood," "insist[ing]" to his friends that they all need to "stay in touch" once they scatter for college in the fall. While Dylan is at prom, Eric has Susan over to watch a cheesy movie. The two have a quiet night in, listening to music. Eric does not make a move to kiss Susan, and she leaves around eleven. Prom is "standard," and Mr. D is "relie[ved]" when the evening goes off without a hitch. The Columbine gym is outfitted for afterprom—Dylan and his group of friends attend, and Dylan talks with them all night about college and his future.

In this chapter, Cullen highlights the appearance of normalcy that characterized the weekend of prom—the weekend before the shooting. Everything is a "standard" affair, and Dylan and Eric seem to be enjoying themselves, even as they continue to plan a violent and destructive massacre of their friends, teachers, and classmates. Dylan looks toward the future, seemingly never betraying the fact that he knows he will be dead in just a couple of days.

CHAPTER 7: CHURCH ON FIRE

Cullen describes Trinity Christian Center, the heart of the "heart of Evangelical country." Colorado has long been a "hotbed" for Evangelism, and Colorado Springs is known colloquially as the "Evangelical Vatican." Preachers and pastors warn of "the Enemy," Satan, and insist that the devil roams the foothills of Jeffco. Religion is a 24/7 commitment, and members of the local megachurches treat it as such. Cassie Bernall, a particularly devout Columbine student, transferred there from a nearby Christian school after begging her parents to switch so that she could "witness to the unbelievers at Columbine."

The religious atmosphere in Jefferson County is, for many, all-consuming. The threat of "the Enemy" is very real, and the Evangelical mission of "witnessing to" or "saving" those who are classified as "unbelievers" is important even for younger members of the community, such as the devout Cassie.

Monday morning after prom is an uneventful one at Columbine, but elsewhere in Jeffco, Special Agent Dwayne Fuselier is "on edge." He heads the FBI's domestic terrorist unit in Denver, and knows that April 19th is a "dangerous" day—it is the six-year anniversary of the "worst disaster in FBI history," the day the feds stormed the Branch Davidian cult in Waco, Texas, after a fifty-one-day standoff. Fuselier had been the last known person to speak to the Davidians' leader, David Koresh. April 19th has become "a symbol of perverse authority," and it was on that date in 1995 that terrorist Timothy McVeigh bombed a federal building in Oklahoma City. His attack took 168 lives and was, at that point, the largest terrorist attack in American history.

Dwayne Fuselier, who will come to be one of the leading experts in the Columbine investigation, is introduced as a thoughtful veteran of the FBI, aware of the unseen dangers and threats that many around him do not perceive. In this chapter, Cullen contrasts the perception of the unseen but ever-present threat of Satan in the Evangelical community with the unseen and ever-present threat of physical violence in Fuselier's world.

CHAPTER 8: MAXIMUM HUMAN DENSITY

Cullen believes it is a "safe bet" that Eric and Dylan viewed coverage of the Waco and Oklahoma City incidents on television—Timothy McVeigh, the perpetrator of the Oklahoma City bombing, was tried in downtown Denver. Eric, in his journal, would speak of his desire to top McVeigh's attack.

Cullen cites the influence of the media on Eric and Dylan as they grew up—they were able to bear witness, through their televisions, to acts of angry, large-scale violence that they later cited as inspirational to their own massacre.

Eric and Dylan refer to their plot as "Judgment Day"—Eric has designed seven large bombs after finding recipes on the internet. He has made the bombs using propane tanks, aerosol can detonators, and alarm clocks as timers. Eric plans to place several decoy bombs in a park near his house, a few miles from Columbine, in hopes of diverting police while they use "every free minute [to] raise the potential body count" at the high school.

Eric and Dylan envision their attack as being one of biblical proportions, so much so that they name it Judgment Day. Eric in particular dreams of an insanely high body count—inspired, no doubt, by spectacle murders such as the Oklahoma City bombing.

The "main event" is "scripted" to unfold in three "acts, just like a movie." For "Act One," the boys plan to place two large propane bombs in the cafeteria at the beginning of "A" lunch. The bombs have been loaded with nails to maximize shrapnel and stuffed into duffel bags, which will conceal them while the boys retreat out of the cafeteria and take cover. After "wip[ing] out most of the lunch crowd," the boys plan to prepare for "Act Two," when they will pick off anyone who survives the bombing with their firearms—a semiautomatic handgun and a shotgun for Dylan, and a carbine rifle and second shotgun for Eric. The two also plan to load up on smaller pipe bombs, Molotov cocktails, knives, and other assorted ordnance. For "Act Three," the boys expect to already be dead—bombs concealed in each of their cars will blow just as police, press, and paramedics arrive on the scene, and even more lives will be taken.

The fact that Eric and Dylan scripted their attack like a film lent credence to the popular opinion that violent media had been an inspiration to them. The desire to create a spectacle that flowed in an intuitive way and had a clear structure with definitive characteristics of each phase wasn't tied to any one film, show, or video game, but it did reflect the boys' theatrical sensibilities and desire for constructed violence that would inspire the awe and "respect" that their favorite films did.

Eric and Dylan have been planning their attack for months, and considering it for well over a year. Both boys know their attack will "puzzle the public," and they plan to leave behind detailed journals outlining every step of the logistics behind the massacre, as well as websites and a series of incendiary, disturbing videos that will come to be known as the "Basement Tapes."

The boys are very concerned with their legacy. They want to use the attacks to make a visible and lasting impact, and want for their names to become synonymous with large-scale violence. They are considering their audience at every turn while planning the attack.

Eric planned the massacre for the Monday after prom, but failed to acquire enough ammo over the weekend. He calls upon Mark Manes, a drug dealer who also runs guns and ammo, and the man from whom Eric purchased Dylan's semiautomatic. Monday evening, after an uneventful day for both Eric and Dylan, Manes acquires ammo on Eric's behalf. Eric is eighteen years old, but Cullen notes that the fact that he could legally purchase his own ammunition seems either to have escaped him or to have been something he did not want to do. Eric picks up the ammo from Manes' house, and Manes asks Eric if he is planning on going hunting later that evening. "Maybe tomorrow" is Eric's reply.

This shift in planning is uncharacteristic of the meticulous Eric. Cullen does not claim to know what the last-minute change might have signified. Eric's callous response to Manes' question demonstrates a collected and determined state of mind, as well as a deep, unrelenting sadism and desire to "hunt" his classmates down.

CHAPTER 9: DADS

On Monday afternoon, Frank DeAngelis and Dave Sanders enjoy a Columbine baseball game together. They discuss their lives, their shared pasts, and their coaching. Both men look back fondly on their careers as coaches and teachers, but both regret perhaps having "shortchanged" their own children. Dave confides in Frank that he is planning to take his first summer ever off from coaching, and then heads out while Frank stays behind for the rest of the game.

Though Mr. D and Dave believed it to be just another Monday afternoon, their conversation took a turn for the profound—Dave was on the verge of a major life change, and had chosen to confide in his friend. Little did they know this was one of the last times they would speak.

After a slightly tense practice, Dave returns home to his sleeping wife. He has a present for her mother's birthday, which is the following day. Linda wakes up and catches up with Dave, then falls asleep with a smile. The following morning, the two of them, both running late, argue briefly—they are both stressed. They leave the house without kissing the other goodbye.

Again, Cullen highlights the unknowability of life through dramatic irony. It is just another Tuesday morning for Dave and his wife, but they do not know that everything between them is about to come to an end.

CHAPTER 10: JUDGMENT

On the morning of the massacre—Tuesday morning—Dylan Klebold leaves the house at 5:30. His parents, still in bed, hear him call out just one word—"Bye"—and close the door behind him. The boys drive together to the grocery store to purchase additional propane tanks. By seven in the morning, the boys return to Eric's house, where they split up to continue assembling supplies. They rendezvous once more to practice, "chill," and get something to eat.

The boys have a "normal" morning "chilling" together even as they make the final preparations for a literal massacre. The boys' cold, removed approach to their impending actions speaks to the horrifying banality of evil.

Several of the boys' friends, Cullen says, recall noticing "peculiarities" on the morning of the attack. Dylan's prom date, Robyn, noticed his absence from class, and the boys' mutual friend, Brooks Brown, wondered "what kind of stunt" Eric was pulling by missing an important test in psychology class.

There are seeds of unease in the air, but truly none of the boys' friends are able to predict—or even really suspect—what they are about to do.

Dylan and Eric head for school—they are already running behind schedule. Dylan wears cargo pants, a black t-shirt emblazoned with the word WRATH, and a baseball cap. Eric wears a similar outfit, but his t-shirt says NATURAL SELECTION. Both boys wear combat boots, share a single pair of gloves, and bring along heavy black duster jackets. The boys leave behind the Basement Tapes on Eric's kitchen counter, along with some handwritten "final thoughts."

The shooters designed every detail of the attacks down to their outfits. The shared pair of gloves seems to denote the deep bond that planning the attack created between them, and also symbolizes their shared responsibility for and dedication to the violence that was about to occur. The boys want there to be witnesses to and an audience for the attack, and leave behind evidence of their careful planning in plain sight.

After setting the decoy bombs in a field a few miles from Columbine, the boys drive to school. They are on a tight schedule. Dylan parks in his regular spot in the senior lot, while Eric parks in the adjacent junior lot. Brooks Brown, on his way out to lunch, spots Eric pulling into the wrong lot and questions him. Eric tells Brooks that "it doesn't matter," and implores him to "go home." Brooks continued to head off campus for lunch, shaking off Eric's odd comments.

Despite meticulous planning, the shooters found themselves running behind schedule. Eric's bizarre but benevolent comment to Brooks—who was more of an enemy than a friend, as Cullen will later reveal—demonstrates some kind of "perimeter" around the attacks, or a boundary that could not be crossed—Brooks was spared as he headed away from campus, and the attacks would only begin when the boys entered the high school itself.

Eric and Dylan drop off the duffel bags containing the propane and gasoline bombs in the commons, then return to their cars to arm themselves with guns, small bombs, and knives. The bombs are timed to go off at 11:17. Cullen writes that the surveillance cameras Mr. D installed in the cafeteria should have caught the boys' suspicious activity—however, this morning the custodian too was running late, and, while rewinding the previous day's tapes, missed Eric and Dylan putting "Act One" in motion.

The fact that both the shooters and the custodian charged with reviewing and rewinding the security tapes were running behind schedule and did not complete their assigned tasks exactly as planned ties in with the book's themes of failure and contingency.

Patrick Ireland heads to the library as lunch begins, planning on finishing his homework during the hour. Cassie Bernall is also in the library, studying during lunch. Mr. D is absent from the commons, about to take a meeting in which he is planning to offer a new teacher a permanent position. Robyn Anderson drives off-campus for lunch just as shots are fired on the opposite end of campus. A freshman named Danny Rohrbough and a few friends head outside for a cigarette at "the worst [possible] moment."

Columbine students and staff, unaware of what is about to befall them, go about their morning. The simple choices they each make on this ordinary day will affect them in ways they can't yet even begin to perceive.

Eric and Dylan presume that their decoy bomb has done the job of distracting authorities, unaware that Jeffco officials will learn of the decoy's detonation just as the shooting begins—"nothing of consequence [will be] diverted." The boys stand by their cars, waiting for the commons to explode.

The shooters' first failure is happening just across town, unbeknownst to them. The morning will be full of failure, despite the shooters' careful and detailed planning.

CHAPTER 11: FEMALE DOWN

It is 11:18, and the school is "intact." Their devices, the boys know, "should have blown by now." As students continue to leave the building, heading out for their lunch breaks, the boys decide to go to Plan B—though "there [is] no Plan B," so "staggering" was Eric's self-assuredness while planning the attack. Eric, Cullen says, "left no indication that he planned for contingencies, [while] Dylan left no indication that he planned much of anything."

The second of the killers' failures comes in the form of the undetonated propane bombs, which had been the centerpiece of their attack and provided the opportunity to leave behind the highest body count in the history of American terrorism.

Though no eyewitnesses observe the boys actually making the decision to proceed with "Act Two," at 11:19 they are observed climbing the outside stairs toward the building's west exit. There, they ready their weapons and began firing. Eric "sho[ots] at anyone he [can] see. Dylan cheer[s] him on [but] rarely fire[s]." They begin tossing pipe bombs down the stairs and into the grass nearby, and are observed and recorded by security cameras laughing "heart[ily.]"

It's unknown what transpired in the parking lot between Eric and Dylan, or how they made a plan to go forward with a new line of attack. Their attack quickly transformed, however, from a bombing into a shooting.

The first two students down are Rachel Scott and Richard Castaldo—Rachel dies instantly, but Richard, alive and frightened, plays dead. Danny Rohrbough and his friends assume the shots are part of either a paintball game or a senior prank, and "rush to get closer to the action." Danny is gunned down, and his body lies face-down on the sidewalk. His friend Lance Kirklin is also injured, along with another friend, Sean Graves. Lance begs for help; one of the boys approaches him, says, "Sure, I'll help," and shoots him in the face. He blacks out.

The students of Columbine are unable to believe that a shooting could be happening at their school—either confused or in denial, though Cullen cannot say, students actually approach the gunfire as they believe it to be part of an elaborate prank. The coarse, taunting language that the shooters will use against their victims throughout the attack is already on display in its early moments.

A student from inside the cafeteria runs out to grab Sean and pull him to safety. A janitor advises Sean to play dead, and he does. Dylan steps over Sean's body and enters the cafeteria, where a "stampede [is] under way." Coach Dave Sanders runs into the cafeteria and attempts to shepherd students out of the commons. He leads the way up the staircase to the second floor. Nearby, in a science classroom, students taking a chemistry test hear what they think are "rocks being thrown against the windows." Their teacher tells them to stay seated and concentrate.

Columbine is such a massive school and so much is happening at once that students and staff are having totally different experiences depending on which part of the school they're in. The cafeteria has been thrown into full-on chaos, while students in the science wing are oblivious to the violence erupting nearby, and their teachers chastise them for seeming distracted.

Dylan enters the cafeteria just as it empties out. He "watche[s] students [flee] up the stairs," but does not fire his weapon.

Cullen again makes note of Dylan's secondary role in both the planning and the execution of the attack.

Eric, still outside at the top of the stairs, shoots at a student named Anne Marie Hochhalter—she keeps running, and is shot again. Another student helps her out of Eric's line of sight, then abandons her. She narrowly misses being caught by a nearby pipe bomb. Dylan rejoins Eric on the stairs, and the two of them realize that they no longer have any "easy targets"—most of their classmates have fled or hidden. It has been four minutes since the two of them began shooting.

The killers failed to amass a high body count in seconds with the help of the propane bombs, and have had to resort to a shooting spree. That spree has inspired chaos, fear, and confusion, and the next phase of the attack will not be so "easy" for them.

Officers are alerted to reports of gunshots at Columbine. The dispatch reaches police at 11:23, and a local deputy pulls onto the scene.

Every minute in a shooting is crucial, and four minutes have already gone by since the first shot.

Four minutes into the attack, many of the students at Columbine are still "oblivious." While students hear commotion outside and in the halls, they continue to sit quietly in class. Teacher Patti Nielson, hearing the ruckus, looks down a hallway and sees one of the shooters with a gun. Assuming it is a prop, she approaches him to reprimand him for being "inappropriate"—it is Eric, and he fires directly at her, shattering a glass door between the two of them. Nielson runs, and a second shot fills her shoulder with shrapnel. "Desperate for a phone," Nielson runs to the library, orders the students in there down on the ground, and calls 911.

Just as the students outside when Eric and Dylan were on the stairs were in denial, teacher Patti Nielson is also in denial—until the shooters fire on her directly. Just as all the simple, banal choices made on the morning of the 20th will have unforeseen consequences, so will Patti's choice to direct students in the library to get down on the ground rather than to flee for their lives.

Outside, Eric fires at Deputy Gardner—the first officer on the scene. Dylan flees inside. Gardner fires back, and believes he makes a hit—but Eric reloads his gun and returns fire, then runs inside. Both shooters head for the library.

Eric's reckless shooting at an officer continues to demonstrate his inability to believe in the fact that he could fail—despite having already done so.

Dave Sanders, having heard the gunfire aimed at Patti Nielson, runs toward it. He sees the shooters at the end of the hall and turns the corner, telling as many students as he can to find cover.

Dave Sanders, dedicated to his students, seeks to protect them as the shooters enter the school and begin firing.

CHAPTER 12: THE PERIMETER

It takes twenty-eight minutes for reports of a shooting at Columbine to hit TV. The information coming in is muddled and confusing, but it's clear that "something awful" has happened—and is still happening. A war is happening abroad, and all network news has been fixed on Kosovo, but by six minutes til noon Denver time, CNN has abandoned its coverage of Central Europe in favor of "lock[ing] in" on Columbine.

Though the coverage of Columbine takes a little while to hit televisions, once it does, it becomes the most absorbing and high-stakes story around the country, topping even a violent war in Europe. This is a more immediate horror, and an unprecedented one—a school shooting captured live, not after the fact.

Students with cell phones still trapped inside the building make frantic 911 calls with conflicting information, "overwhelm[ing]" 911 operators. When calls to the police can no longer go through, many students call the local TV stations directly, and are interviewed live on television. There is no shortage of "witnesses," though not all of them have actually seen anything, and those who have are deeply confused. Because Eric and Dylan each removed their trench coats at different points in the attack, students report seeing many shooters, all dressed differently.

As students find law enforcement unable to respond to their cries for help, they turn to the media, which is laser-focused on what is happening inside the school. The media is hungry for eyewitness accounts to feed their coverage, and the students are desperate for help of any kind.

As students begin returning from lunch, they find their school barricaded. Nate Dykeman, who had gone home for lunch, returns to campus, sees the mayhem, and begins to put the pieces of the puzzle together—Eric and Dylan missed class that morning, and have recently been bragging about gathering ordnance--building pipe bombs and buying guns. When Nate learns that the shooters are in trench coats, he knows for sure that his two friends are the attackers. Nate heads home, and begins making calls to his friends. He plans to call Dylan's house "soon."

Though Eric and Dylan's friends did not suspect them of plotting murder or violence, the pieces of the puzzle fall together for their friends relatively quickly. Friends like Nate failed to see how the boys' actions in the months before the attacks were adding up.

As police officers, firefighters, and paramedics rush toward Columbine, students continue to rush from the building and provide desperate, confused reports of the chaos inside. One injured student tells an officer that he was shot by "Ned Harris." Not one officer goes into the school. This is "protocol [which] call[s] for containment." Deputies set up a "perimeter," and paramedics "establish triage areas." Cullen writes that "half a dozen cops arrive every minute [but] nobody seems to be in charge." Some want to breach the perimeter and go into the building but others are afraid to reject protocol. The perimeter is reinforced, and no officers will fire on or approach the school for another half hour.

The attempt to contain the violence within the school and establish a perimeter will come to be perceived by many as a major failure in the way Jeffco handled Columbine. However, with so many confused and conflicting eyewitness reports, officials themselves are confused, apprehensive, and desperate to stop the loss of life in whatever way they can.

CHAPTER 13: "1 BLEEDING TO DEATH"

Onlookers and reporters, as well as more and more policemen, continue to arrive at Columbine. Among them is Misty Bernall, mother of the Evangelical student Cassie Bernall. Realizing she cannot get close to the school, Misty heads for one of the designated rendezvous points nearby—the public library. At each of the safehouses, sign-in sheets have been posted at the entrance. Misty waits impatiently for a fax from another nearby rendezvous point to arrive—a fax that contains the names of all the children who are safe there. Cassie's name is not on the list, and Misty frantically questions the other kids who have gathered at the library.

Misty's frantic search for her daughter Cassie is just one example of the chaos, desperation, and fear that thousands of parents felt on the morning of the massacre.

The newly-elected sheriff of Jeffco, John Stone, is in command—this is his first murder case while in office, and he is not a popular local figure.

John Stone, already an unpopular official, will become even more controversial as the investigation unfolds.

At 12:06 p.m., the first SWAT team to approach the school breaches the perimeter. One of their lieutenants, unfamiliar with the school's recently-renovated layout, leads his team into an area which is not at all what he thought it would be. They move through the school, working slowly and methodically toward the killers. Though the shooters are still active at the moment, Cullen says that it will take the teams another three hours to find Eric and Dylan—and by the time they do, the shooters will have killed themselves.

