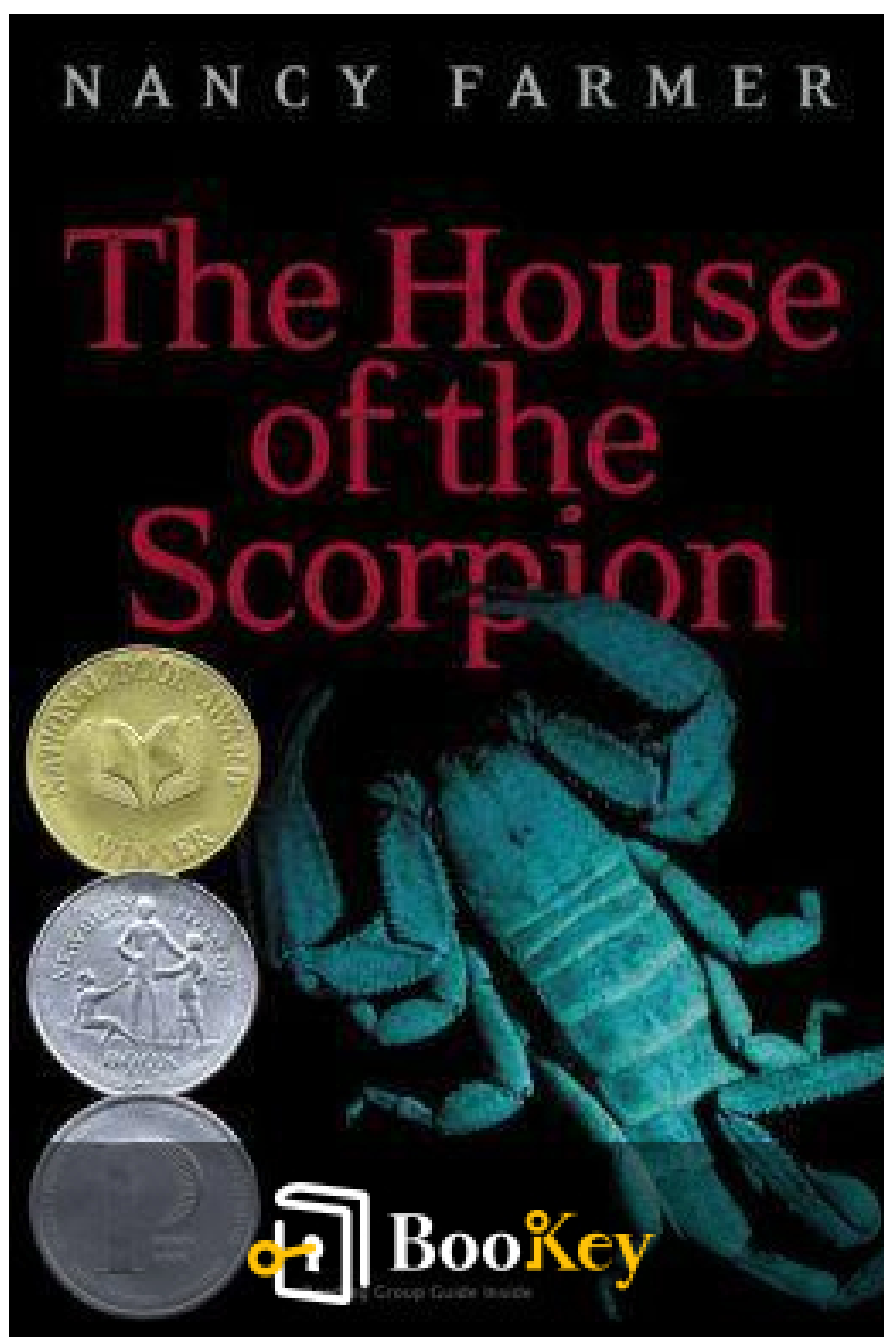


# The House Of The Scorpion PDF (Limited Copy)

Nancy Farmer



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# **The House Of The Scorpion Summary**

"A Journey of Identity in a Cloned Existence"

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## About the book

In the not-so-distant future, nestled between the borders of the United States and a land once known as Mexico, lies the shadowy territory of Opium—a land ruled by a ruthless drug lord and his perilous empire. Within its suffocating confines exists El Patrón, a man who possesses unimaginable wealth and power, right down to human lives. Among these lives is Matt, an unassuming young boy who slowly navigates the sinister truth of his existence. As the cloned progeny of the tyrant himself, Matt grapples with the haunting knowledge that his fate is intertwined with the very purpose of his creation. "The House of the Scorpion" by Nancy Farmer delves into the realms of identity, morality, and humanity in a world where lines between right and wrong blur, challenging readers to question the essence of life itself. Step into Matt's shoes and experience a gripping journey where courage is the only beacon in the dark labyrinth of destiny.

