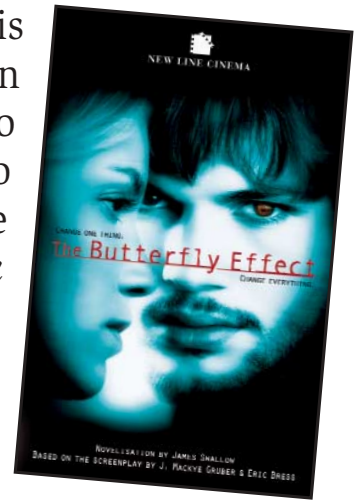


THE BUTTERFLY EFFECT

NOVELIZATION BY JAMES SWALLOW

BASED ON THE SCREENPLAY BY J. MACKYE GRUBER & ERIC BRESS

Struggling with the psychological effects of his repressed childhood memories, Evan Treborn devises a technique of traveling back in time to inhabit his childhood body. As he attempts to mend the broken lives of those closest to him, he finds that every trip into the past brings chaotic results into the present, leading him to travel back again and again causing irreparable damage. With his past in tatters and his future just as bleak, Evan realizes that some things are better left untouched!



Based on the awesome New Line Cinema release starring Ashton Kutcher, in theaters January 2004.

About the author.

London-born and bred, James Swallow's youthful love of science fiction led him into a career as a media journalist and author and has written about science fiction, games and oriental media for more than sixty different publications in seven languages around the world, including *SFX*, *Dreamwatch*, *Starlog*, *Manga Max*, and licensed magazines covering *Star Trek*, *The X-Files*, *Star Wars* and *James Bond*.

The Butterfly Effect is released in January 2004 and can be purchased in all better bookstores.

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Note

***THE BUTTERFLY EFFECT** is a dark horror story. This
excerpt does include some violence and strong language,
which may cause offence to some people.*

FROM THE BUTTERFLY EFFECT

Evan watched Carlos's eyes glaze over as he tried to explain how the flashbacks worked. He found himself using his hands to indicate places and times, but the more he got into it, the less his cellmate seemed to follow the logic. He stopped for a moment, and peeled one of the tattered pages off the ceiling of the cell and gripped it tightly. Carlos was the closest thing to an ally Evan had in the prison and if he started to tune him out, he might lose everything.

“Look, when I do this, it's like I'm in a trance, or something.” He held up the paper for emphasis. “You see people do that in church, right?”

Carlos gave a slow nod. “Like the Rapture.” He was still unconvinced, and only the lure of winning a carton of cigarettes was keeping him interested.

“So, when I'm out, I need you to watch my face and hands closely.”

The other man studied him. “You know what I think? I think you need to see the prison shrink, man.”

Evan gave an exasperated sigh; it was clear that Carlos would only accept proof that he could see.

Both men paused as the mail cart rolled past the open door of their cell and Evan was surprised to see Snake pushing it. "Hey," he said expectantly. "Anything today?" If his mother had managed to get some other journals to him, then his attempts to coerce Carlos could be forgotten; but Snake shot down that hope with a thin smile.

"Yep. Just not for you."

Evan didn't bother to mask the disappointment on his face, and he turned back to Carlos, holding the worn page firmly in his fist. "Look, will you do this for me? I need you to watch my back while I'm under... I don't want Karl slitting my throat while I'm out." When the convict didn't reply straight away, Evan tapped the unopened packet of smokes in his pocket. "Come on, man. What have you got to lose?"

"I guess. So what should I do?"

Evan rested himself against the wall and flattened out the paper on his lap. "Just tell me afterward, if anything weird happens."

"Weirder than this?" said Carlos, watching him doubtfully.

"There might be something on me, marks or scars, I dunno. Anything could happen, I guess. You ready?"

"Go on then," Carlos folded his arms. "Go talk to Jesus."

Evan swallowed hard and studied the page before him, silently reading the words written there in a labored child's hand. *On wensday I got in trouble for a drawing that I didn't do. Mommy won't let me see it.*

It came instantly now, easy and free; the pressing sensation across the inside of his skull, moving and vibrating with hollow echoed resonance. His vision fogged, and as it blurred and changed he saw the bars of the cell begin to deform and shiver. Carlos's face studied him with concern and then it too began to slip and alter, falling away from

him. Evan heard the sound of children's voices, growing louder, filling his senses as his consciousness detached from his body and snapped back through the years. The cell trembled around him—

And it was gone, fading like a mirage.