It has taken over forty minutes for officials to get inside the school. When every second counts, many parents and families of victims will see this time frame as a crucial failure on the county's part. The SWAT teams breaching the perimeter have no idea what they are walking into due to the confused nature of student witnesses and the excessive amount of ordnance still being fired or going off throughout the school.

On the other side of the school, paramedics and fire department teams go in for the bodies on the lawn that still show signs of life. Among them are Anne Marie, Lance, and Sean. Danny Rohrbough is pronounced dead and left on the sidewalk, while Rachel Scott is brought as far as the fire truck before she, too, is pronounced dead. Richard Castaldo is brought to safety.

The losses begin to mount, and officials struggle to handle the staggering number of injured students.

A "terrified" Nate Dykeman breaks down and calls the Klebold residence. Dylan's father Tom picks up, and assures Nate that Dylan is in school. Nate tells Tom that Dylan didn't show up for school, and that there has been a shooting—he also tells Tom that the shooters were described as kids in trench coats, and that he believes Dylan is involved. Tom runs upstairs to check Dylan's closet for his trench coat—it is missing. Tom calls Sue, his wife, and tells her to come home, but withholds what he suspects of their son from her. Before she arrives home, he calls 911 to warn them of Dylan's possible involvement—then he dials a lawyer.

As the reality of the situation begins to set in for Dylan and Eric's friends and classmates, Nate makes the situation known to Tom, Dylan's father. Tom responds with controlled horror, but is already looking toward the future, and seeking to protect himself and the rest of his family from the onslaught that he knows is going to come.

The television coverage lags—the networks are about "thirty minutes to an hour" behind on the most recent facts. They continue to report that cops have "sealed off the perimeter." By 12:30 p.m., the networks show the first footage of the "grisly" carnage coming out of the scene. Included in the disturbing images is a view of a classroom—someone is holding up a dry-erase board to the window, and on it is written "1 [ONE] BLEEDING TO DEATH."

Though the media and the SWAT teams don't know it yet, the shooting is over by the time the first images of its carnage are being broadcast to the nation. Though the danger is over, the horror continues, searing itself into the minds of those still trapped inside and those watching on television across the country.

CHAPTER 14: HOSTAGE STANDOFF

At about 1 p.m., reporters get words that children are trapped inside the building and that the situation is now a "hostage standoff," though "reports conflict" as to where the hostages are being held. Word spreads to the parents waiting at the nearby rendezvous points. As things grow tense, parents pass around cell phones—Columbine is an "affluent" community, and nearly everyone has one.

The media continues to report false facts about the state of the shooting incorrectly and repetitiously. Though Eric and Dylan are dead at this point, the SWAT teams do not know this, let alone the newscasters scrambling to report every new detail that comes to light.

Word gets out that somewhere between twenty and thirty students are still alive in the choir room—the parents cannot decide if this is "good news or bad." In reality, "two to three hundred students" are still hiding in the school. Reporters have no idea, but the cops are aware of the real numbers. As more and more students use their cell phones to call into local TV stations, the police "plead" with the news to "ask the hostages to quit calling the media [and] turn off the televisions."

The role of the media in the shooting continues to expand as the "hostages" make more and more calls to local stations and rely on the faulty coverage—which is partially incorrect due to flawed student accounts—to inform them of what is happening just outside their classroom doors. This cycle of confusion and misinformation thus continues to feed into itself.

None of the school shootings in the last several years have been televised, and America watches, riveted, as Columbine unfolds. "The mounting terror of horror withheld" and the feeling of "*almost* witnessing mass murder," Cullen writes, are what keeps America watching. It will be months before investigators fully understand what transpired inside Columbine, and years before investigators will unravel a motive. The public, however, "[cannot] wait that long," and so the news outlets begin to speculate and draw conjecture.

Themes of bearing witness to tragedy and violence run throughout Cullen's text, and here the danger of equating "almost" witnessing something which actually bearing witness to it are displayed. The public's desire for the feeling of being present at Columbine and the media's desire to deliver on that front led to dangerous speculation and the reportage of erroneous and damaging facts which would prove difficult to unstick from the narrative of the attack for years to come.

CHAPTER 15: FIRST ASSUMPTION

Before noon, an investigative team had already been assembled. Kate Battan is named the lead investigator, and, from student reports, has identified the shooters as Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold and begun compiling information about both of the boys. She sends detectives to each of their homes. Eric's parents are "uncooperative" and attempt to refuse the police entry, but the cops insist. In Eric's room, their team finds a stash of ordnance: sawed-off shotgun barrel, ammo, fireworks, and materials for building bombs on nearly every surface.

The interaction between Eric's parents and investigators on the day of the killing will come to symbolize the nature of all their further interactions with investigators: reluctant, uncooperative, and conditional.

The Klebolds are "much more forthcoming" and "communicative," assisting the police by describing their son's social life and past. The police find pipe bombs in the house, and both Tom and Sue are "shocked," insisting that their son was happy, and that they would have known if something had been wrong with him.

The Klebolds are compliant where the Harrises were reluctant, but both sets of parents are shocked and alarmed by their own failure to see what was happening with and between their sons.

Supervisory Special Agent Dr. Dwayne Fuselier (FUSE-uh-lay) is the first FBI agent to arrive at Columbine. Though he is a veteran agent and "one of the leading hostage negotiators in the country," he is only there because his son, Brian, is a Columbine student. Fuselier offers his services to Jeffco officials, though, and they accept. The first step of negotiating, Fuselier knows, is to determine if the situation is a hostage or nonhostage situation—the situations are vastly different. Hostage-takers often act rationally and issue demands, whereas nonhostage gunmen find no meaning in human lives and "typically issue no demands." Jeffco officials have labeled Columbine a hostage situation when Fuselier arrives on the scene, and all major news outlets are reporting it as such; Fuselier, though, knows that what he is heading into is "much worse."

Fuselier's expertise is a welcome addition to the investigation, which promises to be long, sprawling, and grueling. Fuselier's classification of Columbine as a nonhostage situation, and the shooters as desirous of violence at any cost, with no demands and nothing to lose, changes the nature of the situation—and the impending investigation—entirely.

Both the public and the detectives on the scene believe that the attack is a "large conspiracy"—they feel it is too big to just have been orchestrated by the two gunmen. One of Eric and Dylan's friends, Chris Morris, was home playing video games at the time of the attack. He called himself in to 911, "scared" by the knowledge he possessed—that Dylan and Eric owned guns and had recently been "messing" with pipe bombs. The police take Chris into custody, believing he "looks the part" of a conspirator.

The desire to understand the "why" of Columbine begins with the refusal to believe that just two boys could have been responsible for such carnage—the police, desperate to pin the motive and blame on more than two students, seek out the boys' friends who seem to fit the bill.

Though media and witnesses both describe the shooters as a unit—a *they*—Fuselier knows that "multiple gunmen demand[s] multiple [negotiation] tactics." He knows already that there may be two very different motives at work in the attack—one for Eric, and one for Dylan. As reports of the shooters as loners and outcasts continue to emerge, witnesses from the school describe the shooters as members of the Trench Coat Mafia—a group of "Goth" students at Columbine "associated with death and violence." This claim is false, but the story, which is "bizarre," spreads like wildfire.

Fuselier's ability to differentiate between the shooters, and to understand early on that there will be different motivations and desires for each boy, allows him to approach the situation more receptive to the "whys" than any of his fellow investigators. The introduction of the Trench Coat Mafia angle ignites something huge in the media, which seizes upon the bizarre idea and sensationalizes it almost immediately.

CHAPTER 16: THE BOY IN THE WINDOW

As Danny Rohrbough dies outside the Columbine building, his stepsister is inside, changing for gym glass. While the girls in her class prepare to head outside to play softball, the killers enter through the building's west doors. Mr. D runs "straight into [Eric and Dylan's] gunfire," shepherding the girls into a storage closet within the school's gym. He tells the girls that he'll come back for them, and that there will be a code word they should use—as the girls struggle to come up with one they all can agree on, the group begins to laugh, and the absurdity of their situation "br[eaks] the tension for a moment."

Even in the midst of horror and violence, the camaraderie between Mr. D and his beloved students comes through. His priority is sheltering them from harm, and they take comfort in his presence.

Mr. D opens the outside door to see a Jeffco sheriff pulling up, and quickly goes back to retrieve the girls from the closet and get them outside to safety. Mr. D follows them to the SWAT team command post, where he draws diagrams of the hallways for them and describes the shooters more accurately—they are not in trench coats, he says, and one of them is wearing "a baseball cap turned backwards." Mr. D then heads to one of the rendezvous points to be with more of his students, and feels the first signs of post-traumatic stress disorder settling in—he is numb and feels nothing, like a "zombie."

Mr. D prioritizes his students above even himself—he feels himself growing "numb," but insists on being with the kids he has sworn to support and protect. Mr. D provides a much more accurate testimony than his terrified students are able to, and his rejection of the Trench Coat Mafia theory is a major development.

Patrick Ireland's parents know that he always goes off-campus for lunch, and they approach the Columbine campus and beg to get to the parking lot so that they can determine whether Patrick's car is parked there or not. They cannot get through the perimeter and have not heard from Patrick or any of his friends, but don't allow themselves to believe that their child has been harmed. Little do they know that Patrick spent his lunch in the library studying with four of his friends, and that all five of the children have been shot.

The establishment of the perimeter is a frustrating barrier for parents like the Irelands and the Bernalls, and Cullen highlights the desperation with which families of students and victims sought information on their children.

At around 2:30 p.m., an officer riding in a news helicopter spots a bloody student "sagging against [a window] frame [in the library,] [preparing] to jump." He radios the SWAT teams on the ground, and they drive their truck toward the window. SWAT officers call up to Patrick Ireland, but he is confused. He is dizzy, his vision is limited, and he is unsure of where he is. Patrick has been shot in the head, and bullet fragments have lodged in his brain, severely impairing the vision and language sections of his brain and paralyzing the right side of his body. It has taken him three hours to drag himself to the window. Now, he leans forward over the ledge and topples onto the armored SWAT truck parked below. Once out of the building, Patrick attempts to climb into the truck's front seat, confused and disoriented. He attempts to tell paramedics his name, but cannot form the words. Patrick's fall out of the library window is televised, and quickly becomes a "stunning" and iconic image for Americans watching at home.

Patrick, one of the survivors of the library massacre, emerges from the second-floor window dazed, bloodied almost beyond recognition, and desperate to escape. Patrick's fall is captured by the media, and its instantly iconic status is emblematic of the horror, disorientation, and desperation which is still unfolding inside the building.

John and Kathy Ireland receive a call telling them that Patrick—whose fall out the window they did not see—has been taken to St. Anthony's hospital. They drive to the hospital, where they are made aware of the severity of their son's injuries. He has brain damage, and doctors are unsure of whether he will regain the brain function he has lost.

Patrick was unrecognizable on television, and his parents failed to notice that the boy falling out of the library window was their son.

As one SWAT team rescued Patrick from the library, another rescued the sixty students "barricaded" inside the choir room. Sixty more are discovered safe in the science wing minutes later. All one hundred and twenty are evacuated at 2:47 p.m., and run single file from the building with their hands on their heads. Each student is frisked and then sent to safety. In Science Room 3—the classroom where the whiteboard reading "1 BLEEDING TO DEATH" had been held against the window—the carpet is "soaked in blood," and the bleeding teacher is "barely alive."

As students continue to pour out of the building, alive and whole though terrified and, in some cases, traumatized, one individual is still "bleeding to death" inside the science wing. The perimeter has served its purpose of keeping Columbine contained, and has saved hundreds of unharmed students —but at the cost of failing to attend to the injured few.

CHAPTER 17: THE SHERIFF

Though it was treated as one, Columbine was "never" a hostage standoff. Dylan and Eric had no demands. As SWAT teams search the building and evacuate terrified students, they are unaware that the killers have already been dead for over two hours—they committed suicide in the library at 12:08 p.m. There had never really been a standoff, though investigators had entertained that option and the overzealous media had reported on Columbine as an active hostage situation.

Dylan and Eric desired only violence—there was nothing they wanted from the world or from the authorities. They never could have been talked down from violence, and had no interest in sparing lives for their own benefit—what they wanted was death, annihilation, and fame.

At about 3:15 p.m., SWAT teams enter the library and find it in a "shambles." Most of the children in the library have been dead for hours—one girl, Lisa Kreutz, has survived, and is rushed to the hospital with a shattered shoulder. Most of the bodies in the library are under tables, hidden, but two bodies are not—they match the descriptions of Eric and Dylan, and the SWAT team realizes that the ordeal is over. They discover Patti Nielson and three other women hiding in rooms just off the library. No one knows just how long the shooting has really been over for—detectives will eventually learn that there is a vast difference between "how long the attack lasted, and how long Eric and Dylan killed."

There is massive confusion in the library—those trying to hide and protect themselves did so at the cost of their awareness of their surroundings. SWAT team members realize that the active shooting situation has been over for hours—it has taken them hours, though, to reach the room where it all ended.

Detectives interview anyone and everyone they can find, and brief triage interviews help to weed out those who need to be interviewed at greater length and those who are not direct witnesses. Lead investigator Kate Battan wants to get every detail right—she does not want "another situation like O.J. Simpson [or] JonBenet Ramsey." When Battan's team runs Dylan and Eric's names through the Jeffco system, they find that the boys had been arrested the year before for theft, and had entered a year-long diversion program consisting of community service and counseling. The boys, Battan finds, "completed the program with glowing reviews just three months before the massacre." Additionally, a complaint was filed over a year earlier by Brooks Brown's parents, revealing that Eric had made "death threats" toward Brooks. The report features "ten pages of murderous rants printed from [Eric's] webpage." Battan orders search warrants for Eric and Dylan's homes.

The investigative team at Columbine wants to avoid turning the shooting into a fiasco—they want to get their facts straight and avoid media sensationalism, though of course these troubles are already beginning to seep into the investigation. The discovery of police reports and permanent records on and for both of the boys adds another layer to the brewing storm—if Jeffco failed to take steps to investigate these boys when they were causing minor troubles, the blood of Columbine will be seen by the media and the public as being on their hands.

At 3:20, Fuselier learns that his son Brian is alive and all right. At 4:00, Jeffco holds a press conference, presided over by Sheriff John Stone and chief spokesman Steve Davis. Stone bungles the question-and-answer portion of the event, doubling the death count, fueling rumors of more than two shooters, and erroneously attributing the killers' motive to "craziness."

The reckless and irresponsible manner in which John Stone delivered the first press conference after the shooting foreshadowed the many mistakes and failures that Jeffco officials would encounter as the investigation continued to unravel.

In the frenzy following the press conference, distraught students and witnesses, desperate for someone to listen to them, pour their hearts out to the press.

Students contribute their (possibly flawed) accounts and perspectives to the hungry media.

Linda Sanders, Dave Sanders' wife, watches coverage from home as she waits for word of her husband. Dave was the teacher shot in Science Room 3—he laid bleeding in the room for hours, though his family does not know this. In the middle of the afternoon, a reporter from the *Denver Post* calls Linda for comment on the shooting of her husband. Linda, horrified, screams and throws the phone away from herself.

The facts coming out of Columbine emerged in fits and starts, often alienating victims' families or keeping them in the dark. Linda Sanders learned of her husbands' injury from the press—not from law enforcement officials, paramedics, or investigators.

Robyn Anderson, who had helped Eric and Dylan to acquire guns, told detectives who interviewed her "the truth, but not the whole truth." She told them she did not know anything about the plot, but did not mention that she did know about the guns. She is consumed by guilt. When she calls Zack Heckler that afternoon, he tells her that he knew the boys had been making pipe bombs—this "astound[s]" Robyn. Zack had helped the boys make pipe bombs, and he is scared, too—he also left his involvement in making the bombs out of his police interview.

The shooters' friends struggle to cope with the information that has come to light about Dylan and Eric. Though most all of their friends knew that something was going on, and that the boys had been up to no good, none of them was aware of plans for an attack, or of just how deep their friends' rage and derangement went.

Meanwhile, Chris Morris confesses everything he knows to the police, describing Eric's fascination with Nazis and dreams of setting pipe bombs off at school. Detectives believe that if Eric and Dylan leaked information to Chris, they must have leaked it to more of their friends—leaking is "a classic characteristic of young assailants." Chris tells detectives that he knew Eric and Dylan were looking for guns and ordnance, and that he suspects someone named Phil Duran, a former coworker at Blackjack, of having helped them acquire the weapons.

Chris Morris is compliant with the authorities, and his honesty helps investigators to figure out a pattern in the boys' behavior that could eventually lead them to more information, or perhaps even confessions from more of the boys' friends and acquaintances.

Robyn Anderson tells her friend Kelli that she helped acquire guns for the boys. Robyn did not pay for anything and did not sign any papers, but she was the one who made the transaction.

Just as the shooters "leaked" information to their friends, Robyn, feeling guilty, "leaks" the truth of what she knew and did to a close friend.

While the Klebolds' house is searched, Tom and Sue sit outside on their porch, forbidden from entering their own home. At 8:10 p.m., the house is officially designated a crime scene, and the Klebolds are told to get out. Unable to "grieve for [their] child," the Klebolds leave. When they speak to their lawyer, he warns that because Dylan is no longer around "for people to hate, people are going to hate [Tom and Sue.]"

The Klebolds, shocked and devastated by the days' events, comply with the investigation of their home and family while attempting to steel and prepare themselves for the hatred that is sure to come their way very soon.

CHAPTER 18: LAST BUS

As busloads of students arrive at the rendezvous point at the nearby Leawood Elementary, parents are both joyful and discouraged. Brian Rohrbough, father of Danny Rohrbough, abandons hope, but Misty Bernall—who has been reunited with her son, Chris, but still has no sign of her daughter Cassie—holds out hope. Parents are told that one more busload of students will be arriving soon, but the bus never comes—the parents whose children have not yet arrived are brought to a separate room and asked to retrieve their children's dental records for investigators. The Evangelical parents react differently than the "other" parents, responding with songs, prayer, and hope, "at peace" with the fact that their children have gone on to a better place. Of all the Evangelicals, only Misty Bernall is "defiant," believing that Cassie is still alive.

The parents of the victims of Columbine were given false hope that was then quickly taken away. Cullen's emphasis on describing the ways the Evangelicals react to the news as opposed to the less religious families shows the feverish dedication to religion that many Jeffco residents have, and foreshadows the powerful role that religion will come to play in the aftermath of the tragedy, as survivors and families grieve.

Mr. D stays with the families, consoling them, even as he fears the rumors he hears about Dave Sanders' death.

Mr. D once again puts the needs of the Columbine community before his own.

Agent Fuselier, exhausted, returns home and hugs his son. Columbine, for him, has been even more "unbearable" than Waco. He holds his son and his wife as he watches the news, grieving for parents whose children have died.

The singular horror of Columbine is conveyed through veteran hostage negotiator Fuselier's disturbed reaction to the day's events.

CHAPTER 19: VACUUMING

Shortly after the SWAT team reaches Science Room 3, Dave Sanders dies before he is able to be evacuated. His family is not notified. Linda recalls arriving at the hospital after receiving word, eventually, that her husband is "injured." She waits at the hospital for her husband to arrive, but he never does. After growing frustrated, Linda returns to Leawood, and then finally home. At last, she and Angie, Dave's daughter, call Dave's teacher friends and are "informed" of what happened to him. Linda, with her house full of family and guests, worries about not having "time to vacuum."

Cullen outlines the ways in which Dave Sanders' extraction from the crime scene was greatly mishandled. The grief and trauma that his family feels in the wake of learning of his death manifests as the numbness characteristic of the early stages of PTSD—the same numbness Frank DeAngelis experienced.

Brad and Misty Bernall arrive home at about 10 p.m. They can see Columbine from their house, and Brad watches from atop the garden shed with binoculars while explosives experts and SWAT teams search the school for unexploded devices or hiding conspirators. At 10:30 p.m., there is an explosion. Misty, fearing that Cassie is still alive inside the school, worries that she has been injured by the blast.