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## About the author

Nancy Farmer is a renowned American author celebrated for her contribution to children's and young adult literature. Born in Phoenix, Arizona, in 1941, Farmer spent much of her early life traveling and working in various countries, including India, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe, where she gathered experiences that sutured her creative canvas with rich multicultural threads. She earned a Bachelor's degree from Reed College and later found her calling as a writer, crafting compelling narratives that often merge futuristic elements with real-world issues. Her distinct storytelling abilities have earned her numerous accolades, including three Newbery Honor awards. "The House of the Scorpion," one of her most acclaimed works, is testament to her skill, bringing together issues of identity and autonomy in a thought-provoking sci-fi landscape, further establishing Nancy Farmer as a luminary in the world of speculative fiction.

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## Chapter 1 Summary: In the Beginning

In the introductory chapter titled "In the Beginning," we are introduced to Eduardo, a scientist working in a futuristic laboratory. Here, thirty-six minute droplets of life, each containing the genetic blueprint for a human, are nurtured in glass dishes. The lab is filled with the hum of machinery maintaining the perfect environment for these cells' growth. Despite Eduardo's extensive understanding of the process and the awe he holds for the genetic intricacies contained within these cells, he is anxiously aware of the stakes involved.

Eduardo's work is critical; each droplet is a potential human life, and the success of the project determines not only his career but also the future well-being of his family. The cells, preserved for over a century, begin dividing and growing—a promising start that quickly turns precarious as over half fail to develop, leaving Eduardo with only fifteen viable embryos.

To sustain these fragile lives, Eduardo implants the remaining embryos into genetically engineered brood cows. These creatures, manipulated to resemble mere machines than living beings, live in a state of induced contentment, unaware of the embryos they carry. Yet, one by one, the embryos are rejected, dwindling in number until only one survives. This final embryo becomes Eduardo's singular hope, the weight of his entire life hinging on its survival.



The embryo develops successfully, bringing immense relief to Eduardo, who forms an unexpected emotional bond with the unborn child. As this pivotal moment approaches, the critical procedure of ensuring the embryo's intellectual capacity yields an unexpected turn. Lisa, a senior technician, halts Eduardo from blunting the baby's intelligence, noting it belongs to Matteo Alacrán—a family known for preserving intelligence in their clones.

This revelation leaves Eduardo pondering the future of this special child, conscious of the impact his actions could have on its life. He questions whether sparing this particular trait will be seen as a blessing or a curse, contemplating the ethical and emotional dimensions of his work as he watches nurses tend to the newborn Matteo Alacrán.

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## Chapter 2 Summary: The Little House in the Poppy Fields

In Chapter 2 of "The Little House in the Poppy Fields," we are introduced to Matt, a young boy who lives with a woman named Celia in a small, cramped house surrounded by endless fields of white poppies. Celia is a cook at the nearby Big House, and each morning she leaves to work, leaving Matt feeling lonely and restless.

Matt is a thoughtful child who yearns for companionship and a world beyond the isolation of his home. He watches the poppy fields for movement and occasionally sees horses ridden by children. This sighting ignites his desire for connection with others. Inside the house, Matt occupies his time with toys, television, and books like "Pedro el Conejo," a story about a mischievous rabbit. Despite the distraction these activities provide, Matt's longing for real interaction grows stronger, leading to a mix of frustration and sadness.

Celia, who loves Matt deeply but keeps him hidden from the outside world, has strict reasons for maintaining his secrecy. She fears for his safety, hinting at dangers beyond their little haven. Celia often brings home leftovers and discarded items from the Big House, ensuring Matt's belly is full and he has small gifts like a coloring book and crayons to keep him entertained.



