

Chuck Palahniuk has a thing for single word titles: *Pygmy*, *Snuff*, *Haunted*, *Diary*, *Choke*, *Survivor*. His latest novel follows this trend and is titled, simply, *Damned*.

*Damned* is the story of thirteen year old Madison, the daughter of a self-obsessed billionaire film star, who is left at her Swiss boarding school over Christmas while her parents go off adopting orphans. During this period of parental neglect, Madison dies of a marijuana overdose and ends up in Hell. Finding herself in a cell amongst the archetypes of the American high school movie genre, a jock, a nerd and a punk rocker, the group set out on a journey across Hell to confront Satan face to face.

Madison's Hell is overtly Palahniukian; the *English Patient* plays on a loop, there are cannibalistic demons and, even in Hell, you're harassed by call centre companies, albeit by damned telesales operatives. Palahniuk, the author of cult-classic *Fight Club*, is known for his nasty plots and marginalised characters and setting the latter firmly in Hell, the retirement village for all the world's crazies, feels completely natural for Palahniuk.

Palahniuk states that the death of his mother from breast cancer in 2009 was the inspiration for the new work. In an interview with *ShortList*, he describes that writing the novel was like being on drugs and was his way of coping with his mother's own drug treatment. In true Palahniuk style, he confesses, "It was kind of insensitive, though, because I was sat at her bedside reading all these books about Hell. That might not have been a huge comfort."