Just as Linda, Dave Sanders' wife, was in denial after learning of his death, Brad and Misty Bernall fail to accept the fact of their daughter's demise, holding out hope that she is still somehow alive somewhere in the wreckage of Columbine High School.

CHAPTER 20: VACANT

On Wednesday morning, the survivors who descend upon the crime scene are "changed." They are no longer emotional, and an "unsettling quiet" falls over most of them. The bodies of the dead are still inside the perimeter, and their names have not been released.

The violent spectacle of the day before has receded, and students are left with shock and numbness.

Brian Rohrbough receives a phone call Wednesday morning from a friend, warning him that there is a blurry picture of Danny's corpse out in the open on a sidewalk outside the school. Danny was "all Brian had," and had been training to come work in Brian's auto shop after high school was over. Brian is shocked by how "cavalierly" officials are treating his son's dead body. On Wednesday, it snows. Danny's body will lie on the sidewalk for twenty-eight hours.

Jefferson County officials continue to fail the parents of the victims of the shooting, disregarding the bodies that still have not been removed from the scene of the crime.

Brad and Misty Bernall return to the perimeter Wednesday morning, and ask the police whether anyone inside the building is still alive. The cops tell them no. Misty thanks the cop for his "honesty," but holds out hope that he is wrong, and continues to try and breach the perimeter all morning. Around lunchtime, parents are brought over to Leawood, where the district attorney, Dave Thomas, "informs families one by one" that their children are dead. Misty wants her daughter's body out of the library.

Misty's faith continues to give her false hope even in the face of the fact that her daughter is dead. When she finally comes to accept the fact that Cassie died in the library, Misty, like Brian Rohrbough, becomes incensed by the local officials' treatment of the students' dead bodies which still litter the high school.

Linda Sanders and her family wait for the news that they already know is coming. Around 3 p.m., a deputy arrives at their house and informs them that Dave has been "tentatively identified" as a victim. Linda screams and throws up.

Again, Cullen shows how the family members of the many victims react with violent shock, denial, and despair as they are notified of their loved ones' deaths.

Wednesday morning, Frank DeAngelis is "consumed with guilt"—his job is to provide a safe environment at Columbine, and he feels he has failed to do so. He is due to deliver a speech at a local megachurch, Light of the World, at 10 a.m., but has no idea what to say. Mr. D. buckles as he takes his place before the crowd and they cheer and applaud him. He apologizes to the students and the community, and ends his speech, as always, by telling the children that he loves them.

Mr. D continues to represent safety and community, even though he feels he has failed in his duties as principal.

Columbine students, lost and overwhelmingly feeling misunderstood by their parents, are "desperate to unload their stories." Many seek out the media camps in a nearby park. They pour their hearts out to journalists, a move that some of them will later "regret."

The media firestorm continues to be fueled by the inaccurate accounts of students who are "desperate" for a sympathetic ear.

The Harrises and the Klebolds hire attorneys as "the presumption of guilt land[s] on their shoulders." In the public opinion, Eric and Dylan are seen as "just kids," not contributors to the tragedy, though violent movies and video games, Goth culture, bullies, Satan, the Trench Coat Mafia, and both boys' parents are. Both sets of parents release statements to the press on Wednesday, though neither agrees to speak directly with the media.

The media and the public, unable to comprehend how two boys could have been motivated all on their own to commit such horrible violence, seek answers in the boys' interests and influences.

Everyone, including the police, assume that Columbine had to have been a conspiracy. The conspiracy angle is on Agent Fuselier's mind Wednesday morning as he steps into the crime scene for the first time. It is "luck" that has drawn him to the case—if his son had not been a Columbine student, he would not have been assigned to the case. Fuselier will, however, come to play "the leading role in understanding the killers."

Again, the witnesses and officials in the Columbine community fail to comprehend that Dylan and Eric are the only—and gleeful—perpetrators of the attack, believing there must be something else underlying the violence.

The largest team in Colorado state history is assembled to begin solving the crime. Nearly one hundred detectives are on the case in Jeffco, and the FBI sends more than a dozen special agents. Eleven "likely conspirators" are identified, including Brooks Brown, Chris Morris, and Robyn Anderson. The band room is converted into a command center—the rest of the school is in awful shape. The cafeteria is completely flooded, and the library is a site of "unspeakable" carnage. Meanwhile, detectives clear out Eric and Dylan's homes, and discover a "mother lode" of evidence and documentation at Eric's house—"he wanted [the public] to know" what he was planning, Cullen writes.

As Jefferson County officials and representatives from the FBI hunker down and begin their investigation, they still fail to see how two students and two students alone could have been responsible for this carnage. When they uncover the "mother lode" of documents at Eric Harris's house, though, they begin to see the truth of the situation they are dealing with.

Five hundred interviews are conducted within the first seventy-two hours of the investigation. Student witnesses are "growing more compromised by the hour" as the media stays locked on to reports and speculation on the carnage and the investigation. Some detectives head out to the suspects' hometowns, away from Jeffco.

As the investigation gets underway, law enforcement officials know that time is precious and that the media sensationalism beginning to take over the case could seriously compromise their work.

CHAPTER 21: FIRST MEMORIES

Eric exhibited "telltale signs of a particular breed of killer" even before adolescence, and as a teen he "settled into a live of petty crime." The symptoms of what was to come, Cullen writes, were "stark [only] in retrospect."

Eric was skilled in covering up the truth of his personality, even as he slid deeper and deeper into dangerous territory.

In the journals he left behind, Eric wrote "frequently and fondly" of his childhood. He especially loved fireworks and explosions, and shared in his notebook a happy memory of one particular Fourth of July celebration.

Eric remembers, in his journals, feeling peace as a child, especially around explosives.

Eric was a military brat, and lived in five states over a period of fifteen years. His friends "came and went," and his parents Wayne and Kathy tried as hard as they could to "smooth over the disruptions." Wayne—a military man—had no tolerance for misbehavior, and took a carefully-considered approach to each of his children's punishments. As detectives delve into Eric's past, they discover "contradictions." He had been friends with minorities, and an "enthusiast" when it came to sports—a dissonance in his Nazi-obsessed, jock-hating recent profile.

Though Eric's parents claimed to be on top of his behavior issues, they were largely unaware of what was really going on with their son. The profile of Eric that has emerged—a profile which Wayne and Kathy are purportedly shocked to discover—has some contradictions, though, revealing that there had to have been some motivation for Eric's violence other than just a hatred of jocks and minorities.

As an eleven-year-old, Eric discovered the video game Doom, and became obsessed. Behind the screen of a computer, "he could triumph over thousands of strangers he had never met." In 1993, when Eric was in seventh grade, the Harrises moved to Jeffco, to a nice neighborhood just two miles south of Columbine High.

Eric was obsessed with domination and glory from an early age, and was already set in his ways by the time he and his family arrived in Jeffco.

CHAPTER 22: RUSH TO CLOSURE

On Thursday morning—two days after the shooting—the *Denver Post* runs a headline which reads: HEALING BEGINS. The "rush to closure" is not well-received in Jeffco, and in the weeks to follow, the survivors will find it difficult to move on despite "grumble[s]" that it is time for healing to indeed begin in earnest.

One of the major issues in the wake of Columbine—for survivors and for the families of victims alike—is how long the half-life of healing is. For some, it will be just weeks—for others, it will take years and years.

On Thursday, the families of the victims have their loved ones' bodies returned to them. Heroic but false tales of the victims' bravery begin to spread—Brian Rohrbough is "irritated" by the narratives, believing that his son's death was "tragic enough."

Misinformation and sensationalism continue to pervade the coverage of Columbine.

In Clement Park, next to Columbine, students gather in a "prayer mosh." One young girl invokes the presence of The Enemy—Satan is in their midst, she says. Another official gathering is organized at another nearby megachurch, and again Frank DeAngelis is called upon to speak. Counselors advise him that he is "the key" to letting students know that it is okay to show emotion. As Mr. D takes to the stage, his students chant "We are Columbine," and he begins to cry. He assures them "keeping [emotion] inside doesn't mean you're strong."

The secular and religious gatherings for mourners in the wake of the attack have very different vibes. The religious gatherings are focused on the presence of a lingering enemy—the secular events, still housed in churches, focus on solidarity and healing.

The school considers how they will finish out the year. The building will not be opened for months, and so administrators decide to follow a split-day schedule with Chatfield, a nearby rival high school. Figuring out a "long-term solution [proves] trickier." Some want the school to be demolished, while some worry that losing the school will traumatize some students even more deeply.

Officials and members of the community are unsure of whether it will be more traumatizing to force students to return to the site of unspeakable violence, or whether erasing the place they once felt at home will be even worse for them.

Victims' funerals become a chance for Evangelical ministers to decry the presence of "Satan" and urge communities not to let "hatred be repaid by hatred." The "boys with bombs" are not the enemies, these preachers claim. Satan is the only Enemy. One such preacher, Reverent Kirsten, believes—and passes on to his congregation the belief—that the "Great signs of the Apocalypse" are under way.

As members of the community struggle to understand how such unspeakable violence came to pass, many of the religious leaders in Jeffco attempt to highlight and sensationalize the presence of a greater evil, and use the horror of the event as a predictor of the apocalypse and the rapture.

Reverend Don Marxhausen disagrees with the Evangelicals—he recognizes that Eric and Dylan are the symptom of a larger societal ill. Marxhausen and other non-Evangelical members of the clergy begin to realize that all the new "members" of their congregations are not coming to church to be saved, but rather to be comforted. Kids continue to "pour into churches," many of which offer free snacks and warm drinks. In nearby parks and at makeshift memories, Evangelicals distribute pocket-sized Bibles and Scientologists hand out pamphlets.

A struggle between opportunism and empathy begins to emerge in the religious communities of Jefferson County. While some religious entities attempt to blame the attack entirely on Satan, others recognize that there are real problems in schools and society that can only be remedied through listening, understanding, healing, and change.

Detectives work the angle of the "physical evidence": primarily the ordnance the killers left behind. They find that the propane bombs were a "mess," constructed by someone who didn't understand anything about how bombs worked. Detectives attempt to track the boys' guns to their origins, but the shotguns do not have serial numbers and are "impossible to trace."

Though the shooters' attack was meticulously planned, their materials were not at all sophisticated or even functional.

Robyn Anderson confesses her role in acquiring the guns to the cops, who press her heavily for even more incriminating information. She insists that she had no idea that Eric and Dylan were planning an attack, and that they even "assured her they would never hurt anyone." The investigators press her about the pipe bombs, but she "holds her ground" and insists that the boys never told her about their experiments. She maintains that their actions never aroused her suspicions that they were planning something violent.

Robyn Anderson is one of the shooters' many friends who noticed odd behavior but failed to anticipate their violent plans. The shooters reassured Robyn, and several others, that violence was far from their minds, when in fact the opposite was true.

Bomb squads, after combing the crime scene, find almost one hundred explosive devices. The unexploded propane bombs would have killed "five hundred people" in a few seconds, and the discovery of those devices "changed everything" for investigators as they began to realize the nature of the attack—it was a failed bombing, not ever planned as a shooting. Though officials announce the discover of the bombs, the media does not "grasp the implications," and continues to filter all new developments through the lens of the shooting as "outcasts targeting jocks."

As the nature of the attack begins to change in the eyes of investigators and officials, they attempt to correct the narrative in the public and in the media. The media, however, is so deeply entrenched in the narrative they spun of the attack as a shooting which targeted certain social, ethnic, and religious groups, that they are unable to untangle themselves from it and rewrite the story as what it truly was— a failed bombing that targeted all human life indiscriminately.

CHAPTER 23: GIFTED BOY

Dylan Klebold, Dave Cullen writes, was "born brilliant." Named for the poet Dylan Thomas, he was born in Jeffco and, as a child, was a sports fan and a "driven competitor." He idolized major league players "until the day he died." Dylan and Brooks Brown were childhood friends, and Brooks' mother, Judy, remembers witnessing one of Dylan's explosive temper tantrums when he slipped and fell at a creek as an eight-year-old. He lashed out, humiliated, and Judy, after that day, grew to expect to see Dylan "go crazy" any time he "got frustrated with himself." Over time, his "anger and loathing traveled inward."

As Cullen investigates the shooters' lives, he finds that Eric and Dylan were always very different. Eric was constantly in trouble and displayed many disturbing traits early on, whereas Dylan was explosive, occasionally to a bizarre degree, but also deeply sensitive and self-critical.

In 1990, the Klebolds, escaping the Denver sprawl "encroaching into Jeffco," moved further back into the foothills. Dylan identified as a "part-time country boy." Then in middle school, Dylan was "repuls[e]d" by "suburbanite assholes" and he found solace in nature. He "treasured tranquility," but, Cullen writes, "loved a good explosion."

As Dylan matured, he did develop a sense of superiority and a desire for spectacle—both the spectacle of nature and the spectacle of violence.

CHAPTER 24: HOUR OF NEED

The night of the shootings, Reverend Don Marxhausen held a vigil at his Lutheran church. As he led his congregation in prayer, one parishioner begged him not to "forget" the Klebolds "in their hour of need."

The Klebolds, unaware of their son's violent aims, have been warned that they will be reviled in their community—however, there is a gleam of hope for them as some individuals recognize that the Klebold family is in anguish, too.

After checking his parish rolls that evening, Marxhausen realizes that Tom and Sue Klebold and their children, Dylan and Byron, had been members of the church five years ago. Though they didn't stay on, he believes they are still "under his care." He sends word to them that he is available to them if they need him, and a few days later, he receives a call from Tom—he needs a funeral for Dylan, and needs it to be confidential.

As Don Marxhausen helps his parishioners cope with the tragedy of Columbine, he faces another even larger test: helping the outcast Klebolds to mourn their son.

The service is conducted the Saturday after the shooting. Just fifteen people attend. Tom tells Marxhausen that "what you see in the papers was not my son." Those attending the funeral "pour out their hearts" with anecdotes about Dylan, unable to understand where the violence and anti-Semitism come from—Sue herself is Jewish.

Dylan's family, grieving, confused, and totally lost, mourns him and wonders how and why Dylan felt so angry, isolated, and failed.

The Klebolds are aware that if they bury Dylan, his grave will be defaced, so they elect to have him cremated. Marxhausen asks the Klebolds' attorney how he should respond when the press inevitably is made aware of the service. The attorney entreats Marxhausen to tell them, very simply, about what he witnessed at the service. The *New York Times* features Dylan's service on the front page, and in the article, Marxhausen describes Tom and Sue as "the loneliest people on the planet." Many people have difficult drumming up any sympathy for the Klebolds, but some of Marxhausen's parishioners are deeply proud of him for "finding compassion in his heart for anyone."

Marxhausen is faithful to his parishioners, and treats the Klebolds with the same compassion he would extend to any other member of the congregation. He goes a step further, seizing the opportunity to attempt to reach out and humanize them in the media, where they are being reviled and ostracized rather than pitied or understood.

Though Cullen presumes that Wayne and Kathy Harris held "some ceremony for Eric," word of it never leaked to the press.

The secretive Harrises somehow kept their sons' memorial from the sensationalist media.

CHAPTER 25: THREESOME

Eric and Dylan presumably met in middle school, though they did not really connect there. Brooks Brown, Dylan's childhood friend, met Eric during their freshman year at Columbine, and soon "all three" boys were close friends. They played video games together, attended football games together, and shared interests in classical philosophy and Renaissance literature.

Dave Cullen now goes back and traces the roots of Eric and Dylan's destructive friendship. The boys did not click immediately, but were hanging out together by the end of their freshman year of high school.

In an "I Am" poem, a class assignment from his freshman year, Eric described "five times in eighteen lines how nice he was." He described dreaming of himself as "the last person on earth," and frequently shared similar fantasies in Internet chat rooms and journals. He wished for, and was obsessed by, the "extinction" of the human race.

Eric was intensely egotistical as early as ninth grade. He also already wished for death and destruction even this early in life, and sought to discuss those wishes publicly on the internet.

Zack Heckler and Dylan shared one class their freshman year, but became fast friends. Zack, Dylan, and Eric all became a group soon enough, and would play video games together. On his own, Eric played the video game Doom obsessively and drew his own characters and worlds into his journal. He hacked the software to bring them to life, and believed he had "dominated and mastered Doom creativity." In a freshman-year English paper called "Similarities Between Zeus and I," Eric described himself as a tireless creator who, similar to Zeus, enjoyed "punish[ing] people in unusual ways."

Eric develops a friend group with Dylan and Zack, but is most comfortable on his own. His rich fantasy life—which is full of violence, hatred, and delusions of grandeur—occasionally bleeds into his real life and his schoolwork, but those around him seem not to notice his troublesome behavior, or take it very seriously.

CHAPTER 26: HELP IS ON THE WAY

Dave Sanders' daughters are "angry" about the things they've heard regarding his "disturbing" final hours bleeding to death inside Columbine while officials refused to breach the perimeter. They begin looking into police reports of their father's discovery.

Dave Sanders' daughters hope to expose the failures of the Jefferson County sheriff's office, and with this come closer to finding a sense of justice and closure.

Dave Sanders was shot once in the back and once in the neck. The second bullet exited his mouth, "lacerating his tongue, shattering several teeth, [and] open[ing] one of [the] major blood routes to the brain." The shot in his back clipped another major vein, and Dave bled heavily. Two teachers dragged Dave into Science Room 3, where help was being called. Dave needed assistance immediately, though, and so a teacher went into a nearby lab and asked if anyone knew first aid. One boy named Aaron Hancey, an Eagle Scout, volunteered; Hancey was able to use sweatshirts and strips of other students' clothes to fashion tourniquets and stanch Dave's wounds while "execution"-style gunshots, bomb blasts, and screams "like [someone was being] tortured," echoed in the halls outside the science room.

Cullen describes in careful, nuanced detail the severity of Dave Sanders' injuries and the massive loss of blood he endured immediately after having been shot. He does this in order to highlight the ineffectiveness of the care he did receive—at the hands of a thoughtful and careful student whose training was simply not what Dave needed—as Dave, his fellow teachers, and their students waited and waited for help to arrive.

Dispatchers assured everyone in Science Room 3 that help would arrive "in about ten minutes"—but these reassurances were repeated again and again over the course of more than three hours. Students and teachers showed Dave pictures of his wife and children and grandchildren, begging him to hold on. Dave knew he was not going to make it, and begged his students to "tell my girls I love them."

Jeffco officials failed to help Dave Sanders—more than that, they failed to let him and the students and teachers calling for help on his behalf know the reality of the situation.

As the shooting ended and things within the building calmed down a bit, Dave lost consciousness. His students attempted to rouse him. Those still on the phone with 911 told dispatchers of their plans to throw a chair through a window and lower Dave to safety, where he could get proper medical attention, but they were warned that it was still too dangerous—nobody knew that the killers had already shot themselves.

The 911 dispatchers, doing the best they can do at their job, inadvertently cause the extreme worsening of the situation in science room three. The violence has stopped, but both officials and those still in the school are unaware of what the situation is, and unable to discern the truth.

At almost 3:00 p.m., the SWAT team burst through the doors of the science room and began evacuating students and teachers. Aaron Hancey begged to stay with Dave Sanders, but SWAT team members, trained to maximize the number of lives saved and recognize when someone is beyond help, urged him out along with his other classmates. Two SWAT officers stayed behind with Dave and called for a medic—but when the medic arrived, he knew there was "nothing he could do," and quickly moved on to the library.

Dave's critical injuries have caused him to pass the point of no return. Though he arguably could have been saved several hours ago, he is now beyond help. The students who sat by his side all that time, attempting to stanch his wounds and attend to him, will never know if their teacher could have survived.

Many people were angered by Dave Sanders' story, and some called the SWAT team's slow response "pathetic." Members of the SWAT teams who had first entered the school began to respond in the press, urging parents to "understand" that the team had no idea what they were going into, and describing scenes of chaos, carnage, and obstacles such as fire alarms, sprinklers, and multiple unexploded bombs. The Sanders family ultimately "expressed gratitude" publicly to the SWAT teams at Columbine, and invited the full teams to Dave's funeral. Cullen writes that "all the officers attended."