One day, Matt overhears voices outside the house—an exciting but frightening development for the sheltered boy. Two children, Steven and Emilia, peer through the window, curious about the mysterious occupant within. Although Matt is initially paralyzed with fear, his loneliness and curiosity ultimately outweigh his terror. The encounter leaves him both electrified and apprehensive, realizing he has touched an unfamiliar part of the outside world.

That night, Celia relays stories about the children living or visiting the Big House, painting a vivid picture of their characters. She describes Steven as potentially kind but not fully understanding, and his brother Benito as trouble. Matt, soaking in her tales, is particularly struck by her descriptions of Emilia and her younger sister María, who frequently becomes the unfortunate target of another mischievous boy, Tom.

Before bed, Celia performs a nightly ritual, tucking Matt in and lighting a candle before a statue of the Virgin of Guadalupe, reassuring him of her presence and affection. As Celia falls asleep with exhaustion, her snores bring Matt comfort. Alone in the gentle glow of the candlelight, Matt revels in the names of Steven and Emilia, imagining future interactions where he might finally reach out and connect with others his own age—a dream that ebbs into his sleeping mind.



The chapter lays the groundwork for Matt's aspirations for friendship and the exploration of the world beyond his secluded environment. It introduces Celia's protective nature and the subtle tensions between their small circle and the larger, unexplored world represented by the elusive Big House and its occupants.

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## Chapter 3 Summary: Property of the Alacrán Estate

In this chapter of "The House of the Scorpion," we find Matt, a young boy living on the Alacrán Estate, navigating his isolation and confusion. Left alone as Celia departs in the morning, Matt eagerly anticipates the arrival of children he has been told about. As the sun sets, his anticipation grows into anxiety, but finally, he hears voices coming through the poppy fields that surround his home.

Two older children, Emilia and Steven, accompany a younger girl named María to Matt's window. Emilia and Steven seem skeptical, but María is curious and hopeful. She tries to engage Matt, who is captivated and tongue-tied by the intrusion. Despite Celia's precautions—nailing the window shut—Matt attempts to interact by showing a humorous picture, a tactic that yields mixed results. This simple, yet meaningful interaction illustrates Matt's yearning for connection and acceptance, underscoring his loneliness in the isolated living situation forced upon him by circumstances beyond his control.

When the children become frustrated and prepare to leave without more than a brief, confusing exchange with Matt, fear overcomes him. He envisions the horrors of the chupacabras—a mythical creature feared to emerge at night—lending urgency to his desperation. Matt takes drastic action, smashing the window with a pot to gain the children's attention and



potentially save María from the ominous darkness. In his innocence and vulnerability, this act of rebellion marks a pivotal moment for Matt, displaying his desire to be part of the wider world.

The attempt ends painfully as Matt injures himself on the glass, triggering a chaotic rescue mission by the children, who carry him across the poppy fields to the main house. This perilous journey emphasizes Matt's fragile state—both physically and emotionally—as he grapples with new sensations of belonging and danger while bleeding profoundly from his injuries.

Upon reaching the Alacrán Estate, Matt is met with a mixture of curiosity and disdain by the adults, including a severe maid named Rosa and the authoritative figure of Mr. Alacrán. The discovery of mysterious writing on Matt's foot—"Property of the Alacrán Estate"—adds a disturbing layer to his identity, revealing that Matt's existence might be controlled and dehumanized, likened to an object rather than a person.

Mr. Alacrán's harsh reaction—denouncing Matt as a beast and ordering his removal—exposes the cold, unsettling environment of the estate where Matt is deemed an outsider, unworthy of compassion. Rosa, torn between orders and empathy, ultimately abandons Matt on the lawn, leaving him to confront yet another layer of isolation.

This chapter portrays Matt's first steps out of confinement and into a



complex social hierarchy that views him as both an enigma and a pariah. It is a pivotal point that highlights the themes of identity, belonging, and humanity under the shadow of ownership, setting the stage for Matt's continued exploration of his place within this world.