Evan's head jerked like a poorly worked puppet's and he shook off the aftershock of the shift. He blinked, held up his hands before his face and he wiggled the little podgy fingers. "I'm here," he said aloud. His body felt strange, weak and shrunken.

"So am I!" said a child, and he glanced at the speaker. Kayleigh's seven year-old smile beamed at him from the next desk over.

He glanced around. Evan's first grade class was just as he had remembered it, the chattering hordes of kids all hard at work on sprawling pictures, some of them gluing pieces of paper together or sprinkling glitter over wet paste. He looked down at his own piece of construction paper that was blank save for a scribble of words at the bottom left corner of the page: *Evan Treborn, Age 7.*

"What... what are we drawing?" he asked, his words sounding strange in the high-pitched voice of a little boy.

Kayleigh worked at her paper and answered without looking up. "We gotta draw what we want to be when we grow up."

Evan nodded and looked back at the blank paper, wondering how he could turn this flashback into something that would help him in the future. For a brief second he considered writing a note, something explaining what would happen in thirteen years time but rejected the notion just as quickly. Sure, like anyone would take some little kid's wacko scribbling seriously...

The teacher wandered past, raising an eyebrow at him but said nothing. Evan watched her go. Boswell. That was her name, Mrs Boswell. He'd never really liked her

as a child, but as he watched her circle the classroom, Evan found himself re-evaluating her with an adult's eyes—she was actually quite attractive, in an older woman, prim and proper kind of way.

He made a few experimental lines on the paper with a black crayon, then discarded it. Evan reached for a box of colored pencils, but another boy snatched at them first and he jerked back.

"I'm using these!" said the boy.

"Tommy?" Evan managed.

"What?" snapped Tommy Miller, giving him a combative stare. "Find your own pencils, Evan!"

His heart thumped in his chest as he looked at the child who would grow into the man he had killed, and Evan felt his stomach turn over. Tommy spilled the pencils out across the desk and started to draw, pausing to elbow Lenny Kagan when the portly kid crowded him a little. After a moment, Tommy glared at him.

"What? Why are you staring at me?"

"No-nothing," Evan said, tearing his eyes away. "It's nothing."

"If you copy my picture, I'll pound you!" he threatened.

Evan got up and stepped away from the desk, his mind a whirl. There had to be something he could do here, something he could do that would resonate through from now to the cell in the future. He shook his head. It was hard to try and keep it all in perspective, to manage all the shifts in time and place. He glanced at the teacher's desk and spotted a pair of paper spindles, the sharp metallic spikes pointed straight up skewering report cards and other paperwork.

Evan thought of the scar that had appeared from the cigarette burn before and studied the needle-bright spindles with serious intent. His small hands bunched and he took a step toward them.

Out of nowhere, a strong grip clamped around his shoulder. “No monkey business, Evan.” said Mrs Boswell. “Sit still and finish your drawing.” Firmly but gently, the teacher turned him around and steered him back to his chair. Feeling defeated, Evan let himself be pushed over to the desk; if he made a fuss or argued with her, he might lose any chance he might have to alter things.

Mrs Boswell handed him a new box of pencils and Evan took one at random. It was dark blue, the exact same shade as the denim fatigues at the prison.

“That’s great, everyone!” the teacher called out. “Just imagine anything you want to be, there are no limits. Draw whatever you’d like to happen when you’re older.”

Evan twirled the pencil in his hand and with a sudden flash of inspiration, he started to rough out a sketch across the page. You want to see what future I want? he thought to himself? I’ll show you what I want to happen.

A stark and uncompromising image began to emerge on the paper, forming into a representation of all the anger and hatred that Evan had stirred up in himself since he’d arrived at the prison. He drew Karl and Rick and their whole skinhead crew as dead and bloodied corpses, torn open and ruined by a vengeful depiction of himself. When he’d finished, he studied it with a cold smile of satisfaction. If only I could take this with me.

Evan grabbed the drawing and sneaked around to the front of his teacher’s desk, catching her unawares. “Oh, Evan?” she blinked. “Are you finished already?” She took the paper from him and her face went white with horror.