As the story enters the local community as well as the media, the consensus is clear: Jefferson County failed to save Dave Sanders. Though the situation was a desperate and awful one with no right answer—the SWAT teams and officers on the scene could not have known what they were walking into, especially with the revelation of the big bombs—failure and blame must be pinned on someone, and the officials take the fall for the death of an innocent man.

CHAPTER 27: BLACK

By Eric Harris's sophomore year, he was "evolving"—and the changes were beginning to show. He had striven to fit in for so long, believing social status to be important, but during his sophomore year, he began shopping at Hot Topic and dressing in combat boots and all-black outfits, attempting to look "different." His behavior became "boisterous and aggressive." Girls at school still described Eric as "cute," though he "hated" his appearance. Cullen writes that though classmates described both Eric and Dylan as "want[ing] to be outcasts," the word "outcast" only meant that the boys rejected a "preppy" model. The boys had active social lives, and though being different was "difficult" for Dylan, Eric enjoyed it.

Eric made attempts to distinguish himself from his classmates. He wanted to be different, and to be seen as different. He believed he was of a separate, higher standing than everyone around him, and dressing distinctively was a way to signify that. He was never a social outcast, though, and neither was Dylan—though the myth of the boys as bullied outcasts preying on their tormentors still persists even in the present.

During Eric Harris's sophomore year, Eric Dutro, another boy at Columbine, wanting to go as Dracula for Halloween. He purchased a long black duster—his friends referred to it as a "trench coat"—and the sophomore boy thought it was a "cool" item of clothing. Dutro hung onto it, and began turning heads at school. Kids called him a "freak," but he wanted to give them a "freak show." Dutro's friends soon purchased trench coats, too, and when another student referred to their clique as "the Trench Coat Mafia," the term stuck. Eric and Dylan were not among the students who made up the TCM, though their friend Chris Morris was. The TCM "heyday" died down, and Eric and Dylan purchased trench coats years later. Their choice to wear the coats during the massacre thus understandably caused "tremendous confusion."

The confusion over the Trench Coat Mafia's involvement in the Columbine shooting arose out of the media's mistake in locking onto the theory far too early. Because it was a totally bizarre and quite frightening possibility, the media sensationalized the TCM, and repeated the story of their involvement so much that the "Trench Coat Mafia" is associated with Columbine to this very day.

CHAPTER 28: MEDIA CRIME

The Trench Coat Mafia was "mythologized" and continues to color the way the public thinks of Columbine. Though "we remember Columbine as a pair of outcast Goths from the TCM snapping and tearing through their school hunting down jocks," Cullen insists that "none" of that is true, and neither did the attacks have any connection to Marilyn Manson, Hitler's birthday, or the desire to slaughter Christians. Though no reputable sources or experts on the case believe any of these myths anymore, much of the public still does, and Cullen attempts to explain why.

The ways in which the media got Columbine completely wrong are outlined in this chapter. The root of their errors, Cullen says, was the mythologizing of untruths such as the TCM and the shooters' plan to sync their attacks with Hitler's birthday. By focusing on details that would be sensational in their own right if they were true, and then sensationalizing them even further, the media created a firestorm of intrigue and confusion.

Just hours into the coverage, the media had assigned the blame for the attack to the TCM, "a cult of homosexual Goths in makeup orchestrating a bizarre death pact for the year 2000." Though journalists, Cullen says, were mostly careful, using "disclaimers like 'believed to be' or 'described as,'" the problem with the coverage was "repetition." Addressing the rumors repetitiously, however carefully, created an enormous impact that the media was largely "blind" to. Though the media assured the public that the "kids" were informing them of the facts, the kids were actually being informed by the coverage they saw on TV, creating a self-sustaining spiral of confusion.

It is repetition of erroneous facts, Cullen insists, not the idea that the facts were erroneous in and of themselves, that created the confusion, sensationalism, and false beliefs that came to characterize the way the public remembered the Columbine shooting for months and even years after the incident.

Explaining the shootings as "targeted" was "reassuring" because it addressed the "known threats [of] bullying and racism." The shooters, however, were not targeting any specific social or ethnic group—their aim was total, indiscriminate annihilation.

The media's desire to explain away the motive for the shooting with a safe, easy explanation fueled their repetition of false facts.

The third major problem with the coverage, Cullen writes, was the media's role in equating "student" with "witness." All two thousand students "were deputized as insiders" by the media, adding more acutely to the confusing and conflicting reports.

This is a crucial point: though everyone in Columbine at the time of the shooting was a witness in a certain sense of the word, they were not eyewitnesses in the technical sense—and the media failed to understand, or honor, the gap between the two roles.

As "many survivors" descend into the early stages of post-traumatic stress disorder, Cullen considers that "some who had been in the library [were] fine, while other who had been off[-campus] would be traumatized for years." Witnessing violence directly had nothing to do with the atmosphere of trauma in Columbine. Students are also gripped by survivor's guilt, and pack the hospitals where their classmates are recovering in order to be close to the wounded.

It didn't matter what students saw—or if they saw anything—when it came to the trauma they experienced in the wake of the attacks. Being a student at Columbine on April 20th, 1999, was enough to be traumatic. Each student dealt differently with the fallout, but the trauma of the situation radiated through the community in an all-encompassing way.

Patrick Ireland's doctors focus on helping him regain brain function, and do not bother to operate on his injured foot. Patrick's parents are told he'll never walk again, but Patrick remains unaware, assuming he will make a full recovery. His speech begins to improve, his vitals stabilize, and he is moved out of the ICU to a regular room. His parents ask him if he was the boy who tumbled out of the library window, and he tells them that he was. A neurologist from Craig Hospital, one of the "leading rehab centers in the world," helps the Irelands make plans to transfer Patrick there, reassuring them all that there is "hope."

Patrick's recovery will be a long one, but his parents, bolstered by their son's bravery, feel hope that he will regain some sense of normalcy. All three Irelands are at this point aware of how lucky Patrick is to be alive—and how many of his classmates were not as fortunate as he.

As students begin to move past grief and towards anger, some of them begin telling the press that the killers were "outcasts, freaks, [and] fags." Cullen observes that "gay [is] one of the worst epithets one kid could hurl against another in Jeffco." Most of the media "carefully sidesteps" rumors of the boys' homosexuality, instead seizing on rumors of their obsession with Gothic culture. Some report, accurately, that the "morose [Goth] community is quiet, introverted, and pacifistic," attempting to dispel the Goth connection. The media then moves on to probing the "outcast" angle, focusing on "bullying and alienation," again falsely reporting that there were "long-simmering rivalr[ies] between the TCM and [Columbine] athletes." Though the details are accurate—there were indeed tensions between these two groups—Eric and Dylan were a part of neither, and the media's "conclusions [were] wrong."

The students' fear and sorrow quickly turns to anger. Because the killers are dead, there is no one alive on whom the blame can be fully placed—so the students lash out against the killers by slandering the lives they led before the attack, and by seeking to lower and humiliate the killers even in death.

No evidence supports the theory that bullying led to the Columbine massacre, though it was an issue at Columbine. Frank DeAngelis insisted he was "unaware" of this fact. His "unusual rapport with the kids created a blind spot." One student tells Cullen that her "Goth friends" hated their time at Columbine, citing Mr. D's perhaps accidental "preference" for supporting athletics. Reports of Columbine as a "toxic" place begin to emerge, and it becomes characterized as a school "terrorized by a band of restless jock lords." Columbine begins to "embody everything noxious about adolescence in America," and Cullen, citing Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, stays that "by observing an entity, you alter it"; meaning that in the weeks following Columbine, the community was so deeply scrutinized that it became picked apart "beyond all recognition."

One of the most pervasive myths about Columbine was that it stemmed from bullying. Though bullying was indeed an issue at Columbine, it was not the cause of the massacre. Nonetheless, many students and members of the Jeffco community come forward—angry, confused, and desperate for closure—to call out the problems within Columbine. As they do so, the media continues to scrutinize the school, putting a spotlight on hurting and angry students and thus inspiring an unhealthy, microscopic focus on their school.

CHAPTER 29: THE MISSIONS

Halfway through his sophomore year, Eric's "active fantasy life [and] extinction fantasies" begin to translate to action. Starting in January of 1997, he, Dylan, and Zack begin to make "mischief," embarking on a series of late-night "escapades" focused on vandalizing the houses of kids Eric doesn't like. Eric dubs these pranks "the missions," attacking houses sometimes "to retaliate for perceived slights, but most often for the offense of [mere] inferiority."

Eric's desire for mayhem, violence, and the assertion of his dominance over other members of the human race begins to come to a head. His desire to "retaliate for perceived slights" speaks to an inability to handle failure or humiliation—a trait he and Dylan shared.

The boys begin to get into other kids of trouble, too. Eric and Brooks Brown's friendship falls apart—Eric, during a snowball fight, breaks the windshield of Brooks' Mercedes-Benz with a chunk of ice. Brooks approaches Kathy Harris and tells her that Eric has been sneaking out at night and "going around vandalizing things." Brooks tells Kathy that Eric has liquor and spray-paint in his room, and leaves hurriedly before Eric returns home.

Brooks' involvement in Eric's descent into threatening, violent behavior will come to have a vaster, deeper resonance than anyone yet knows.

After Brooks' mother becomes involved in the incident, Eric's parents confront him, and he describes in his journal lying to them "like a fuckin salesman" to get out of trouble. Wayne Harris details Eric's offenses and punishment in his diary—it is February 28th, 1997. Wayne brings Eric over to the Brown home to apologize—he waits in the car while Eric speaks with Brooks' mother at the front door. Judy Brown calls Eric a liar, and tells him that if he ever does anything to Brooks again, she will call the police.

The Browns reported to the media and to the police that they always knew that Eric was dangerous, and Cullen writes of the incidents that unfolded between the Harris family and the Brown family in support of that claim. The Browns witnessed Eric's true self, but were powerless to convince his family or the authorities of what was really going on.

Eric posts Brooks' name and phone number to his personal website, encouraging his readers to harass Brooks and describing his "missions" at Brooks' house. Brooks' mother continues calling the cops to inform them of Eric's behavior. Wayne struggles with how to handle Eric's mounting issues, and Eric continues lying to his father's face. Wayne believes that Brooks is "out to get" Eric, and Wayne writes in his journal that he feels his family is being "victimized" by the Browns.

Wayne's failure to see his son for what he really was would have vast, unintended consequences. Wayne wanted desperately to believe that it was Eric who was being victimized—when really, the manipulative Eric was creating a spectacle on the web for anyone who cared to bear witness to it.

The "missions" continue. Eric loves them, and Dylan enjoys the camaraderie—but the missions are not enough to make the "miserable" Dylan feel any lasting happiness.

Eric and Dylan are shown to be in cahoots together early on in their high school careers. Yet though they are working together, they have different motivations for and different responses to the mischief they are making.

CHAPTER 30: TELLING US WHY

Long before the Columbine shooting, Jeffco police had files on both Eric and Dylan. They were in possession of at least twelve pages of "hate[ful], threatening" rants from Eric's website. Essentially a public confession which the authorities have been "sitting on" since 1997, the files are a potential "PR disaster."

The Jefferson County sheriff's department failed, in a major way, to investigate Eric and Dylan when they had reports of the boys' dangerous behavior years earlier. If this information comes to light in the media circus surrounding Columbine, it will be disastrous and damaging.

Judy and Randy Brown, Brooks' parents, had sent the sheriff's department the pages from Eric's website, and had warned officials "repeatedly" about Eric for over a year. Even after the attacks began and officials used sections of Eric's web rant to justify obtaining search warrants for his parents' house, Jeffco officials publicly continued to deny having ever seen the rants.

Jeffco officials lie outright, despite evidence of the fact that they knew about Eric's violent and hateful website—and had been informed repeatedly of other incidents involving Eric.

The public gets "two conflicting stories" about the Browns: "either [they] labored to prevent Columbine, or [inspired] one of its conspirators." The Browns insist to the press that they contacted the sheriff's department fifteen times to discuss Eric. However, Jeffco officials insist that the Browns never met with an investigator, "despite holding a report indicating they had."

The sheriff's department slyly attempts to turn public opinion toward the idea that the Browns perhaps "created" Columbine through their repeated harassment of Eric—when really, the officials' failure to follow through on investigations of Eric is the real story.

Thirteen months before the shooting, two Jeffco investigators—John Hicks and Mike Guerra—investigated one of the Browns' many complaints, and "discovered substantial evidence that Eric was building pipe bombs." Guerra drafted a search warrant but "for some reason" it was never followed up. After Columbine, at a "clandestine, cover-your-ass" meeting of about a dozen Jeffco officials, Guerra is told "never to discuss [the warrant]" again, and he complies.

Mike Guerra had the opportunity to disarm Eric Harris, but due to a number of factors and incompetence within the department, Guerra was never able to do so, and Eric was able to keep—and continue to build—pipe bombs and other ordnance that he already possessed over a year before the attack.

Ten days after the massacre, Jeffco officials hold a press conference in which they "boldly lie" about what they knew about Eric Harris's "motive, means, and opportunity" well in advance of the shooting. Investigator Guerra's file on Eric Harris "disappear[s.]"

The department's desire to save themselves outweighs their allegiance to the public's right to the truth.

Chris Morris, desperate to clear his name—investigators believe he is one of the shooters' conspirators—agrees to a wiretap to help officials "smoke out Phil Duran." Over the course of a long and tense phone call, as the FBI listens in, Chris obtains an admission from Duran that he had "been out shooting with Eric and Dylan [at a] place called Rampart Range." Officials question Duran a few days later. Duran confesses to having put the boys in touch with Mark Manes, and to putting up some of the money for the gun they obtained from him, but promises he made no money on the deal—everything he says is true. Five days later, officials question Mark Manes, who makes a full confession, and outlines how Dylan made the down payment and picked up the gun from Manes' house in late January. Manes made nine dollars, total, on selling the gun to the boys, and now faces eighteen years in prison.

Investigators, still hunting for conspirators and others who might share in the blame for the attacks, "smoke out" the individuals who provided Eric and Dylan with a large part of the means they needed to commit such a large-scale atrocity. The arms dealers, who had no idea—much like the shooters' friends—what Eric and Dylan's intentions were, now face serious punishment for their roles in the massacre.

Dr. Fuselier, plagued by questions of motive, begins carving out time amidst all his other responsibilities to look into the killers. He is the only psychologist on the investigative team, and the only one qualified to analyze the boys' perspective. Though the boys' point of view is "indefensible," Fuselier forces himself to empathize with them. He quickly becomes known as the "expert" on the boys among his peers and subordinates alike. When he comes across Eric's journal, which opens with the line "I hate the fucking world," Fuselier realizes he is dealing with an "all-pervasive hate." Whereas Eric's website mostly "vented rage," it said very little about why he felt it—but the journal is "reflective," and describes the "urges driving Eric to kill."

Fuselier, experienced in his role as an analyst and negotiator, understands that while the killers' crimes are unforgivable, there must have been a "reason" for them—at least in the eyes of the boys themselves. Fuselier's endeavor to understand the shooters will shed some much-needed light on the case. His discovery of Eric's deep, blanket hatred of the world and humanity opens a new chapter in the investigation, and will provide some much-needed answers for those still struggling to identify and understand the "whys" of the case.

CHAPTER 31: THE SEEKER

At the end of March of 1997, Dylan began keeping a journal. He was in pain, and nobody understood him. He was "consumed" by thoughts of suicide, and drank alcohol to quell the pain. He envisioned his journal as a "stately tome" and titled it "Existences: A Virtual Book." There was not even a "hint" of violence in the early pages of the journal—rather, Dylan spoke of being on a "spiritual quest," longing to stay sober, stop making fun of younger kids, and stop playing video games.

While Cullen portrays Eric as a full-blown psychopath with sadistic tendencies, he seems more empathetic towards Dylan. As Cullen delves into Dylan's past, it becomes clear that Dylan was initially just a sensitive boy who suffered greatly and felt entirely lost in the world.

Dylan was lonelier than lonely—he felt "cut off" from humanity, and believed most people to be "annoying." He believed himself to be a "seeker" who beheld the "possibilities and wonder" of life that most human "zombies" could not see. Dylan described his deep belief in God and envisioned himself as "a modern Job." Dylan planned to kill no one "except, God willing, himself." He craved death on every page of the journal, but feared committing suicide because of his belief in a "literal heaven and hell."

While Dylan was clearly depressed and even suicidal, he also had a sense of his own dramatic importance even years before the massacre. He didn't necessarily see himself as superior to other humans (like Eric did), but he did see himself as special in his suffering and desire for answers, and thus disconnected from all the "unimportant" other people. Dylan's belief in a literal heaven and hell also shows another side to religion in the book—this time connected to the killers, rather than the victims and community.

Dylan's journal began a year earlier than Eric's, and was nearly five times as long. Eric, however, began his journal "as a killer," and used his diary "not [for] self-discovery but self-lionization." Dylan, in his journal, was simply "trying to grapple with existence," describing over the course of two years "the [neverending] battle between good & bad."

Here Cullen makes it clear that he empathizes much more with Dylan than with Eric. As Cullen describes it, Eric was almost always what he was, while Dylan had a long and tortuous path to becoming a mass murderer.

CHAPTER 32: JESUS JESUS JESUS

The Sunday morning after Columbine, Jeffco churches are "packed." After services, at a nearby shopping center, seventy thousand people arrive to mourn in public along with the Colorado Governor Bill Owens, Christian pop singer Amy Grant, Vice President Al Gore, and Reverend Franklin Graham—Billy Graham's son. Local pastors speaking at the event implore mourners to "seek Jesus." Reverend Graham invokes Cassie Bernall's name, claiming she'd "stood before a gunman who'd transported her immediately into the presence of God" when her killer "held her at gunpoint and asked if she believed in God." Cassie answered "Yes," and was "promptly shot in the head." Cassie Bernall's story is repeated by Vice President Gore, and the country, in the days after the event, becomes "transfixed" by it.

A religious fervor sweeps through Jeffco in the wake of the attack. The community is already a devout one, but people's sense of loss and desperation in the wake of the attack gives rise to a feverish and visceral search for answers from religion.

Cassie is being hailed as a "martyr," and local preachers see an opportunity "to unabashedly save more souls [and] pack [the] ark with as many as possible." Most of the Denver clergy is "appalled" by the Evangelicals' opportunism, but the crux of Evangelical faith is recruitment in the name of Jesus Christ—they cannot miss the opportunity this tragedy has provided them.

The tension between the goals of Evangelism—to "recruit" as many souls as possible for Jesus—and the blatant opportunism the Evangelicals engage in in the wake of Columbine causes many to balk at how the local clergy is responding to the tragedy.

Craig Scott, Rachel Scott's older brother and a survivor of the library massacre, saw death and carnage on the day of Columbine—but he had "heard something wonderful," too. He heard a girl profess her faith in the library, and he is responsible for spreading Cassie Bernall's story of martyrdom. Local and national newspapers alike pick up Cassie's story throughout the week, and by Sunday, it is "proclaimed from countless pulpits."

Desperate to find any light in the horrible tragedy, locals seize upon what seems like the only "good" to come out of Columbine—Cassie Bernall's martyrdom. Religious officials use her as an icon of the tragedy, a different kind of opportunism meant to demonstrate the power of faith and the "benefits" of leading a pious life.

Cassie's parents "burst" with pride, and describe their daughter's martyrdom as having thrown Columbine "back into the face of Satan." They urge anyone listening to their daughter's story to go to church—especially young people. Soon, Brad and Misty Bernall are on *20/20* and *Oprah*. When Oprah asks them whether they wish their daughter had said "No," Misty says she "can't think of a more honorable way to die than to profess your faith in God."

The Bernall family is devastated by the loss of their daughter, but they find strength and pride in her martyrdom. They tell her story again and again to the media, which is hungry for a sensational and inspirational story like Cassie's.

CHAPTER 33: GOOD-BYE

Dylan believed that God had blessed him with some good things, but had also condemned him to the existence of a seeker "in search of answers [but] never finding them." Dylan described "moving down [a] hall" toward answers, and death as "passing through the doors," perhaps at the end of the hallway. Dylan referred to humans as "zombies" in his journal entries, and described himself as "god[-like]" compared to the idiots around him.