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## Critical Thinking

**Key Point:** The Quest for Connection and Belonging

**Critical Interpretation:** In Chapter 3 of 'The House of the Scorpion,' you will witness how the power of yearning for connection can propel one beyond fears and limitations. Matt's desperation to be part of something larger, to bridge the gap between isolation and belonging, triggers a bold, albeit risky, action that leaves a significant impact. You've likely felt the pang of loneliness at some point. Allow Matt's story to serve as a beacon: no matter the barriers—real or self-imposed—your quest for connections can become the turning point toward an enriched existence. Risking vulnerability to express that impelling hunger for human contact can be daunting yet transformative. As you navigate your journey, remember that reaching out in defiance of obstacles can foster growth, foster relationships, and lead you to a newfound communal world that embraces your unique story. Embrace this lesson, for it is in the bonds we forge that we discover the depth of our humanity and the beauty of shared experience.



## Chapter 4: María

In Chapter 4, the narrative follows a young boy named Matt who finds himself gazing up at the star-lit sky. The stars, which Matt knows as the Milky Way, remind him of the stories Celia, his caretaker, used to tell him. Celia, who works in the poppy fields, would frequently recount tales about the stars as messages from God. In Matt's ill and feverish state, he hopes for Celia to rescue him, reminiscing about the comfort of her presence and stories.

Matt is outside, lying on the grass after a painful ordeal has left him with a dull ache. He overhears children nearby, including Emilia, Steven, and a younger girl named María, who are discussing him. Matt learns from their conversation that he is a clone—a revelation that changes his understanding of his place in the world. Clones, according to Steven and Emilia, are not regarded as humans. This fact terrifies them and causes them to treat Matt as a lesser being.

Steven explains that while most clones have their minds destroyed at birth by law, Matt is different; he has been allowed to grow like a real boy by El Patrón, a powerful and wealthy figure who can bend any rules to his will. This information repulses Emilia, and she warns María to avoid Matt, calling him a "bad animal."



As Matt lies injured, a doctor and a fierce man arrive. The doctor insists on treating him despite the fierce man having initially discarded him after an incident involving blood. Matt is taken to a room in the servants' quarters where he is left alone in the darkness with only a dim light for comfort—a scenario that terrifies him since he's accustomed to having Celia nearby.

During the night, María sneaks in to bring Matt food, defying the orders that forbid any interaction with him. While feeding him, they bond over shared fears and tales of mythical creatures like the chupacabras and La Llorona—stories that Celia had also told Matt to keep him safe from supposed dangers of the night. María, though initially terrified by his stories, finds comfort in Matt's presence and stays the night with him.

Despite their connection, the implications of María's visit become evident when Rosa, a maid who disdains Matt, discovers María sleeping beside him in the morning. Rosa is furious and declares that María will be in significant trouble for being with the "filthy clone," and threatens to send her home. Matt is left grappling with his identity, the perception others have of him now that they know he is a clone, and the compassion shown by María—a rare kindness in his harsh world.

This chapter explores themes of identity, humanity, and companionship, set against the background of a society where clones are marginalized and mistreated. Matt's interactions with Celia, the children, and María highlight



his struggle for acceptance and understanding in a world that views him as an aberration.

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## Chapter 5 Summary: Prison

### Chapter 5 - Prison

In this chapter, Matt, a young clone of the powerful drug lord El Patrón, is confined to a grim and isolated room after being discovered as a clone. When his caretaker, Celia, who treated him with kindness, is replaced by the harsh and abusive maid Rosa, Matt's world turns bleak. Rosa informs him with disdain that María, a girl who once showed him kindness, will not return.

The doctor visits daily to check Matt's wound but maintains a cold, business-like demeanor, which is somewhat of a relief to Matt, who is wary of him. However, the doctor strikes up an unsettling camaraderie with Rosa, amplifying Matt's sense of isolation. As they discuss El Patrón's moods and frailty, Matt feels both confused about his own identity as El Patrón's clone and fearful of what the future holds.

Rosa's resentment towards Matt grows, turning her into an almost demonic figure in Matt's life. She threatens him and makes his living conditions increasingly unbearable, removing his bed, forcing him to live in squalor, and treating him like a beast. Matt tries to hold onto his dignity and emotions, despite being treated inhumanely.



Matt creates a grim world for himself, finding solace in the few beams of sunlight, and indulging in quiet games with accumulated trash. The days blur into each other, but Matt clings to tiny distractions, such as insects drawn to his food scraps, to stave off utter despair.