Standing up on his tiptoes, Evan stretched to the full height his seven year-old self could attain and leaned over the front of the desk, where the paper spindles sat.

He gritted his teeth and called out to her in a musical voice. “Oh, Mrs Booossweeell?” Her shocked gaze met his just in time for him to slap his hands palms downward toward the sharp points of the two spikes.

“No!” she shrieked, the word drawing out into a long, echoing shudder of sound. Evan felt a millisecond of blinding sharp pain in his hands and then his vision went white—

Evan choked like a swimmer breaking the surface and jerked forward, banging his forehead off the metal frame of the bed with a dull ring. The noise of screaming children vanished from around him like the last fragments of dream, slipping between the cracks of wakefulness, gone like wisps of vapor. He became aware of his surroundings. He was still in the cell, still trapped in a dark, dismal present.

Carlos stared at him with wide eyes and newfound reverence. The convict crossed himself. “Oh sweet Jesus!” he breathed. “It’s true... You weren’t lying to me, it’s a miracle. A true miracle!”

Evan blinked as the aftershock released him. “What? What did you say?”

“Your hands!” Carlos took his palms and turned them over. “You have the stigmata!” There, in the center of each of Evan’s palms, were two circular scars. He turned them over. Identical marks were on the back of his hands too, where the spindles had pierced right through them.

“What did you see?” Evan asked. “What did it look like?”

Carlos laughed. “It was amazing, man! The signs of the Lord, they just appeared out of nowhere!” He shook his head. “I thought you were loco, but it’s true! God really speaks to you!”

Part of Evan felt wrong about taking advantage of his cellmate’s deeply held beliefs, but it was clear to him that if he didn’t have Carlos on his side, any chance he had of surviving inside Mavis Penitentiary would quickly drop to zero.

“So you believe me, then?”

“Amen,” said the inmate, and handed Evan a packet of cigarettes.

He held up a hand to refuse them. “No, you keep them. You’ll need them if you’re going to help me.”

Carlos nodded with absolute seriousness. “Anything, man. If Jesus works through you, then I’ll do whatever you want!”

The last thing the members of the Brotherhood had expected to see was Evan. They’d been planning what to do with him for the past few hours, cooking up schemes and making heartless fun of how they would leave him busted and broken—if he was lucky. Karl had entertained them for a while by picking out passages from his stolen journals at random, but after a while that had paled. The skinheads were much more interested in shedding blood, and Rick in particular was looking forward to cutting his name on Evan’s soft belly, as payback for daring to stand up to him.

One of them spat on the floor as he approached and blocked his path. “What the fuck do you want, bitch?”

“I want to make a deal.” Evan replied nervously.

“Is that right?” snorted the skinhead. He inclined his head at Carlos, who was mopping the floor further down the corridor. “Wassamatter, you get sick of being fucked by the wetback?”

The crew of Aryans shared a rough laugh at Evan’s expense and they crowded around him, itching to kick off and lay into him. Another one of the skinheads made discreet eye contact with Karl, who watched from the door of his cell; the Brotherhood’s leader grinned and signaled. “Let the meat come on over. We’ll get all friendly like.” The skinheads parted and Evan stepped through, fighting down the reaction to turn tail and run.

Karl shared his cell with Rick, and it was almost identical to Evan’s—but instead of pictures of saints adorning

the walls—there was a mix of pornographic pictures and clippings from Neo-Nazi publications. In pride of place over the bunks was the reproduction of a German World War II recruiting poster for the Waffen-SS, and nearby was a bookshelf on which sat Evan's ripped journals. The two men watched him enter with expectant, predatory smiles, relishing the fearful silence.

Evan wrung his hands. "Look, I'm new to all this but I think I get how things work around here. You gotta join a gang or else you end up dead meat, right?"

Karl said nothing, content to let Evan keep talking.

He let a snarl enter his voice. "Well, I want to be with a crew and it sure ain't gonna fucking be with no niggers or spics."

The moment the racist slurs left his mouth, the skinhead's interest was caught. "Is that right?" Karl said coolly. "What about your buddy, the Jesus freak?" He jerked a thumb at Carlos out in the corridor, as he mopped over the area in front of the bars.