Dylan experienced the same disdain for humanity and sense of superiority as Eric did, though his sense of "superiority" often meant that he felt superior in the depth of his feelings, perceptions, and dramatic importance. He did not yet have violent aims, but rather wanted to get to know himself better and find the answers that would guide him through his life.

Meanwhile, Eric was learning to "cover his tracks" when it came to his continuing missions, and experimenting with theft and setting off explosives. By the summer of 1997, Eric and Dylan had finished building their first pipe bomb—it was Eric's "baby." That summer, Eric—who had not yet begun his diary—posted a list of "fifty-odd" entries about things he hated. Fuselier found that the "underlying theme" of his hatred was that of "stupid, witless inferiors." The thing Eric professed to love most was "natural selection."

As Eric continues to fantasize about the death of things—and people—he hates, he begins assembling the physical means to cause harm and even death. Eric desires "natural selection" at this point, an evolutionary process which would theoretically not involve him, but which he finds fascinating and satisfying, as he wants to bear witness to the end of humanity.

Eric's loves and ideas all began to come together during this time. He "hated inferiors, loved explosions, and hoped for human extinction." With all this cohering, he began to build his very first bombs, starting small and describing his experiments in specific detail on his website. At the end of the summer, a "concerned citizen" called the sheriff's department to report the contents of Eric's website. On August 7th, 1999, both of the killers' names "permanently entered" the Jeffco system. A deputy sent detective John Hicks to investigate the "missions" described on the website, but made no mention to him of the pipe bombs.

Eric begins to synthesize his dreams and his reality. As those around him start to recognize what is going on, the law enforcement officials in Jefferson County build an official record for him—but maintain a crucial blind spot.

Eric, Zack, and Dylan got jobs at Blackjack. Zack met a girl, and drifted from their close-knit threesome. Dylan was distraught over Zack's having found love, and wrote about his despair in his journal. Dylan identified Zack as his best friend, not Eric, and claimed that only Zack had ever even come close to understanding him. Dylan also began writing obsessively about a girl in his school, describing his love for her despite never having talked to her. In later entries, Dylan described his anger towards this girl, the object of his affections, realizing that "in reality [she] doesn't give a fuck about me." He described wanting a gun, and feeling "infinite sadness." Hate is the most overt theme of Eric's website at this point, while "love" is the most commonly used word in Dylan's journal.

Dylan and Eric were brought closer together by the slight of their friend Zack's abandonment. Dylan and Eric are both angry, but are torn in different directions by their anger. Dylan is obsessed within gaining love and affection, whereas Eric is still obsessed with violence and domination.

Fuselier, reading Dylan's journals in 1999, believes Dylan to be a "classic depressive." He sees no evidence of psychosis—disorientation or delusion—in Dylan's journal entries, but considers the possibility of psychopathy. Psychopaths act "charming and likable," but are in reality "coldhearted manipulators" who, when "amuse[d]" by murders, will often "kill again and again." He doesn't believe that Dylan is a psychopath, but is confused because Dylan's depression seemed to tilt toward the "languorous," not the murderous—Dylan Klebold, Fuselier, was "not a man of action, [but] was conscripted by a boy who was."

Fuselier's realization that he is dealing with a psychopath changes the nature of the case. Eric's motive was pure and detached hatred—and he used his manipulative charm in order to get the tortured, angst-ridden Dylan on board with his dreams of fame and annihilation.

CHAPTER 34: PICTURE-PERFECT MARSUPIALS

Patrick Ireland grows frustrated by his attempts to talk again. The language centers of his brain are compromised, and he often doesn't know what he's saying: he will answer questions in Spanish, or respond to a question about how he is feeling by asking for a straw. One of the phrases he continues to repeat is "picture-perfect marsupials." He attempts to write on a whiteboard in order to communicate, but can only produce scribbles.

Dave Cullen uses Patrick's failures in communication to illustrate the severity of the violence that was perpetrated against him, and also to draw a metaphorical line between his literal inability to communicate and his inability to communicate the experience he has had as a survivor of the library massacre.

Patrick understands that he has been shot, but doesn't yet realize "the scale of the massacre." He does not know that his fall out the library window was televised. He clings to dreams of his athletic success and graduating high school as valedictorian. When Patrick transfers to Craig Hospital, he catches a glimpse of the news and begins to understand who the victims of the attack are, and continues struggling to bridge the "gap in the network inside his brain" that will allow him to regain movement of his legs.

Patrick slowly begins to recognize what he has been through and how difficult the road ahead will be. He is determined as ever, though, to hang onto his dreams and to not let the violence he has suffered take hold of his life. It becomes clearer that Patrick's is an inspirational story of struggle and success, and thus a counterpoint to the many other narratives of failure in the book.

At a makeshift memorial in Clement Park, a row of fifteen crosses appear on a hill. A carpenter from Chicago had installed them there, and taped a black and white photo of the victim—or killer—to each. While many come and decorate the crosses of the victims, the killers' crosses are defaced. Brian Rohrbough was livid about the killers' crosses, and "affixed each one with a sign saying 'Murderers burn in hell.'" When park officials remove the signs, Brian calls city officials and asks them to remove the crosses. The officials agree to take the crosses down the next day. Believing that the next day is not soon enough, Brian himself takes the crosses down, hacks them to pieces, and tosses the remains into a dumpster. The carpenter who had installed the crosses returns and removes the remaining thirteen. He then builds a set of new crosses, but apologizes profusely and publicly and promises not to erect them. He goes on to milk the "celebrity" the crosses earn him for years, and Brian Rohrbough denounces him publicly as an "opportunist" and a "despicable person." Though many mourners remember the crosses, Cullen writes, most have forgotten the carpenter altogether.

Members of the Jefferson County community struggle with how to mourn the Columbine massacre. The killers are seen by some as troubled boys, and by others as Satanic murderers destined to "burn in hell." Opportunism is at play in this passage, too, as the carpenter who made the crosses attempts to edge himself into the limelight. By highlighting the fact that though many remember the crosses, hardly anyone remembers the carpenter himself, Cullen denounces self-seeking opportunism, and displays the ways in which collective or communal grief often outweighs the desire for sensationalism and spectacle.

CHAPTER 35: ARREST

After stealing a set of signs at the end of summer 1997, Eric becomes more and more obsessed with death. With Dylan, he hacks into the school's computer system in October of 1997 to steal locker combinations, and the boys are caught and suspended. Wayne is relieved to find that the situation will be dealt with "in-house" at Columbine, and the offense will not appear on Eric's permanent legal record. The Klebolds are surprised by Dylan's "lapse of ethics." Both boys are grounded for a month, and contact with one another is forbidden. They "weather the punishment" and remain close—with Zack having drifted away, the two are now firmly a duo.

Eric and Dylan are bound together by their shared responsibility for this newest infraction. Eric's parents are just glad that it won't be on their son's permanent record, while Dylan's parents are totally shocked by his behavior. The two grow even closer after "weather[ing]" their punishment.

Fuselier wonders what Eric's psychological state might have been at this point. Though his website is angry and surely the instincts that will lead him to the massacre are already in place, Eric has not yet revealed any specifics.

Eric has made a spectacle of his anger, but his actual motivations are still imprecise and unclear.

Dylan, in his journal, continues to fixate on Harriet, the girl he loves from afar. He works with her on a group project, but fails to talk to her. Dylan identifies with two fictional characters in his journal at this point in time: the protagonist of Nine Inch Nails' macabre concept album *The Downward Spiral*, the plot of which culminates in suicide, and the main character in David Lynch's *Lost Highway*, a dark and twisting film about confused identities and deep insecurity. Though the darkly comedic killing-spree film Natural Born Killers and violent video games are cited as the boys' inspiration for the attacks, Cullen argues that Dylan, at least, only identified with characters who seemed just as depressed as he was.

Dylan's deep self-esteem issues and low sense of self-worth are reflected in the characters he identifies with—people who are confused, unhappy, and struggling with who they truly are. The popular myth that the boys were directly influenced by stylized violence in the media is seemingly incorrect—yet Cullen posits that Dylan, at least, may have been "inspired" by more morose, directionless icons in which he saw himself more clearly.

Eric's father discovered one of his pipe bombs in the fall of 1997. Eric told his friends about the discovery, but Wayne Harris never wrote in his personal journal about it. Eric promised his parents he would never make a bomb again, but eventually "got back to business."

Eric continues to deceive his parents and put on a contrite, innocent face, but meanwhile "leaks" information about his exploits to his friends.

While Dylan is still grounded for the computer hack, his older brother Byron is kicked out of the house for drug use. Dylan feels abandoned and "more depressed with each day." In his journal around this time, he makes an overt reference to "go[ing] on [a] killing spree," but does not linger on the idea for more than one line. Cullen considers it "unlikely" that, at this same moment in time, Eric was experimenting with building bigger bombs.

Dylan's depression worsens, and he focuses his heightened despair outward rather than inward for the first time ever. Eric, meanwhile, seems to have taken a hiatus from his designs on destruction. Both boys are angry and frustrated, but stuck.

Toward the end of 1997, Eric completes a school paper about school shootings. He writes that it is "just as easy to bring a loaded handgun to school as it is to bring a calculator." His teacher rates his paper as "thorough & logical," and commends him on a job well done.

Eric is testing how far he can push people around him, no doubt taking pride in his ability to push the envelope and reveal small facets of his dark inner desires to the world.

Eric and Dylan continue to steal, taking equipment from the computer lab. Eric, at this point, may or may not have attempted a credit card scam. Dylan's father catches him with a stolen laptop and forces him to turn it in, and in January Dylan is sent to the dean again for writing "fag" on a freshman's locker—he is suspended once more.

As the boys get into more and more trouble in a series of failed exploits, they are increasingly on everyone's radar—nothing of major consequence, though, happens to them.

The boys have begun setting off pipe bombs, and brag to their friend Nate Dykeman about their success. They bring Nate along on Super Bowl Sunday to show him a "demo."

The boys are putting on a show for their close friends—but it's also a "show" that only they are in on, further isolating the two from others.

One Friday night at the end of January, the boys, restless and driving around aimlessly, steal a large amount of electronic equipment from a parked van. Dylan does the "dirty work," wearing ski gloves to mask his fingerprints, while Eric stands guard. The boys drive away to play with their new toys, but once they park in what they think is a safe place they are approached by a Jeffco Deputy. Eric lies, claiming that the boys had "stumbled onto the equipment," but he is "off his game" and describes the location they'd found the equipment as the actual location of the robbery. Dylan "folded" and confesses to the officer.

This is the most significant crime the boys have committed, and, as such, it is proportionally their largest failure to date when they are caught. Eric, flustered, told an easily-punctured lie. Dylan, perhaps afraid of getting caught, or realizing that they would be no matter what, confesses and ensures that their failure is total. This is then a definitive turning point in the boys' lives.

The boys' parents are at the police station when Eric and Dylan arrive. In their statements, Eric blames Dylan for masterminding the theft. Dylan alleges that the boys had both gotten the idea to rob the van "almost at the same time." The boys are fingerprinted, booked, and released into their parents' custody. They each face three felony charges, which each carry up to three years in prison.

Eric still continues to manipulate things in his favor, going so far as to throw Dylan under the bus for the crime. The boys are in the system as felons now, highlighting even more profoundly the fact that Jeffco officials knew they were trouble and had every opportunity to look into what the boys were really up to.

CHAPTER 36: CONSPIRACY

The investigative team behind Columbine seeks convictions. There are three separate crimes to uncover: participation in the attack itself, participation in the planning of the attack, and guilty knowledge of the attack. All of Dylan and Eric's friends who've been interviewed have copped to knowing small details, but were "clueless" about the master plan. Searches of the killers' friends house turn nothing up. None of them appear in the killers' journals. Though Sheriff Stone will "publicly espouse a conspiracy theory" for months, Fuselier feels that theory slipping away within the first two weeks of investigations.

The investigative team fails to believe that just two boys could have committed such a large-scale crime, but their attempts to pin down more conspirators are unsuccessful. Jeffco officials, in the meantime, continue to derail the public and media perception of the incident by continuing to push the theory that Columbine was a larger conspiracy.

While witnesses claimed to have seen multiple shooters, experts and investigators state that eyewitness testimony—due to the brain's inability to form new memories during moments of terror or trauma—is not particularly accurate, and memory is "notoriously unreliable."

Issues of bearing witness and the accuracy of eyewitness testimony come to the forefront as the investigation begins to increasingly rely on testimony and firsthand accounts.

Desperate for "whys," the media locks onto a new angle of motive behind the attacks: the Marines. Eric had been talking to a Marine recruiter during the last few weeks before the attack. Eric was also taking an antidepressant. The story of Eric, rejected by the Marines, going off his medication and flying into a killing rampage gains traction, but Fuselier knows it is wrong. Eric had remained on a full dose of medication up until his death, and Eric had never been rejected from the Marines. Fuselier knows "what the media [does not.] There had been no trigger."

The public simply cannot accept that the attacks were perpetrated by two boys whose only motives were hatred and disdain. The theory that there had to have been a "trigger" which pushed the boys to kill is attractive, because it eliminates the horrific truth behind the massacre: that the boys had coolly calculated the attack for no reason other than their own ill will and desire for glory.

Lead investigator Kate Battan interviews the Klebolds, but is disappointed to find that the interview only yields "a fluff piece on their son" in which they describe him as quiet and sensitive. The Harrises demand immunity from prosecution before they talk to investigators. Jeffco officials refuse, and Battan does not even get "fluff" from them.

The parents of the shooters are reluctant to speak to the media, and even when the Klebolds, who had been unaware of Dylan's depression and anger, relent, they are unable to yield anything useful.

Sheriff John Stone continues spewing his theory that Columbine had been a conspiracy engineered by several students to the members of the press, and Jeffco spokesmen must constantly correct their sheriff's misstatements. Stone's staff begs him to stop speaking to the press, but are worried about the optics of "muzzl[ing]" their sheriff. Nine days after the shootings, there is a "blackout" of information, and nothing new about the shootings will come out of Jeffco for five months. Columbine press coverage, too, abruptly ends—the narrative, Cullen writes, is set.

John Stone fails to provide his community with the correct information, despite his staff's pleading with him to stop saying anything at all. Soon the crucial moment in the development of the narrative of Columbine has passed, and it is too late to change what the public will think—as evidenced by the many untrue myths about the massacre that persist even to this day.

CHAPTER 37: BETRAYED

In the wake of Eric's arrest for theft, his parents realize he needs professional help. Wayne Harris searches for a therapist, and makes Eric an appointment for mid-February. He also plans to apply for Eric to complete a juvenile diversion program, which mandates a year of counseling, community services, fines, and fees in an exchange for having the crime removed from Eric's permanent record. Eric tells his new psychiatrist that he has "anger issues" and thoughts of suicide, and is placed on an antidepressant. Eric and Dylan are forbidden from contacting one another. Eric's computer access is revoked, and he continues to work on his pipe bombs. On February 15th, just before Eric's first therapy appointment, Jeffco bomb squad investigators respond to a call reporting a pipe bomb found in Eric's neighborhood. The investigator summoned "defused the bomb and filed a report."

The Harrises are desperate to keep their son out of trouble, and to correct whatever has gone wrong in him. Though they take every step they know how to take, Eric continues to evade their intentions entirely, and keeps plotting and building bombs. He glides by right under their noses, which no doubt brings him immense joy and feels to him like retribution for their having punished him.

Eric and Dylan do not tell their friends about their arrest or their punishments. Eventually, though, word gets out, and Eric and Dylan are both humiliated. Eric is "raging mad," while Dylan retreats into fantasies of finding love with Harriet, and writes of blowing himself up with a pipe bomb if "by love's choice" she doesn't love Dylan back.

Dylan and Eric fume over the injustice of their arrest, and Dylan in particular begins showing increased signs of longing for self-annihilation.

Wayne Harris works diligently to get Eric into a diversion program. Meanwhile, Eric is detonating his first pipe bombs in his spare time, and laments not yet having found a "target" for them. Eric's dreams of human extinction begin to change—on his website, he longs to be an "enforcer" of annihilation, and "rig explosives all over a town." He wants to "kill and injure as many as [he] can."

Eric is angry and embarrassed, and lashes out by doubling down on his desire for destruction and retaliation. His rage knows no specific target, and he is desperate to inflict pain on whoever he can.

Dylan, alarmed by Eric's rants, gives Brooks Brown Eric's web address and tells him to look at it, but not to tell Eric that Dylan pointed him there. Brooks checks the website, sees that he himself is threatened personally several times, and tells his mother. His parents call the cops, who follow up and file reports, but do not alert the DA's office—as a result, Eric and Dylan still get into the diversion program.

Dylan is angry, humiliated, and upset, but still at this point has enough self-awareness to realize that Eric is dangerous. He even attempts to warn Brooks Brown, but ineffectual local officials do not delve any further into the Browns' claims about Eric.

Both Tom and Sue Klebold attend Dylan's diversion program intake meeting. Dylan and his parents independently fill out an intake form, and then a mediator discusses each set of results with all three Klebolds. Dylan's parents are shocked by Dylan's confessions about drinking, but admit that they know their son is "angry, sullen, disrespectful and intolerant."

Dylan's parents are still "shocked" by aspects of his life previously unknown to them. They are learning more and more about who their son really is, but are still unable to grasp the full picture.

Wayne and Kathy attend Eric's intake session, too, and are surprised that on a checklist of thirty "potential problem areas," they only mark three, while Eric himself marks fourteen—"virtually everything related to distrust or aggression," including homicidal thoughts. His parents worry that though they can try to control his behavior, they cannot control his moods. Eric, on his website, will write that he only made a "partial" confession in the intake meeting, and continues to describe his desire for humanity to bend to his will, as well as fantasies of "blowing up and shooting up everything he could."

Wayne and Kathy, too, must admit that they do not know what is going on with their son as well as they might have thought they did. They are not to blame, though—Eric uses his skills to keep himself from them, and to disguise his true intentions. He continues to write in his journal of his dark desires, bragging of how he continues to deceive not only his parents but everyone around him.

The boys' intake supervisor, Andrea Sanchez, worries about both boys' ability to accept responsibility for their actions, but recommends them for enrollment. A Jeffco judge doesn't believe that this offense is the boys' first—though both they and their parents claim it is—but is impressed by their "deferential" behavior at their hearing and he approves them for diversion. Fourteen months later, Cullen writes, the judge will "lament how convincing the boys had been, [and] how decepti[ve]."

Eric and Dylan manage to deceive everyone who is in a position to hold them accountable for their actions. The system fails partly because Eric and Dylan are so good at jamming it.

Judy and Randy Brown, Brooks' parents, continue to hound the cops. Investigator Guerra drafts an affidavit for a search warrant of Eric's house, and even mentions within it the pipe bomb recently discovered near Eric's house. The affidavit is filed, but is not followed up on "in any way" and no explanation for the inaction is ever provided. None of the "damning" evidence was ever brought before the judge who approved the boys for diversion. Eric, having gotten wind of the Browns' continued pursuit of him, takes his website down and begins writing the journal, in which he would "record his progress toward the attack and thoroughly explain his motives."

The boys slip through the cracks of the system, and Eric, perhaps realizing the luck he's had in evading real trouble thus far, takes his website down and begins making his angry, hateful writings private.

CHAPTER 38: MARTYR

Cassie Bernall is being compared to third-century Christian martyrs, and it is predicted by pastors and noted religious scholars that she will become "the first officially designated Protestant martyr since the sixteenth century." Their daughter's story brings Brad and Misty Bernall "tremendous relief"—years ago, The Enemy had nearly taken their little girl.

The tales of Cassie Bernall's martyrdom provide her parents with a refuge in the wake of having had to witness their daughter's life being taken away by senseless violence.

Misty believes her daughter had been possessed by Satan three years earlier. Cassie had disturbing letters in her possession, written by a friend but "suggest[ing] a receptive audience," describing an unknown peer's encouragement of Cassie to murder her teachers and her own parents. The pages were filled with "hard-core sex talk and magic spells" and featured drawings of the Bernalls' graves. When Brad and Misty confronted Cassie about the letters, she threatened to kill herself, cutting her wrists and bashing her head against the bathroom sink. One night, three months after the discovery of the letters, Cassie was "saved" at youth group, and promised her parents that she had changed. Cassie then leaned full-tilt into Evangelism.