A boy named Tom discovers Matt, taunting him as if he were an animal in a zoo. When confronted by the cruel taunts, Matt retaliates as best as he can with a rotten orange, earning him a measure of satisfaction, though it is short-lived.

Celia, finally discovering Matt's plight, is distraught by his condition but promises a plan to get him out, which involves delivering a letter to her father, Senator Mendoza. María, despite her innocence and naiveté, agrees to help. This glimpse of hope reignites Matt's will to survive, though he's left wondering about Celia's promise of rescue.

Ultimately, Matt's confinement reflects not only the harsh realities of his existence as a clone but also his fragile hope amidst the cruelty of his keepers and the indifference of his surroundings. And through it all, the symbol of hope, a single dove feather, becomes his private assurance of eventual deliverance from his grim world.



## Chapter 6 Summary: El Patrón

Chapter 6, "El Patrón," introduces us to a pivotal character, El Patrón, as well as offers a pivotal shift in Matt's life. At the start, Matt is abruptly awakened by Rosa, who has been keeping him in oppressive conditions for months. Rosa is a harsh character responsible for Matt's confinement in a room full of sawdust, treating him more like an animal than a child. Matt is quickly prepared by Rosa for an important meeting, emphasizing he must behave and not speak about his captivity.

As Matt is ushered through the mansion's brighter and grander sections, he senses the possibility of a different life. This setting shift underscores the contrast between his past imprisonment and the luxurious world of El Patrón.

Upon entering a lavish room, El Patrón is introduced—a powerful, intimidating figure. Despite his frail appearance, his authority is clear. Celia, who has cared for Matt, defends him, revealing the mistreatment he's endured. Rosa and Willum, the doctor, are put under scrutiny, leading to Rosa's dramatic outburst and removal. This scene highlights the power dynamics in El Patrón's household and his absolute control over its members.

El Patrón takes a keen interest in Matt, revealing he is Matt's clone, a



significant revelation that transforms Matt's understanding of his identity and purpose. The old man's fondness for Matt introduces a glimpse of warmth and protection, a stark contrast to his prior life. El Patrón and Matt share a meal, during which El Patrón shares stories from his past in Mexico, enhancing Matt's sense of belonging.

The following day, a formal arrangement is made to ensure Matt's protection, using El Patrón's influence. He assigns Tam Lin, a bodyguard, to Matt, signaling his importance. As the story unfolds, Matt faces a new, uncertain future within the privileged yet dangerous world of El Patrón's family. Here, he must navigate complex relationships and the shadowy purpose his clone status holds.

Overall, Chapter 6 serves as a transformative moment for Matt, transitioning him from a life of degradation to being recognized as a person with intrinsic value and potential. Yet, it also foreshadows the complications and challenges of living under El Patrón's shadow and the intricate roles he must play to survive.



## Critical Thinking

**Key Point:** Transition from oppression to potential

**Critical Interpretation:** Imagine you find yourself trapped, with your spirit crushed under unfair conditions, much like Matt in Rosa's sawdust room. Then, suddenly, life gives you a glimpse of a brighter world full of possibilities, echoing the moment Matt steps into El Patrón's grand mansion. This pivotal shift reminds you of the transformative power of stepping away from restrictive circumstances and embracing opportunities that elevate your sense of self-worth and values. It inspires you to realize that resilience can lead to redemption, showing you that regardless of past oppression, there's potential for a future where you are recognized and valued. Embrace the courage to take bold steps toward this new world, understanding that it's the gateway to discovering your true potential.



## Chapter 7 Summary: Teacher

In Chapter 7 of the story, the narrative continues to follow Matt, a young, isolated boy living in the opulent confines of El Patrón's Big House. Matt is a clone, specifically created as a genetic replica of El Patrón, and his interactions with the household reveal the complex dynamics at play due to his unique nature.

Initially, Matt avoids venturing out of Celia's apartment due to the hostile environment he faces outside. The servants treat him with contempt, Steven and Emilia ignore him, and Tom, a particularly troubling figure, actively bullies him. Tom is manipulative and cruel, often causing Matt distress by teasing and taunting him, actions which Tam Lin, Matt's bodyguard, disapproves of.

Tam Lin, a rugged and imposing figure, has become a parental surrogate in Matt's life. Although initially intimidating, Tam Lin shows a protective and gentle side when Matt falls seriously ill one night. He helps Matt recover, candidly showing his ability to care under pressure, which ultimately further endears him to Matt.