"Fuck him," Evan spat. "I don't want to share a cell with that trash." He hesitated, turning pale. "So, look, how do we do this? I know you gotta work your way up, and I'm the new guy..." He coughed self-consciously. "So... should I... I mean, do I suck your dicks right now?"

A silent look of understanding passed between the two inmates. "Is your blood pure?" said Karl. "Are you an Aryan son?"

Evan's tone turned angry. "I ain't no fucking kike, if that's what you mean."

The retort was obviously the right answer, although each of the bigoted insults left a bad taste in Evan's mouth. The skinheads got to their feet, towering over him in the cramped confines of the room. "Let's see what you got," Rick smiled. "And watch the fuckin' teeth or you'll be leaving without them."

Reluctantly, Evan dropped to his knees as Karl and Rick unbuttoned their prison-issue trousers, rolling them down to their ankles. Evan held a miserable expression for a moment, hovering there before doing the deed. He glanced over his shoulder, and caught the eye of Carlos.

“What are you waiting for, bitch?” Karl snapped. “Get to work!”

With his attention elsewhere, Karl didn't see Carlos move until it was too late; without any warning, the convict threw the mop aside and dove through the open door of the cell. The Hispanic man's broad form forced Karl into the wall and the skinhead screamed as Carlos jammed a shank into his crotch.

Rick jerked forward to rush Carlos, but the clothes around his ankles caught his legs and he tottered over. Evan was ready for him and helped Rick on his way, planting a savage kick on his face as he went down.

“Carlos!” Evan shouted. It had only taken seconds, but now the rest of the Brotherhood was scrambling towards them. Evan's cellmate dropped Karl's writhing form to the floor and pressed his broad girth against the cell door, physically blocking the entry of the other skinheads.

“Hurry, man!” Carlos yelled, weathering punches and kicks from the snarling, shouting Aryans.

Evan grabbed at the journals and flipped them open, frantically running past page after page, desperate to find what he was looking for.

“You... You piece of shit!” croaked Karl. “You're dead men!”

There! Evan ignored the thug's words and located the entry he wanted, focusing on the words. He had no idea if this would work as every other time he had tried to make the shift, things had been quiet and calm. Now, if what he tried failed, Evan and Carlos would be gutted by the Brotherhood and left for the guards to find.

He had no choice. It was this, or nothing.

Evan began to read aloud, running through the writing like it was a chant, spilling out the words as fast as he could.

“We took the woods behind the junkyard just to make sure that we wouldn’t bump into Tommy, but we hadn’t seen the smoke yet.”

On the page before him, the letters began to flex and merge, warping like an image seen through rain-slicked glass. The pressure blew into life behind his eyes, pulsing as the agitated cries of the skinheads mingled with a shrill stream of animal shrieks, coming together in a jagged profusion of sound. Evan heard the shuddering echo of new voices and a panicked yelp, as the cell became a quivering, frenetic blur—

Everything shifted once more.

Evan almost lost his footing and stumbled, nearly tripping on an exposed root. He forced himself to come to a halt and looked around, bright sunlight suddenly piercing his eyes.

A smile crossed his face and he sniffed the air, a new exhilaration coursing through him. He’d made it. “Rot in hell, you fucking animals,” he said with venom.

A few steps behind him, Evan’s sudden comment made Kayleigh and Lenny stop dead in their tracks.

“What did you just say?” asked Kayleigh, confused by the outburst.

Evan looked around, getting his bearings. He was thirteen again, out in the woods behind the Kagan place. “Nothing,” he told her. “Just kidding around.”

She didn’t seem convinced, but Kayleigh decided not to press the point.

“So, uh, where are we going?” Lenny said in a flat monotone. “I’m not supposed to go far.”

For a moment, Evan weighed things up in his mind. In the next few seconds he’d be taking Kayleigh and Lenny

into something that would twist their futures on to a different course once more, toward an incident that could scar them all. Did he really have the right to meddle in their personal histories as well as his own? His one attempt to set things straight had already sent him on to a collision course with murder and a sordid death in prison, and he had no guarantee that what he would do now would be any better. But if he did nothing, that future was sure to come to pass, and Evan would not be able to stop it.

He held up a hand to halt the others. “Wait, before we go any further...”

“What is it, Evan?” said Kayleigh.

On the breeze, he caught the faintest smell of burning and the distant cry of an animal in agony.

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