Cassie was a disturbed child, and herself harbored fantasies of violence, murder, and deviant behavior. The story of Cassie having been "saved" at youth group is another cornerstone of the Bernalls' faith—an example of the power of religion to heal, change, and convert pain into happiness.

Two other martyr stories surface in the wake of the massacre. Val Schnurr was shot and remained conscious—she began to pray to God for her life. The killers overheard her, and Dylan asked her whether or not she believed in God—she answered yes, and Dylan began to reload his gun, but "something distracted him," and he walked away from her, leaving her alive. Val's story, like Cassie's, emerged the day of the attack, but took longer to gain traction in the press. She was seen as a "usurper," and as Cassie's fame grew, Val was shunned.

Val's story was shut down—even though it was true—because it came second. The grief and need for answers that emerged after the shooting made some stories seem more valuable than others, and as is the case in too many tragedies, some survivors have suffered and been silenced even after having endured terrible violence.

As Cassie's story continues to "mushroom" and Brad and Misty are hailed as "blessed parents of the martyr," another student, Emily Wyant, knows the truth of Cassie's story. Emily had been in the library during the attack, under the same table as Cassie. She watched as Cassie was shot without saying a word to her killer. Another girl, Bree Pasquale, corroborates Emily's story. Both girls give detailed accounts to investigators, and 911 audio supports their claims. The girls wait for the truth to emerge.

Many witnesses who know the truth about Cassie's story have kept silent as it unfolds. Because the situation is so delicate, they do not want to hurt or offend the Bernalls, and so wait patiently for the misinformation to come to light without making a formal accusation.

Emily Wyant is saddened by the moral dilemma she faces: she does not want to hurt Cassie's parents or embarrass herself, but can't help feeling that the story of Cassie's martyrdom is a lie. Emily is contacted by the *Rocky Mountain News*, and tells them the truth. The paper holds onto the story, waiting for the right time to release it.

Emily confesses the truth to the press, who are determined to bring it to light.

Telling Cassie's story makes the loss of her daughter more "bearable" for Misty Bernall, and someone suggests she writes a book. Misty agrees, and a small Christian press plans to publish the account, titled *She Said Yes: The Unlikely Martyrdom of Cassie Bernall*. The press plans a printing of 100,000 copies, and expects it to be a hit.

Meanwhile, Misty Bernall has used the story as a shield between herself and the horror of her daughter's death. An opportunistic religious publisher then plans to spread the story, not knowing it to be false.

On May 25th, the school library is opened to victims of the library massacre and their families. As Craig Scott walks through with family members and retells Cassie's story, he gets the details wrong, pointing in the direction of the table where Val Schnurr, not Cassie, had been hidden. When detectives point out the inaccuracy, Craig gets sick and exits the library, refusing to go back inside.

Craig realizes that his memory has failed him—as Cullen has written many times in this text, eyewitness memory is not always reliable, particularly during traumatic events.

Investigators get word of Misty Bernall's book deal, and decide to alert her to the truth. Misty claims they told her not to stop writing the book, but alerted her that varying accounts of what transpired in the library were coming to light. Kate Battan suggested Misty take the story of Cassie's martyrdom out of the manuscript, but continue with the account of Cassie's life and transformation. Val Schnurr's family and Emily Wyant's family both separately attend dinner with the Bernalls, and both families recognize that the book is Misty's way of healing. The Schnurrs, however, contact the publisher and tell them to slow down—there is "a lot of conflicting information out there," they warn, but the publisher declines to delay publication.

Despite investigators' attempts to intervene and to spare Misty from the ramifications of putting a false story out into the world, she proceeds with her manuscript and with her belief in Cassie's story. Everyone tiptoes around the Bernalls, afraid to hurt or disappoint them—including their publisher, even after being made aware of the "conflicting" stories.

CHAPTER 39: THE BOOK OF GOD

As Eric prepares to begin the diversion program—and his senior year—he lashes out even more angrily in his journal. He describes himself as "higher than almost anyone in the world in terms of universal intelligence," and compares himself to God "frequently but not delusionally," going so far as to title his journal "The Book of God." He refers to humans as mindless automatons, echoing Dylan's earlier writings which described humans as "zombies." Eric wants to impose a kind of natural selection of his own making, to "fuck things up as much as we can [and] leave a lasting impression on the world." Dr. Fuselier, reading Eric's journal in the present day, comes to an important conclusion: he is dealing with a psychopath.

Eric sees himself as many psychopaths see themselves—as better, more deserving, smarter, and more talented than the rest of humanity. He believes that his desire for annihilation of the human race is justified. Dr. Fuselier's realization about Eric will then reorient the way he sees the entire case.

CHAPTER 40: PSYCHOPATH

Insanity, Dr. Fuselier knows, is "marked by mental confusion." Eric Harris's journals reveal a cold but highly rational kind of calculation. Fuselier also notes that Eric is both charming and callous, as well as manipulative and egocentric. Most alarmingly of all, Eric seemingly has no empathy: he fits the bill of a textbook psychopath. Fuselier attempts to attack his own hypothesis, but finds that diagnosing Eric with psychopathy holds up against every inquiry. This diagnosis then establishes the foundation for understanding the crime.

Fuselier, after taking many measures to make sure that his theory is right, prepares to look at the case with fresh new eyes. Knowing that Eric was a psychopath allows him to get closer to understanding why the attacks occurred, and how.

Psychopathic brains, Cullen writes, are distinguished by two characteristics: a ruthless disregard for others and, secondly, a gift for disguising that disregard completely. Psychopaths come off as charming and inviting, not "evil" or insane. Lying, and finding joy in lying, is a "signature" trait of a psychopath. Scans of the brain waves of psychopathic brains reveal "activity unrecognizable as human to most neurologists."

By explaining the classifications which are required to deem someone a psychopath, Cullen outlines how consistent all of Eric's behavior up to this point has been with the diagnosis.

Another psychological phenomenon within the Columbine attack was the presence of a "dyad," a murderous pair who "feed" on one another. These partnerships—think Bonnie and Clyde—tend to be "asymmetrical," and the dyad of Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold certainly was. Eric was the ringleader and sadistic psychopath, and Dylan was an angry, erratic depressive.

Again, Cullen introduces the term "dyad" late in the game, so to speak, in order to allow his audience to accept the term as truth, having witnessed Eric and Dylan's toxic and symbiotic friendship evolve.

CHAPTER 41: THE PARENTS GROUP

Though Fuselier is confident in his diagnosis of Eric as a psychopath, he knows there will controversy and "resistance" over diagnosing such a young man. Three months after the attack, the FBI organizes a summit on school shooters, at which Fuselier briefs attendees on the inner workings of the killers' minds and then tentatively posits, to minimize controversy, that Eric Harris was "a budding young psychopath." As Fuselier waits for blowback, a psychiatrist in attendance speaks out: "I don't think he was a budding young psychopath. I think he was a full-blown psychopath."

Fuselier's theory is vindicated by his peers. He feels confident in his diagnosis of the situation, and firm in his ability to view and interpret the Columbine massacre through the lens of Eric's "full-blown" psychopathy.

Though the killers' motives are now known, Fuselier is not permitted to talk to the public, as the FBI has prohibited him from speaking to the media. However, "failure to address the obvious" has begun to eat away at the Jeffco sheriff department's already-waning credibility. Jeffco is covering a lot of things up—like the disappeared affidavit, which, Guerra attests, was "purged" from the system in the wake of the attacks.

Fuselier and other investigators are prevented from sharing what they know with the media and the grieving public by a sheriff's department desperately trying to disguise its own failures.

Meanwhile, Patrick Ireland struggles to regain movement of his legs. He is rebuilding the frayed signals in his brain. He makes steady progress each day, and within a few weeks, he is on his feet. It will take him "months to hold a pen without shaking," but he is on his way to normalcy. Another injured student, Anne Marie Hochhalter, receives less positive news. After weeks "delirious on morphine with a ventilator and a feeding tube keeping her alive," Hochhalter finally asks a nurse whether she will ever walk again, and the nurse tells her she will not. She joins Patrick and several other survivors at the Craig rehab.

Once again, Cullen uses Patrick Ireland's journey of recovery as a barometer for where the larger Columbine community is in their recovery process. Anne Marie Hochhalter is stalled in her recovery, and will have to cope with the injuries she's sustained for the rest of her life—her journey, too, mirrors some of the survivors and witnesses of Columbine.

Families of the library victims return to the scene of the crime with investigators. School officials and families all realize that the library must be rebuilt—sending any child back in is "unthinkable." Students, however, continue to fight for the idea of getting their school back—not as a tragedy, but as a high school. Tourists begin to arrive, angering the students further. On June 2nd, students are finally allowed to return to the building to collect the belongings which have been inside the school since the attack. The students are then "kicked out" again for another two months while the interior is renovated. Fall enrollment increases. Students want their school back. The library renovation will be total, but the rest of the school will be redesigned in a "balanced" way that will "surround [students] with changes too subtle to identify."

The school must decide how to handle reintegrating students into an environment that has now become a place of violence and trauma for so many. Failure to properly reintroduce students to their school—or to make it visually unrecognizable and therefore emotionally inaccessible—will constitute yet another failure on the school's part.

The parents of the thirteen victims form a group to support one another—the Thirteen—as one of the victims' families files a wrongful death suit against the killers' parents for a quarter of a billion dollars. The family insists that the lawsuit is a symbol, but the other victims' families are largely repulsed—they have been spending the months after the attack rededicating their lives to social justice and activism, not seeking financial recompense. As relief funds pour in, families fight about how the money is allocated, and eventually the Healing Fund announces plans to distribute 40% of the 3.8 million raised to direct victims. The Thirteen will receive slightly more money than the survivors.

Though money can never repair the trauma that the Thirteen have had to endure, they are nonetheless desperate for anything that will ameliorate their grief or bring them a sense of justice and resolution. They are also angry at the county and at the school for what they perceive as major failures to prevent the attack. Barely a month after the attack, the amount of compassion people have for the victims' families attempts to get justice has waned.

On May 28th, Kathy Harris writes condolence letters to the Thirteen. She sends all the letters in one envelope to a clearinghouse for victim correspondence. The school district turns the letters over to the sheriff's department, who keep them as evidence.

Kathy Harris's attempts to connect with and apologize to the victim's families fail. Kathy is still an outcast, and reviled in the community.

Sue Klebold also writes apologies, and mails them directly to the Thirteen. Misty Bernall is moved by the letter she receives, and describes Sue Klebold's act of writing it as "courageous," recognizing that the Klebolds have no comfort whatsoever in their grief—at least Cassie died nobly.

Though people are still angry with the killers' parents, some begin to recognize their uniquely lonely place in the tragedy, and the lack of redemption available to them.

CHAPTER 42: DIVERSION

After beginning their diversion program, Eric and Dylan receive their yearbooks, and write notes to each other referencing their anger over their January arrests and swearing "godlike revenge" when "NBK" rolls around. The notes confirm, for Fuselier, that Eric's arrest was an accelerant to murder, though not the cause. Eric defaces both Dylan's yearbook and his own, drawing swastikas and dead bodies throughout. He writes that he could "taste the blood now." The notes that Eric and Dylan write to each other are a "huge leap of faith," symbolizing their trust in one another and their commitment to carrying out NBK together. Dylan writes "page after page of specific murder plans" in Eric's yearbook—the boys are "at each other's mercy now," Cullen writes, due to the incriminating notes, and they know they will "both go down together [in] mutually assured destruction."

Eric and Dylan are binding themselves together in their desire for destruction in a concrete way. The boys cannot turn back now—there is incriminating evidence against both of them, and they must proceed forward with the attack or go down together before their dreams can be realized, resulting in another humiliating failure and, without a doubt, even more legal trouble.

While Dylan focuses only on describing their planned attack, Eric's visions of murders are much more grandiose. Cullen writes that "neither addressed the discrepancy" between their desires in writing.

Cullen once again hammers home the differences between Eric and Dylan's motivations for and investments in the attack.

The boys' behavior "shift[s] dramatically in reverse directions" once they begin their diversion program. Eric leans into attempting to charm and impress Andrea Sanchez, while Dylan consistently misses appointments, falls behind on his assigned community service, and starts failing two classes. Though Dylan had written excited notes to Eric about NBK, in reality he did not plan to go through with it—he was too mired in his own depression.

Eric is energized by the opportunity to lie and deceive as retribution for what he sees as his unfair arrest. Dylan, however, is completely demoralized, and does not even plan to go through with the only thing that had been providing him with hope or excitement—or escape.

Eric earns a raise and takes on a second job, telling friends and family that he is saving up to buy a new computer—when in reality, he is planning on building an arsenal of ordnance. Dylan quits his job at Blackjack and does not find a replacement job over the summer—he does not contribute much financially to the attack at all.

Once again, Eric is shown to be motivated and eager while Dylan drags his heels and continues to mire himself in inaction and misery.

As part of their diversion program, the boys are required to write letters of apology to the owner of the van. Eric's is deeply contrite and remorseful—"he knew exactly what empathy looked like." In his journal, "at almost the exact same time," according to Dr. Fuselier, Eric writes an angry rant declaring that the owner of the van deserved to be "shot" for leaving his belongings "in plain sight," citing "NATURAL SELECTION" in all caps. Eric hides his contempt from Andrea Sanchez, and brags privately about his lies to her. Eventually he complains to her about his medication, and tells her the antidepressants he'd been described aren't doing enough. Eric's psychiatrist switches him from Zoloft to Luvox, though Cullen says it is unclear what Eric's aim was in complaining to his psychiatrist. Fuselier, too, says he would be "surprised" to find that Eric was being honest with, and not attempting to manipulate, his therapist.

Eric's many manipulations of those around him continue to go off without a hitch. His psychopathic brain enables him to lie and deceive skillfully and without remorse. Privately, Eric is angrier than ever, and is making more and more concrete plans and taking serious action toward the completion of his attack on Columbine.

It's difficult for Eric to fool his father Wayne. Wayne's last entry in his journal, in April—after the orientation meeting for the diversion program—outlines a list of Eric's behavioral issues and restrictions to help combat them, including a curfew and apparently a loss of TV, phone, and computer privileges. Cullen writes that because the Harrises have been so reluctant to talk to anyone since the massacre, it is difficult to get anything but a murky idea of their family dynamic.

Though Cullen does not know what the Harrises were thinking, or what things were like at home for Eric during this time period, he writes that they were seemingly desperate to rein their son in and regain some control over him—though clearly they failed to do so.

Though Dylan excitedly discusses NBK with Eric, he is "privately juggling suicide or true love." He writes Harriet, the girl with whom he's obsessed, a love letter, but never delivers it. Cullen wonders if he ever intended to. Dylan writes in his diary that he plans to kill himself on August 10th, and never take part in the attack at all.

Dylan's messy inner life stands in stark contrast to how he presents himself to the rest of the world, and even to Eric. Just as Eric is deceiving those around him, Dylan, too, is deceiving Eric—though he is not quite as skilled at it.

Eric writes threatening and anonymous emails to Brooks Brown, and his parents once again called the cops. A deputy adds a report of the incident to Eric's file. The Browns' garage is defaced with a paintball gun, and they once again call the police. A deputy reports that there are "no suspects, no leads." Meanwhile, Eric is paired with a new counselor in the diversion program, Bob Krieghauser, who writes that he is "doing well."

Once again, the Jefferson County sheriff's department fails to take Eric seriously as a threat, or to follow up on complaints about him in any real way. Meanwhile, Eric has a new person in his life to deceive, and does so with apparent skill.

As senior year starts, Eric continues to guide Dylan toward the realization of NBK. The two boys are in a video production class together, and they make "fictional vignettes [featuring] aloof tough guys protecting misfits from hulking jocks." The boys take storylines from Eric's journal, and think it's "hilarious" to have their plans "right in the open."

The boys are "leaking" here, or dropping hints about their plans right out in the open. Their fantasies of violence and retaliation are on display for everyone around them to see—the easiest form of deception.

Eric writes an essay for school titled "Is Murder or Breaking the Law Ever Justified?" Cullen writes that Eric "took on a provocative issue and gauged exactly how far he could run with it." His paper argues that killing is justified in "extreme situations," and through it Eric once again "leaks" to those around him without giving his plans away. Eric also writes papers on "The Nazi Culture," featuring graphic images of piled dead bodies and Nazis' torture of prisoners. His teachers do not suspect a thing, and write that his papers are "incredible." Another essay mirrors his apology letter from diversion by describing his felony, and how remorseful he is about it. His teacher praises him. In his journal, Eric brags about his "performances" and continues to gleefully anticipate his attack on Columbine.

As Eric grows closer and closer to the realization of his dreams of annihilation, he becomes even more cavalier about leaking information and pushing the envelope at school. His fascination with Nazi culture, and the death and cruelty the Nazis espoused, should have raised flags at school—however, his teachers failed to look closely enough at what was really going on with their student, as he continued to deceive them with just as much reassuring work.

CHAPTER 43: WHO OWNS THE TRAGEDY

Dave and Linda Sanders had been preparing to retire to Laramie, Wyoming. After Dave's death, Linda continues to think about the house. Her struggle of recovery is very different from "all the other victims"—the majority of the attention is on students and their parents.

Linda is isolated in her grief, forced to bear the trauma of her loss alone because she is separate from the other families of victims.

Kathy Ireland, Patrick Ireland's mother, is full of rage toward the killers. Patrick urges her to forgive them, and Kathy agrees to try, inspired by her son's capacity for empathy. Patrick's recovery is a slow one, and he struggles. After nine and a half weeks at Craig Hospital, Patrick walks out the doors on July 2nd, over two months after the attack. It is an exhausting summer full of therapy, but Patrick is soon walking much more steadily. Patrick, a former jet skier, longs to get back in the water, but he knows he cannot. He breaks down—not angry at Eric or Dylan, but just angry.

Patrick's journey, still a mirror for the most successful aspects of the larger community's journey, reaches a major turning point. He goes home and enters a new phase of recovery, but still bears the emotional scars of his trauma.

Columbine is set to reopen on August 16th. School officials know that the atmosphere on that morning will mean "everything" going forward. They want students to return feeling as if they'd made a clean break. Administrators consult with psychologists and grief experts and come up with an "elaborate ritual" for the reopening, known as "Take Back the School." In order for the ritual to have resonance, the community needs an "adversary to overcome." Picking that adversary is an "easy choice": the media. As local news outlets continue to run Columbine stories daily, the students lash out against the media that has "made their lives hell." At the Take Back the School event, parents and neighbors form a human shield against the press—"a human wall of shame."

Because of the "vacuum" that has emerged in Columbine due to the death of the shooters in the attack and the resulting absence of a tangible place to lay the blame, administrators decide to make the media into the enemy, and their plan is effective. They know they must create a sense of community at the school at any cost, and decide that focusing on keeping the media out will be the most effective thing they can do.

Mr. D warns his students that the "new kids" at Columbine will "never understand" what they've been through, and they should "help them [to]" rather than shutting them out.

Mr. D continues to create a sense of safety and community, and urges his students to practice compassion in the face of trauma and confusion.

The morning of the school's reopening, the human shield is 500 people strong by 7:30 a.m. Students are dressed in t-shirts that read "WE ARE COLUMBINE," and Mr. D delivers a rousing address to the students before raising the flags from half-mast for the first time since April 20th. Patrick Ireland leads the teeming crowd of students back into their school.

The entire Columbine community returns to their school, with Patrick Ireland at the front. They are well on their way to recovery, though there is still a long road ahead.

CHAPTER 44: BOMBS ARE HARD

Eric begins putting his arsenal together just before Halloween of 1998, building "cricket" bombs from fireworks and several batches of pipe bombs. He charts his "production data," rating his creations from "excellent" to "O.K." Eric's journal entries from this time period express a desire to "destroy as much as possible" and not get "sidetracked by feelings of sympathy [or] mercy." Though Eric was a psychopath and unable to feel empathy, Cullen writes, he did comprehend the pain he would cause others—and still longed for it.

Eric continues to self-aggrandize his success as he builds his arsenal. He is consumed by anger, rage, and a desire for destruction, and wants to inflict as much suffering as he possibly can.

