

EGMONT USA

The Scar Boys

by Len Vlahos

★ “If Brent Runyon’s *The Burn Journals* (Knopf, 2004) and Stephen Chbosky’s *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (Pocket Books, 1999) could be melded into a single work, it might be this one. Distinguished in every way.”—*School Library Journal*, starred review



“Details like how to cut a record, land a gig at the now-defunct club CBGB (the novel is set in the 1970s and '80s), or rework a tour when the van breaks down strongly resonate.”—*Publishers Weekly*

“Harry’s obsession with punk music will appeal to music lovers, while his journey to accept himself for who he is—scarred face and all—is one that will likely resonate with any teen trying to find his way in the world..”—*Booklist*

“Etches its way onto the heart and leaves a mark.”—*Kirkus Reviews*

“Playing and touring demand creativity and commitment, forcing the Scar Boys — actually three guys and a girl — to come of age in this wry, stylish tale.” —*The New York Times Book Review*

Summary

A severely burned teenager. A guitar. Punk rock. The chords of a rock 'n' roll road trip in a coming-of-age novel that is a must-read story about finding your place in the world. . .even if you carry scars inside and out.

In attempting to describe himself in his college application essay, Harbinger (Harry) Jones goes way beyond the 250-word limit and gives a full account of his life.

Harry's description of his life in his essay is both humorous and heart-wrenching. He had a steeper road to climb than the average kid, but he ends up learning something about personal power, friendship, and first love.

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Discussion guide written by Edward T. Sullivan

Vocabulary

Some words in the story will likely be unfamiliar to you. Use reference books or electronic research sources to find out about the following:

- duress
- eviscerate
- autonomic systems
- imbued
- incantations
- irrevocably
- litany
- maladies
- monosyllabic
- palpable
- pentatonic
- preponderance
- raucous
- sycophant
- symbionts
- tangible

Music References

Each chapter is titled after a song. Locate the song and the lyrics by the artist or group identified. Listen to the song and read the lyrics before or after reading each chapter.

- How well does the song relate to the chapter?

In addition to the chapter titles, there are references throughout the story to artists, groups, albums, and songs. Listen to and find out more about the references with which you are not familiar:

- Abbey Road
- Syd Barrett
- The Beatles
- Black Flag
- Blondie
- David Byrne
- Johnny Cash
- The Clash
- John Coltrane
- Elvis Costello
- Miles Davis
- Brian Eno
- Exile on Main Street
- Gerry and the Pacemakers
- Merle Haggard
- Jerry Harrison
- Richard Hell
- Jimi Hendrix
- Help!
- Introducing the Beatles
- Janis Joplin
- Led Zeppelin
- Lenny Kaye
- Parliament Funkadelic
- Jaco Pastorius
- Physical Graffiti
- Iggy Pop
- Quadrophenia
- Johnny Ramone
- Lou Reed
- Rubber Soul
- Sex Pistols
- Frank Sinatra
- Chris Stein
- Velvet Underground
- The White Album
- The Who
- Woofing Cookies

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Pop Culture References

In addition to musical references throughout the story, many films, television series, actors, characters, famous phrases, and venues are mentioned. Use electronic and print resources to find out more about the references with which you are unfamiliar:

- Grizzly Adams
- Apocalypse Now
- Vinnie Barbarino
- The Bitter End
- Caddyshack
- Carrie
- Jim Carroll
- CBGB
- Chariots of Fire
- Carrie Fisher
- Fonzie
- “Go ahead, make my day.”
- Horshack
- Kung Fu and Grasshopper
- In Search Of
- Laverne & Shirley
- Lenny and Squiggy
- M*A*S*H
- Mayberry R.F.D.
- Leonard Nimoy
- Potsie
- Raiders of the Lost Ark
- Return of the Jedi
- The Right Stuff
- Taxi
- Obi Wan-Kenobi
- War Games
- The Warriors
- Welcome Back, Kotter
- “Where’s the Beef?”
- WKRP

Discussion Questions

1. How does meeting Lucky Strike the Lightning Man change Harry’s life? Why does Lucky tell Harry the story of the butterfly flapping its wings in China?
2. What does Harry mean when he says his life would be easier if he’d “received a direct hit”? (p. 11)
3. Why does Harry consider his mother “a saint”? (p. 12)
4. What does Dr. Kenny train Harry to do to cope with his anxiety? What are some things you do to cope when you are anxious or afraid?
5. Dr. Kenny encourages Harry to create a “People Catalog.” (p. 24) What does creating the catalog do for Harry? What categories would you have in your own “People Catalog”?
6. How do Harry and Johnny McKenna become friends? Describe the relationship they have with one another. How does it change in the course of the story?

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7. In what ways is meeting Gabrielle Privat both a positive event and a rude awakening for Harry?
8. Why is Harry's evening run with Johnny a "favorite ritual"? (p. 48) What is a favorite daily ritual you have?
9. What observations does Harry make about Johnny and his relationship to him before what is supposed to be their first gig at CBGB?
10. How does Cheyenne Belle joining the Scar Boys change the band? How is Harry personally affected by her joining?
11. What moment does Harry cite as "the beginning of the end for the Scar Boys"? (p. 72)
12. Harry calls the Scar Boys a "lifeboat" for him, Richie, and Cheyenne. (p. 81) What do you think he means by that description? How is being part of the band different for Johnny?
13. What signs does Harry see indicating his relationship with Johnny is falling apart?
14. What does Harry realize after his surprising encounter with Mary Beth Tice?
15. What does Harry reveal about his relationship with his father? How is it different from his relationship with his mother?
16. What does Johnny dating Kristen Greely reveal about his character and about Harry's relationship with Johnny?
17. What are two reactions Johnny says he has had through the course of his life when he saw his reflection? How is his reaction different from these when he is in the phone booth calling Dr. Kenny?
18. How is the confrontation between Harry and Johnny while on tour a turning point in their relationship?
19. What are the best hours of Harry's life? What is a moment or event in your life that tops all others?
20. How does Harry feel at first when he learns about Johnny's accident?
21. When Harry goes to see Johnny, what does he see in him that he hasn't seen for years?

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22. What are some examples of the healing power of music in this story?
23. Harry calls himself a coward at the beginning of the story and says he probably still is one at the end. Do you agree? What are some examples of Harry's "cowardice" and what are some examples, if any, of how he has overcome them?

About the Author



Len Vlahos is the Executive Director of BISG, and the former COO of the American Booksellers Association, where he worked for the past 20 years. At the ABA, he had overall responsibility for ABA's Winter Institute. So he knows booksellers and booksellers know him. Len has also worked in indie, chain, and university bookstores, was an on-air personality for a commercial radio station in Atlantic City, and worked for a time for Internet marketing guru Seth Godin. He was in a punk rock band in the mid-1980s. The Woofing Cookies toured and their music was played on dozens of college radio stations coast to coast. You can visit him online at www.lenvlahos.com and on Twitter @LenVlahos.

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