Eric continued to "script Columbine as a made-for-TV murder," using fear and terror as his "ultimate" weapons. He had adopted terrorist tactics in order to ensure that the fear he was going to create would endure, and was planning an act of "performance violence" that would play out like a piece of "theater." He made reference to his "audience" and enjoyed anticipating their confusion and grief. The large-scale "performance" Eric was planning, Cullen writes, would ultimately fail—he would not top the Oklahoma City bombing record, which he hoped to do, and would be "lumped in with the pathetic losers who shot people."

Eric had visions of glory and drama that rivaled the violent movie—"Natural Born Killers"—that served as his inspiration. He wanted to captivate the world and force as many people as possible to watch the violence he would inflict and know he was responsible. He could not see his own failure looming before him, so narcissistic and laser-focused was his brain.

Eric is caught with alcohol, and lies spectacularly to his father to get out of trouble. He manages to convince his diversion program officer that everything at home is "great." His grades are up, and his teachers leave "glowing" comments on his end-of-term report cards. Dylan, meanwhile, continues to "tank." Dylan's diversion officer warns him that if he does not improve, he could be terminated from the program and sent to prison.

Eric and Dylan remain on divergent paths, even as they plan their attack together. Eric is better at deception, and Dylan is distracted by his own torment, self-loathing, and conflict over what to do about the fast-approaching date of the attack.

Eric continues building pipe bombs and attempting to acquire guns. A recent bill passed by Congress, the Brady Bill, requires background checks, and Eric rails against the bill in his journal, writing "its [sic] not like I'm some psycho who would go on a shooting spree." Eric has plenty of explosives, but now he is in desperate need of guns and ammo.

Eric was self-aware enough to make macabre jokes about his plans and designs. Though he continued to assemble his arsenal, he still lacked some crucial components of it—namely the firepower which would make him the fearsome killing machine he so desperately longed to be.

CHAPTER 45: AFTERSHOCKS

The six-month anniversary of the shooting is "unnerving." Additionally, surveillance video of the killers inside the cafeteria has leaked to the media. As injured students continue to "fight their way" toward recovery, a friend of Eric and Dylan's is arrested on October 19th after starting a rumor that he planned to "finish the job." Authorities recover an "incriminating journal" and diagrams of the school, but no signs of any serious planning of an attack. 450 students call in sick on October 20th, the six-month anniversary. Anne-Marie Hochhalter's mother commits suicide inside a pawn shop.

The chapter's title, "Aftershocks," speaks to the continuing waves of trauma that rock the Columbine community. As those who wish to cause harm and destruction come out of the woodwork around the six-month anniversary, ripples of the attack are still seen throughout Jefferson County.

The weekend after the anniversary, the Columbine mental health hotline is "flooded with calls." Many people are rattled by the anniversary, and news of Carla June Hochhalter's suicide has upset many, who believe she killed herself because of Columbine and her daughter's injuries. The Hochhalter family reveals, however, that Carla had been struggling for a long time with clinical depression and bipolar disorder, and had been suicidal in the past.

While the Columbine massacre seemingly did not push Carla June to suicide, it certainly didn't help her state of mind. She is the most visible, tangible example, at the six-month anniversary, of the ways in which people are still "rattled" by the attack.

With the threat of Eric and Dylan's friend, the total number of expulsion proceedings in Jeffco since April has reached eight—there is a zero-tolerance policy for threats of any kind. The boy, who had dreamed of plowing into Columbine as a suicide bomber, is sentenced to a juvenile diversion program—just like Eric and Dylan.

Jefferson County continues to potentially mishandle and underestimate the threats of disturbed teens, though they have instituted a zero-tolerance policy in their schools.

The six-month anniversary also marks the deadline for anyone who wants to sue a government agency for negligence. Twenty families file. Among them are Tom and Sue Klebold, who charge the sheriff's department for failing to alert them about its investigation of Eric's troubling behavior. Sheriff Stone publicly denounces the Klebolds' claim, calling it "outrageous," and blaming "their parenting" for Dylan's role in Columbine.

Members of the Columbine community continue to seek answers as to why the attacks occurred, and blame the county and the sheriff's department for failing to do their part in preventing the violence.

In September of 1999, Misty Bernall embarks on a book tour in support of *She Said Yes*. The *Rocky Mountain News* breaks the long-hidden story of the truth about Cassie's "martyrdom," and the Bernall family feels "humiliated and betrayed." The "vast Evangelical community" refuses to accept the evidence, and continues to hail Cassie as a martyr.

Though the Bernalls face the personal humiliation and failure of learning the truth of Cassie's story, their more opportunistic religious community continues to trumpet the tale of her martyrdom.

The Jeffco sheriff's department refuses to release reports on Eric's journal, though a passage of it leaks through Kate Battan. The victims' families demand to see the journal, as well as the Basement Tapes, and are further outraged when a reporter gets to view the tapes first. Sheriff Stone continues to delay the final report, but "insist[s] that his department [will] be exonerated" by it.

Victims' families want answers, and to see the media that Eric and Dylan produced. The county keeps the materials close, however, hoping to use it for their own means rather than share it with those who are mourning and grieving.

Before Christmas, a bomb threat shuts down the school, and finals are cancelled. In the new year, a young boy is found dead a few blocks from the school. In February of 2000, two students are shot two blocks from Columbine, at a Subway sandwich shop. The "star" of Columbine's basketball team commits suicide. Students believe they are "cursed." Many are still suffering from PTSD.

Things are bleak in Columbine, and the specter of violence and trauma still lingers throughout the entire community.

Patrick Ireland does well in school and keeps his status as valedictorian in sight. However, he begins to suffer seizures, and doctors say that too much stress on his brain, which is still in recovery, could kill him. Patrick, who had dreamed of architecture school, realizes that the demands of an architecture program will weaken and threaten his brain, and a "cloud" appears over his future, though he is socially enjoying his senior year and still experiencing all the normal joys and dramas of any high school student.

Once again, Patrick Ireland's struggle onward mirrors the Columbine community's struggle toward grace, recovery, and understanding.

CHAPTER 46: GUNS

Eric acquires his first shotgun on November 22nd, 1998. He names it "**Arlene**." After recruiting their friend Robyn Anderson to purchase the gun for them—she was eighteen years old, old enough to buy one—Eric and Dylan travel with Robyn to a local gun show and acquire two shotguns. Eric refers to this as "the point of no return." Eric and Dylan saw the barrels off their weapons "way below the legal limit," and take them out to the woods to shoot the first week of December. Both boys realize that they now have the power to kill people—Eric's sadistic streak and callousness combine to turn him toward murder.

Eric lovingly names his shotgun, which symbolizes his acquisition, at last, of the physical power to carry out his deepest fantasies. Eric himself is aware enough to know that this is a turning point in his course toward murder. He and Dylan are both excited by the acquisition, and look forward to their shared dreams of violence.

Eric orders ammunition, and the gun shop calls his home phone when his order comes in. Eric's father answers the phone. He assures the man on the other end that he did not order any ammo, and neither Wayne nor the salesman ask any more questions of one another—each assumes it is a wrong number, and the call is over. Wayne is suspicious, but Eric lies, writing in his journal that he can "'BS so fucking well.'"

A close call almost ends Eric's plans for a violent attack, but again, due to a combination of failure on the part of a third party and Eric's ability to lie and deceive people skillfully, he is able to stay on course.

Eric loses interest in his journal after the acquisition of the guns. Dylan has not written in his journal for five months either, but takes to it again after a bad meeting with his diversion officer. In the entry, dated January 20th, Dylan describes "'going NBK w. eric'" as "the best way to be free." As Eric continues to solidify plans for the attack, Dylan returns to his journal frequently, writing "short and erratic entries" which are mostly focused on "love."

Dylan is clearly in a depressed, desperate state of mind, feeling that he has failed in securing love and affection. Yet he still primarily desires self-annihilation rather than the indiscriminate suffering and destruction that Eric wants.

CHAPTER 47: LAWSUITS

In April of 2000, Jeffco has still not released their final report on Columbine. The families of the victims and the school administration alike are deeply frustrated, and the statute of limitations on lawsuits aligns with the first anniversary. If the sheriffs' department delays the report past April 20th, families will no longer be able to sue. On April 10th, two families file a request to see the report—all of it. The District Judge grants the request, and allows the families to read the report, along with access to "hundreds of hours" of 911 tapes and video footage. Many see the agreement as "too little, too late," and fifteen families file lawsuits against the department that week. The Klebolds and the Harrises choose not to sue.

The families of the victims of Columbine, angered by the county's mishandling of the attack and of its aftermath, continue to seek justice. They are incensed by the sheriff's department's failure to give them the answers they so desperately want.

Though most of the lawsuits are expected to fail, Dave Sanders' daughter Angela is believed to have a chance—she is charging Jeffco with having allowed her father to die. Other suits follow similar logic, but will be difficult to prove. The anniversary arrives amidst all this animosity and legal trouble, and the school is closed for the day—many of the Thirteen leave town.

There is clear evidence for Dave Sanders's death having been a result of neglect—had law enforcement breached the perimeter and saved him, he might very well be alive. The anniversary of the shooting, which should be a time for healing reflection, is marred by anger, unhealed wounds, and "animosity."

The district judge continues to order releases of tapes and reports. He releases everything, including the boys' diaries and The Basement Tapes, though the Harrises and Klebolds attempt to stop him. Jeffco releases its official report on May 15th. It avoids the central question of "why," and covers up the botched investigation into the Brown family's reports of Eric's disturbing and violent behavior. The report is ridiculed.

Even when the report is released, the Jefferson County Sheriff's department continues to fail its community by keeping dangerous secrets and avoiding the truth behind the attacks—and all that led up to them.

The press accuses the families of "milking" the tragedy—this, Cullen says, is "compassion fatigue."

The public's sympathy for Columbine survivors and the families of victims has seemingly run out.

Political opportunism emerges along with the reports—efforts toward gun control are pushed by Tom Mauser, the father of one of the victims, but "no significant national gun-control legislation [will be] enacted in response to Columbine."

The government continues to fail in the wake of Columbine as gun control, a major issue in the massacre, is sidestepped and ignored.

On May 20th, Patrick Ireland graduates as valedictorian of his class, and delivers a hope-filled valedictory address in which he describes the world as a "loving" place.

Patrick is one of the largest symbols of hope in the Columbine community, and the whole school watches as he overcomes his trauma and finds peace and success.

CHAPTER 48: AN EMOTION OF GOD

Eric Harris finds napalm hard to work with. He makes several bad batches, each of which is risky due to the substance's unstable nature and incredibly time-consuming. Eric takes full charge of building the arsenal of ordnance for the attack—Dylan, Cullen writes, "seemed to be no help with any of it." Eric, showing the textbook recklessness of a psychopath, plans to walk the bombs right into the school, hiding them in duffel bags.

Eric is much more motivated to proceed with preparations for the attack, even though he is at a risky stage now. Dylan is removed from these preparations, suggesting his lack of motivation. Eric seems either to not understand, or not care about, the risks of pulling off the attack—failure has not even crossed his mind, so self-assured and egotistic are his inner thoughts.

The boys finish their diversion program. Dylan received a report describing his potential despite his struggles, while Eric's report is "glowing."

Eric once again skillfully deceives a person in a position of authority, while Dylan barely makes the cut.

Cullen observes that while Eric's turning point toward murder was the arrest for theft in January of 1998, Dylan's came later, in February of 1999. Dylan, who had been conflicted about taking part in NBK, writes a short story that month describing "an angry man in black gunning down a dozen 'preps,'" and details of the man's rampage are lifted directly out of Eric's plan for NBK. Dylan's creative writing teacher is impressed by the writing, but "deeply disturbed" by what it depicts, and asks to speak to him about the piece in private. Though Dylan insists it's "just a story," his teacher calls Tom and Sue Klebold, who don't seem "too worried." Kelly turns the story into Dylan's school counselor, who also "downplay[s]" the story's gravity. Around this time, Dylan writes in his journal that his journey seeking love and happiness has been a failure, and that Eric offers him hope.

Cullen attempts to track what the turning point for Dylan was. A depressed and inwardly angry young man, it's difficult to discern exactly what convinced Dylan to take part in the killing after all—but Dylan left behind enough of a record that it seems like his dwindling hope for ever finding love or happiness drove him further into Eric's web.

Eric and Dylan hike to Rampart Range for "target practice," and bring Mark Manes, Phil Duran, and Mark's girlfriend along with them. They take videos of themselves shooting bowling pins and pine trees, and impress themselves with their weapons' immense power. They discover that with the shotguns, they have truly become "killing machines." The boys would make a total of three target-practice trips with Mark Manes, and Dylan would leak the fact that he and Eric had acquired shotguns and had practiced with them to Zack Heckler.

In another example of the boys' friends being either totally oblivious or deeply in denial as to the boys' plans, arms dealers Mark Manes and Phil Duran join them for target practice. The boys are stunned by how much power they finally wield, and this, Cullen argues, could be considered the final push in confidence Dylan needed to solidify his participation in the attack.

CHAPTER 49: READY TO BE DONE

Frank DeAngelis plans to retire at the end of the 2002 school year, once the last class of freshman who were present for the shootings has graduated. He has no idea what he will do when he is done, and is busy trying to keep ahead of any more aftershocks. As angry parents—Brian Rohrbough, in particular—continue to blame the school administration for the killings, Mr. D develops a heart condition from all the stress. He is "riddled" with symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. The years following the tragedy are busy, and packed nonstop. There is a lot of emotional upkeep with the traumatized students, and Mr. D's focus on them leads him to neglect some of his staff. He joins a bowling league with his wife, but has trouble opening up to or interacting at all, really, with his family. He and his wife divorce in 2002—the year it is time for Frank to move on from Columbine. He decides he doesn't want to, and announces his intentions to stay on at Columbine.

Cullen uses Frank DeAngelis's story in the years following the massacre to illustrate the ways in which the community is struggling to heal. While Mr. D suffers from debilitating post-traumatic stress, he continues to try and rebuild a safe home for his students. He must shoulder the burden of many parents' blame, though, and is constantly afraid of another threat against his school. Nonetheless, when it comes time for Frank to move on, he finds that he does not want to—or is unable to.


Jeffco continues to release reports pertaining to the shooting, and information on their cover-up of the dropped ball on looking into Eric emerges. Anger and contempt grow, and a federal judge orders Jeffco to hand over key evidence to a federal courthouse in Denver.

Jeffco's cover-up comes to a head. The public is incensed over their role in enabling the shooting to happen, and their rights to retaining the evidence in the Columbine case are taken away.

Agent Fuselier steps away from the case, returning to his role as head of domestic terrorism for the Colorado-Wyoming region at the FBI.

Agent Fuselier, too, as involved as he was in the case and its aftermath, is "ready to be done."

Sue Klebold struggles to return to daily life—even shopping is difficult for her, as her name is instantly recognizable. Don Marxhausen, who remained close with the Klebolds, is forced out of his job and unable to find another. He eventually takes a job as a chaplain at a county jail.

Sue Klebold is reviled for her proximity to her son, and Don Marxhausen is reviled for his proximity to the Klebolds. As all-encompassing as the religious community is in Jeffco, it is not as tolerant as it claims to be.



The messy lawsuits continue on for years. A series of defendants are added, including school officials, the manufacturers of Luvox (the antidepressant Eric had been taking at the time of the massacre,) and anyone at all who had come in contact with the guns used in the massacre. Most of the charges are dismissed by a federal judge. A federal judge keeps on, though, at Dave Sanders' case, agreeing that the county was in the wrong. Angela Sanders is eventually paid $1.5 million. Meanwhile, the Klebolds and the Harrises agree to a deal—suits against them will be dismissed if they agree to answer the families' questions. The parents of the killers agree, and are deposed for several days in July of 2003. In 2007, a judge, after a lengthy process of deciding whether or not to make the testimony public, agrees that it should be kept confidential—at least for a time. The depositions will be made public in 2027.

Those affected by grief and loss continue to lash out in search of answers, retribution, and reparations. They are not yet ready to be done with the tragedy. For some, this is effective—it allows the legal system to see how deep the trauma of Columbine runs. For others, it is healing—the parents of the Thirteen finally get to have some closure from the Klebolds and the Harrises. The timing of the unveiling of the depositions, though, far in the future, is highlighted in order to demonstrate how perhaps the fallout from Columbine will never really be "done."

Patrick Ireland attends Colorado State University, and graduates magna cum laude with a degree in business. He has a friend build him a custom boot that allows him to waterski once again, finally.

Patrick Ireland's story of recovery and forgiveness continues to signify hope in a community still torn asunder.

The country braces for copycat killers, but school shooting deaths drop 25% in the next three years. However, Eric and Dylan do inspire several attacks which feature "terrorist tactics for personal aggrandizement." Several Columbine-esque plots are foiled around the country, and many schools adopt a zero-tolerance policy for possession of firearms or jokes about attacks.

Eric and Dylan's failed bombing nonetheless inspires a pattern in the attacks that come after Columbine. The large-scale violence they perpetrated has become more and more normalized in the years since the massacre.

The FBI and the Secret Service release guides advising faculty not to focus on identifying "outcasts" as threats—there is no profile for a school shooter. Despite this fact, school shooters at the time of the study were 100 percent male. 93% planned their attacks in advance, and 98% had "suffered a loss or failure they perceived as serious." Dylan, Cullen writes, viewed his entire life as a failure, while Eric was driven to murder by his indignation over his arrest. The FBI releases a list of warning signs "including symptoms of both psychopathy and depression," but cautions that "most kids matching the criteria need help, not incarceration."

Research supports the idea that it is impossible to "profile" a potential school shooter—however, school shooters do share a staggeringly high percentage of common traits when it comes to the planning of and motivation for an attack. While signs indicating psychopathy, anger issues, and depression can be helpful, not every child suffering from anger and depression is harmful, and they should be helped rather than harmed further.

Columbine changed the way police respond to attacks of its ilk—"no more perimeters," Cullen says. New protocol demands action in the case of an active shooter, and old protocol in the face of a "passive" shooter who is alive but not firing. This new protocol, in which cops or guards rushed in to stop shooters, saved lives at some of the increasingly devastating shootings that would unfold over the next decade.

The massive failure at Columbine to extract still-living victims from within the perimeter has led to change in the way active and passive shooter situations are handled.

CHAPTER 50: THE BASEMENT TAPES

Eric, wanting to be remembered, decides to begin recording videos laying out his plans. On March 15th, 1999, he and Dylan begin to make the Basement Tapes, using a camcorder borrowed from the Columbine video lab. The boys drink alcohol and hold their guns in their laps while they rant "for more than an hour" in just the first installment—insulting "Blacks, Latinos, gays, and women," and outlining the details of their attack. They describe individual students they hate and hope to kill, and envision themselves getting shot by "fucking cop[s]." Not one of the students mentioned in the tapes would be killed in the shooting. The boys describe their rage, both apologize to and berate their parents, and show off their vast arsenal of ordnance.

Eric and Dylan's desire for fame, glory, and a legacy to leave behind, combined with their desire to show off their strength, prowess, and superiority, leads them to make recordings—going one step further even than their individual journals. The boys want for their rage to be seen and known, though their statements on the tapes sometimes conflict with their written desires for indiscriminate annihilation.

In another session, three days later, the boys "gush" over the idea that "[movie] directors will be fighting over this story," and wonder whether Steven Spielberg or Quentin Tarantino would do their tale due justice.

The boys' desire to have their story on film is more about their desire for glory and legacy than their love of violent films—which is the angle the media incorrectly homed in on.

Eric, struck with a new idea, attempt to recruit Chris Morris to expand the range of the attack. Eric "joke[s]" with Morris about stringing up a trip bomb behind Blackjack, but Chris is "unenthusiastic." Chris begins to grow worried—he knows that Eric and Dylan have made a ton of bombs, and has heard that they have guns, too. Chris notices Eric growing more aggressive, and the boys' friend Nate Dykeman notices that they are cutting classes and acting "secretive." Neither Chris nor Nate say anything to anyone—not teachers, not parents, and not the authorities.

Eric was not quiet or shy about his plans. Though he presented his desire for annihilation and destruction as a "joke" to Chris, whom he hoped to involve in his plans, he set off a fearful reaction that led to Chris's rejection. Yet neither Chris nor Nate, despite their fears about Eric and Dylan, chose to come forward and speak up—perhaps they did not take the boys seriously, or didn't want to seem like tattle-tales.

Eric attempts to recruit Chris several more times, joking about killing jocks and blowing up the school. Dylan, too, is "leaking indiscriminately," displaying the pipe bombs in public. Eric tells Zack Heckler he's trying to make napalm, and asks Chris if he can store the napalm at his house. Chris refuses. With less than a month to go until the attack, Eric makes a list in his journal of things he has left to do: one item on the list is "get laid." He talks with a Marine recruiter, and goes so far as to meet him, telling the Sergeant that he is "interested in weapons and demolitions training."

The "leaking" phenomenon speaks to the boys' underlying insecurity about their impending attack. Their desire to bring more people on board perhaps indicates that they were afraid that just the two of them could not succeed on their own. Yet their friends and acquaintances fail to understand the import or gravity of what Eric and Dylan are telling them. Eric even "leaks" to a Marine recruiter, shamelessly broadcasting his interest in violence and spectacle.

The boys continue to make tapes over the weekend of the Prom, and Eric stashes the propane bombs he's made at Dylan's house. They show off for the camera the outfits they plan to wear during the shooting, and practice their moves. Eric is much more skilled than Dylan at handling the firearms. Monday night, the night before the shooting, the boys go out together with some friends to Outback Steakhouse. Eric acquires the last of the ammunition, and stays up late planning and recording "audio memoirs" on a cassette recorder. On Tuesday morning, the boys are up early—Dylan leaves his house at 5:15, calling out the word "Bye" to his parents as he steps out the door. Eric, meanwhile, leaves the cassette tape of "audio memoirs" on the kitchen counter, to be found.

The boys are concerned about how they will look and move during the attack—everything they are doing, including the tapes, is for an audience which they want to fear, worship, and glorify them. When the morning of the attack arrives, they leave behind the records of their planning and show no signs of hesitation, remorse, or fear that their plan will fail.

CHAPTER 51: TWO HURDLES

The fifth-anniversary commemoration does not draw as large an audience as many expected, and this "pleased" most people—it means many have moved on. Anne Marie Hochhalter attends, citing the turning point in her grieving process as the moment she accepted that she would never walk again. She forgave and moved on, and has now come back to Columbine to "share her hope."

The struggle between the desire to move on and the desire to properly grieve and commemorate the violence that occurred at Columbine continues to pull at the community. The lessening of the intensity of many people's grief seems to have begun in earnest.

The memorial was budgeted at $2.5 million, but by the time fund-raising began in 2000, "goodwill had been tapped out" and the funds were difficult to come up with. Scaling the project back one million dollars helped, as did a large donation from Bill Clinton, but the project could not seem to gain momentum.

As many people moved on from the memory of Columbine, those who were still grieving, and who still desired a memorial, were seen as extending or milking their grief.

On the fifth anniversary, an analysis of the case by Fuselier and other leading experts from the FBI is published. Angered by the report, Tom and Sue Klebold agree to a media interview—the first any of the boys' parents had given. They admit that they are not qualified to "sort out" their son's motive, but assure the public that Dylan took part in the shooting "in contradiction to the way he was raised." They do not admit to having "induced Dylan's suicide," but feel they "failed to prevent his suicide."

Tom and Sue Klebold were completely caught off-guard by their son's involvement in Columbine. In their first media interview, they profess that shock and horror once again, and assert that they had no idea what was going on—their failure to understand their son resulted in the failure to stop one of the deadliest attacks in American history.

Patrick Ireland still sees many of his friends from high school, but they do not really discuss the massacre—it is not emotional anymore, he says, just "boring." Patrick does not even realize, these days, when the anniversary of the attack rolls around.

Patrick has recovered both physically and emotionally. He has moved on almost completely from the shadow of trauma that fell over Columbine in the wake of the attacks.

Dave Sanders' wife Linda, on the other hand, has felt every single anniversary acutely. After a long grieving period, she got sober and reconnected with her family and friends. Linda was deeply isolated, as Dave was the only teacher to die, but still receives letters "now and then" from people who tell her how impactful Dave's story was for them. She draws strength from these letters.

Linda Sanders was alone in her grieving process—all of the other victims were students, and she was isolated from the kind of grief that the other Thirteen families felt. Now, years after the attack, she has finally achieved a measure of peace and comfort.

In September 2003, the "last known layer of the cover-up" of the investigation into Eric comes out. The new sheriff of Jeffco, Ted Mink, orders the Colorado Attorney General to conduct an investigation. John Stone refuses to participate. The probe reveals that the cover-up went deeper than expected, and implicated Division Chief John Kieksbusch in the destruction of evidence after the Columbine attacks. Kieksbusch "unequivocally denied" all of the allegations.

Years after the attacks, there is finally confirmation that the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office was responsible for covering up the fact that they had knowledge of Eric Harris's violent ideology and possession of sophisticated, dangerous ordnance, and did nothing.

School shootings died down for many years after Columbine, but return "in an uglier form" in late 2006 as a series of spectacle murders take hold of America. Various aspects of the killings resemble Columbine closely, and shooters even cite Eric and Dylan's "legacy" as inspiration. Cullen writes that over eighty school shootings took place in America in the ten years after Columbine. At the Virginia Tech shooting, Seung-Hui Cho killed thirty-two, plus himself, and injured seventeen others. The press, Cullen says, "shuddered at the idea of turning school shootings into a competition, and then awarded Cho the record." Eric and Dylan were mentioned in the manifesto Cho left behind, and though Cho appeared to have been struggling with "a powerful psychosis," the Columbine shooters left an undeniable impression on him.

Cullen, who has made the argument that Columbine was a massive failure over and over again throughout the text, explores how despite its status as a technical failure, it "succeeded" in inspiring another generation of mass murderers who sought to replicate what they believed was glory—glory that never came for Eric or for Dylan. Spectacle murderers will always see loss of life as triumph, even if the circumstances which enabled that loss of life were circumstances of a failure. Cullen also condemns the media for contributing to the false idea of "glory" for mass murderers by "awarding" them the fame and rankings they desire.

CHAPTER 52: QUIET

The boys shoot one more video on the morning of the attack. They apologize to their parents, but insist that the attack is something they have to do.

The boys' apologies are thin and lazy. They know exactly how serious the violence they are about to perpetrate will be.

The shooters spend five minutes firing outside the school, killing two. They advance inside and spend another five minutes holding off deputies, shooting Dave Sanders, and roaming the hall in search of targets. They begin deploying pipe bombs into the commons. The boys walk past the library the first time they go by, but then they circle back to the "highest concentration of fodder they had seen." Out of the fifty-six people inside, the shooters kill ten and injure twelve before getting "bored." At 11:36, seventeen minutes into the attack, the shooters leave the library, and do not shoot another student again. As the shooters roam the halls, they are aware of two or three hundred students still inside the school but choose to shoot at empty classrooms. Though this behavior might seem odd, Cullen writes, it is "normal" for psychopaths, who tire of their exploits easily. Dylan, Cullen surmises, was simply "indifferent [and] ready to die, fused with Eric and following his lead."

Cullen allows the narrative to culminate in a play-by-play account of the shooting. His language in these pages is stark and detached, laying out for the readers who have navigated hundreds of pages of information about the backstory behind the massacre, and the fallout that came after, the cold hard facts of the shooting. The "quiet period" the shooters had after their initial attack and their "boredom" are both disturbing aspects of the attack which show both boys' detachment from their violent actions.

The shooters return to the cafeteria at 11:44, and attempt to detonate the propane bombs still down there. They fail. The security cameras which captured their sojourn to the commons capture a different body language than what witnesses in the library would later describe—the boys slouch and droop, stripped of their bravado. Eric's nose is broken. The boys continue to drift through the school surveying the "pathetic" damage. Out of ideas, the shooters return to the library, finding it "different than they'd left it" as the early stages of human decay began. Both shooters advance toward the window, and fired on the paramedics below. A classic attempt at "suicide by cop," the boys fail at this, too. The shooters then wait for their cars to explode, and when that doesn't happen, they "called it a day." They sit down together. Eric puts his shotgun barrel in his mouth, and Dylan points his semiautomatic at his left temple. The boys commit suicide together. The police find the shooters' bodies "sprawled leisurely, look[ing] serene" three hours later.

As the shooters realized that they had failed—and, perhaps, assumed that their attack would be recognized as a failure—they lost their drive for violence and destruction. After enduring several more small failures they retreated to the library, both ready to die. Their resigned attitude toward suicide in the end is not the blaze of glory they'd imagined going out in—instead it is a pathetic, disturbing act of surrender.

CHAPTER 53: AT THE BROKEN PLACES

Construction begins on the permanent Columbine memorial in 2006. At the ground-breaking ceremony, Bill Clinton delivers an address paying homage to the victims and their "magnificent" families. Patrick Ireland marries his college sweetheart. Mr. D and Patrick's doctors from Craig Hospital are in attendance. Patrick stands at the altar with no support from braces, and he and his wife dance together beautifully at their wedding. Dr. Fuselier continues to teach hostage negotiators around the world, and still hopes to one day interview Eric and Dylan's parents. Brad and Misty Bernall moved out of Colorado. *She Said Yes* has sold over a million copies. Pastors in Columbine report "no long-term impact" of the shooting on their church attendance, despite the initial fervor right after the attacks. Both the Klebolds and the Harrises have remained in Colorado. Each of the thirteen families was given a space to include an inscription in the memorial. Brian Rohrbough's quotation was "an angry rant blaming Columbine on a godless school system in a nation that legalized abortion," and ended with a Biblical quote that declared "There is no peace for the wicked." The planning committee did not stop his submission from being included.

By giving a "where-are-they-now" account of the survivors, investigators, staff, and family members of both the perpetrators and the victims, Cullen provides his readers with a wide range of responses to the continued anguish and trauma left over from the attack. Many, like Patrick Ireland and the Bernalls, are able to find hope, solace, and renewal—while others, such as Brian Rohrbough and, to some degree, Fuselier, remain haunted by the attacks. The massacre has had a lasting impact on many aspects of the Jefferson County community—and a lesser long-term impact on others.

Patrick Ireland speaks at the dedication of the Columbine memorial, and thirteen doves are released into the air—followed by two hundred more, "an arbitrary number to signify everyone else." Cullen, who was present at the dedication, describes the birds "seem[ing] to fill the entire sky, then coalescing into a single flock against the clear blue sky."

Cullen chooses to end his narrative on a note of hope, using the image of a flock of birds to denote the solidarity—and the resilience and ability to move on—that the Columbine community has come to possess.

AFTERWORD: FORGIVENESS

Columbine victim Daniel Mauser's mother, Linda, still experiences "failures" ten years later which she attributes to the constant, enduring pain from the loss of her child. She is still angry at the school, and at the cops who she feels mishandled the tragedy and failed to prevent it. She is particularly angry at the "Evangelical[s] who cast Columbine as religious warfare" and at Eric and Dylan's parents. Eventually, her husband Tom met with Sue Klebold, and then, together, Linda and Tom both met with Eric Harris's parents. Wayne and Kathy Harris "accepted" that their son had been a psychopath, and had fooled them completely. Linda finds the Harrises "sincere," and at the end of their conversation tells them that she forgives their son. Linda forgives the Harrises, too, but chooses not to tell them during the meeting.

The shadow of violence and trauma that Columbine cast continues to cause grief, failure, and pain in the community, even ten years later. There is some healing, too, as the Harrises begin to open up to the victims' families and the Klebolds continue to apologize for their role—and their son's role—in the unceasing storm of grief.

Val Schnurr, a survivor of the library massacre, is "deliriously" happy. Dylan hit her with a blast from his shotgun, and the pain, physical therapy, surgery, and counseling she underwent to recover from her injuries left her a "mess" even at the five-year anniversary. However, shortly after that milestone, Val realized her dream was to become a counselor herself. By the time the ten-year anniversary rolls around, she "loves her life" and has "let go" of her anger. There is "almost nothing about Columbine" that makes Val feel "emotional" now—though at the time of Craig Scott's false statements about Cassie Bernall professing her faith in the library, when Val was actually the student who had done so, she was angry. Craig has since apologized to her, but it has taken her longer to forgive him and Misty Bernall than it took her to forgive the shooters.

Val's journey of recovery differs from many survivors—she let go of her anger at the killers long ago, but retained her anger at having been cast out and deemed a liar for contradicting Cassie Bernall's story. Val has had to overcome a dual setback—her physical injuries from the attack, and the fallout of her struggle to make the truth of her experience known and understood.

Val is relieved that it was Dylan and not Eric who shot her—she knew Eric personally, but was not even aware of Dylan's existence. If Eric had shot her, she says, she would have constantly questioned whether she'd "provoked" him. Her happiness and success, she feels, are the "biggest F-you[s]" to the shooters," and she has found "forgiveness [to be] life-saving." Though she bears extensive scars from her old injuries and for years could not see past her own disfigurements, now she does not "need" to look away from them anymore.

Val's desire to overcome the violence that was perpetrated against her and her community and to live the best life she can live is an act of resistance in the face of trauma, and a refusal to give in to failure, hatred, or fear.

EPILOGUE: APOCALYPTIC DREAMS

Dave Cullen reflects on the endless and senseless tragedies that continue to erupt, and the "peculiar[ity]" of grief—he identifies his personal "poison" as "victim stories." While studying Eric Harris was like "examining a disease under a microscope," getting inside the psyche of Dylan Klebold affected Cullen deeply. He feels a great sadness for Dylan, whom he calls a "lost boy," though it is of course dwarfed by his sadness for the survivors.

Dave Cullen's personal voice finally comes through in full force as he discusses his own relationship to all he has witnessed and taken part in during the research of and recovery from the Columbine attacks.

As Cullen "g[o]t to work" immediately after the attacks, it was the "sea of survivors" struggling often flatly with guilt and the sense of being "lost" who affected him even more than the parents and relatives of the dead. The students he interviewed described feeling separate from their personalities, unable to "get [themselves] back." Interviews with these students shifted the focus of Cullen's attention back "to the living"—they, he says, are the reason he spent ten years writing about Columbine.

A journalist, Cullen's allegiance to the living—and to discovering the facts that would help them to understand and cope with all they'd witnessed and been through—drove him to work for over ten years on a book about Columbine and ensure that the truth was known.

Cullen describes an interview with Don Marxhausen which turned into a "free therapy session." Don's "simple compassion" for Cullen, who was also struggling and suffering despite only being a reporter, reminded him of an encounter he had with a person handing out water and snacks outside the school on April 20th, the day after the massacre. When Cullen instinctively grabbed for a water, he felt ashamed, realizing they must have been for the victims. The man handing out the water bottles asked Cullen if he was thirsty, and when Cullen replied that he was, the man insisted that the water was for him as much as it was for anyone else.

Cullen's unique meditations on what it means to be a witness are drawn out in these anecdotes. A member of the media, Cullen was in no way involved in the massacre—but the members of the Columbine community made him feel as if by bearing witness to their stories and their grief that he, too, had a worthy place in the story of Columbine and Jefferson County.

Cullen did not cry on April 20th, 1999, but did let himself weep on the Wednesday after the attack—the bodies of the victims were still in the school, and, with nothing and nowhere to mourn, students created a memorial and held a vigil around Rachel Scott's car. Then Cullen wept, and believed he'd gotten his grief "out of [himself.]" Cullen later attended Scott's funeral—not as a reporter, but as a member of the Columbine community, and out of a desire to feel "a connection to the dead."

Cullen continued to immerse himself in the community as the grieving period began, longing not just to witness the community for his own ends but to truly connect to what was happening there.

Cullen attempted to abandon the Columbine story many times throughout the ten years he was writing his book, noting that "the public and the media harbored the same delusion" of being able to walk away from the horrific events and be "done" with them.

Cullen reflects on his own desire—and the community's desire, and the world's desire—to put the Columbine massacre on a shelf and walk away, stating that this is not really possible.

Cullen reflects on the realization that he suffered from depression in 1999—his "first" run-in with the disease. He felt its aftershocks as late as 2006, when "three school shootings hit in two weeks," and Cullen accepted his "limits" when it came to exposing himself to traumatic footage and information of and about the new attacks. Cullen waited for years after Columbine for a "worse" horror to occur. That finally happened on April 16th, 2007, with the Virginia Tech shooting, which claimed "upwards of thirty" lives. Cullen did not expose himself to the gratuitous coverage of the murders.

Cullen had to watch out for his own tolerance for trauma and grief, too, and what it meant for him to want to be a witness and a member of the media alike. He hit a wall, so to speak, when a spate of shootings began to reoccur, and was no longer able to bear witness in the same way he had at Columbine.

There was an absence of "theatrics" from the worrisome but low-impact pre-Columbine school shootings. Post-Columbine, terrors following a "performance model" aimed at "staging theater" orchestrated to "match natural disasters" began to emerge. Terrorists and mass shooters fused, and Columbine is what melded the two phenomena into one, Cullen argues. "Spectacle murder," the term for these "theatrical" attacks, is "all about TV." He describes his own role as the "messenger" when reporting on tragedies and spectacle murders, and the "maddening" fact that even the experts Cullen routinely interviews cannot manage to stay ahead of these fame-obsessed killers. Body count and creativity are the two "routes to the elite club" of "prestige" murderers. Killers in the post-Columbine world have "cracked the media code."

Cullen's writing on spectacle killings reveals a deep understanding of the phenomenon. He understands that though he often knows what these kinds of killers want, he, investigative experts, and the larger media are unable to stay ahead of them or report on them in a way that feels responsible.

Columbine still "capture[s] the imaginations" of spectacle killers, Cullen says. All across the country in recent years, at least ten school shooters, both those who succeed and those who are arrested before they can carry out their attack, have cited Columbine as the inspiration behind their plans. Many of these shooters—or would-be shooters—believe the false but "appealing" script of "outcasts turning the tables on their bullies"—which was never a reason for Columbine, despite erroneous media reports.

By referring to the events of Columbine as a "script," Cullen concedes that there is something about the attack that others want to follow, despite its now-known status as a failure. The facts of the killing are still misinterpreted by killers who desire fame and glory, or retribution against bullies.

The second most "pernicious myth" about Columbine is that it was a success. The attack was, by Eric and Dylan's "own standards, a colossal failure, [initially] unrecognizable as terrorism." The killers, Cullen says, who to this day try to "relive the glory and elation at Columbine" fail to realize that there was none.

This is one of Cullen's major points in the book, and he hammers it home one last time: Columbine was a failure, and any attempts to recreate it either disregard or are unaware of this fact.

Cullen outlines the problems that society faces in preventing attacks like Columbine. He believes guns and mental health are unfairly conflated, and also notes that killers like Eric and Dylan don't "snap; they smolder." Cullen argues for screening to identify teen depression, which is valuable not only in preventing shootings but in bettering dropout rates, addictions, car accidents, and "general misery." "Teen depression," Cullen says, is "the great unlearned lesson of Columbine."

Cullen, using all that he has learned in his many years of research on the things that made Columbine possible, makes suggestions for ways in which our society can better serve both troubled teens and innocent citizens everywhere who could be hurt by the effects of "unlearned lessons."

The media focuses on guns and mental health, but fails to recognize itself as a major factor in "handing [killers] the mic." The media, Cullen says, must rethink how they report shootings and terrorist attacks, to take the spotlight off killers and focus on the victims. The media should sacrifice ratings, he believes, in favor of changing the landscape of coverage.

As a member of the media, Cullen knows what must be done to improve his industry and preserve its integrity. The "landscape," though, has created an almost inescapable cycle of a need for ratings—and the realization that horror and terror often deliver on that front.

Cullen still "cringe[s]" for the survivors of Columbine every time he hears of a new attack. He is bolstered, however, by the strength of the families of the victims, such as Coni Sanders, who "gets back up" after the news of every new shooting "knocks her down." She works with violent criminals now, and musters "tremendous empathy for 'the enemy'" each day, knowing it is "the only way to reach them."

Cullen is inspired by survivors and the families of victims who have been able to overcome their debilitating grief and use their pain for good. An attempt to empathize with the enemy has been Cullen's life's work, too, and he takes strength from the fact that he is not alone, and that perhaps this is the answer to combating violence and hate.

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