The focus shifts to Matt's struggle with identity and self-worth, exacerbated by the way others, like Tom, view clones as less than human. Matt wrestles with feelings of inadequacy and alienation as he confronts the notion of his



differentness and the societal stigma attached to clones.

The introduction of a new character, "Teacher," marks a pivot in Matt's education. Her simplistic and repetitive teaching style frustrates Matt, highlighting his intellectual capabilities and desire for genuine learning—a stark contrast to the condescending methods employed by Teacher.

A significant breakthrough occurs when Matt, in a moment of emotional release, vocalizes his frustration, breaking through the silence he's maintained. This outburst surprises everyone, including Matt, and marks the return of his voice. Tam Lin recognizes the importance of this revelation, celebrating Matt's newfound ability to speak.

The chapter closes with Tam Lin suggesting a celebratory picnic, an opportunity for Matt to explore the world outside with guidance and protection. This moment signifies a turning point in Matt's growth, setting the stage for future developments as he navigates his identity and place in a complex and judgmental world.



## Chapter 8: The Eejit in the Dry Field

In Chapter 8 of "The House of the Scorpion," titled "The Eejit in the Dry Field," we find Matt filled with excitement at the prospect of going on a horseback picnic. His hero, El Látigo Negro, often rode a horse on TV, and Matt dreams of such adventures. However, the excitement dims slightly when Tam Lin, Matt's bodyguard, introduces a rather docile gray horse, prioritizing safety over thrill.

During the ride through the poppy fields, Matt is fascinated by the landscape, noting the progression of the poppies—from seedlings to plants ready for harvest. He chats eagerly about his surroundings, something he's been deprived of during his silent months. Tam Lin explains the work of the farm laborers, who collect opium by slashing the poppy pods.

As they traverse the fields, they come across a man lying lifeless in a deserted field. Despite Matt's concerns, Tam Lin explains that it's too late for help since the man is dead, likely from heat or lack of water. This encounter, mysterious and unsettling, reveals a harsh reality of the farm's operation to Matt.

They continue into the hills, leaving the horse behind, as Tam Lin reveals the horse's limitations due to an implant that restricts its actions. The pair eventually arrive at a hidden oasis, a place of natural beauty and life that



Tam Lin keeps secret, even from the Alacrán family who owns the land.

Tam Lin then reveals significant truths to Matt, providing context for the severe environment and Matt's existence. He explains that Matt is a clone of El Patrón, created from a piece of skin, and how this sets him apart from

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## Chapter 9 Summary: The Secret Passage

In Chapter 9, titled "The Secret Passage," Matt's life seems to settle into a routine on the surface. He continues his education through distance learning, excelling academically with support from Celia, who praises him, and María, who visits often. Meanwhile, his rival, Tom, struggles academically, managing to stay at boarding school only through the financial influence of Mr. Alacrán. Despite the semblance of a normal life, Matt experiences a deep sense of emptiness, feeling like a mere reflection of a human—important only until forgotten or discarded.

Matt is haunted by recurring dreams of a dead man in a field, his thirst unbearable, making Matt wake to drink water repeatedly. This fear pushes him to keep water by his bed and occasionally tiptoe past the rooms of Celia and Tam Lin to ensure safety, though he fears encountering the dead man's corpse.

María brings with her Furball, a small, unruly dog, stirring discontent in Matt as people often compare him to the pet. This comparison frustrates Matt, igniting a confrontation with Tom during Easter vacation, where Matt finds himself struggling with the concept that, like Furball, he might be viewed as an unimportant creature who doesn't understand right from wrong.



Solace comes to Matt as he explores the house, weaving around as though he is El Látigo Negro, a fictional character he imagines scouting an enemy fortress. He covertly listens to Felicia, the mother of the Alacrán children, playing the piano with unexpected fervor before collapsing into a drained state. Her exhaustion leads to a servant attending to her with a mysterious drink that restores her. One day, in search of adventure, Matt ventures too close to the piano and hides in a dusty closet to avoid being caught. Here, he discovers a secret passage hidden behind sheet music and dust, a corridor snaking between the house's inner and outer walls.

Excited by his discovery, Matt explores the passage, locating peepholes that offer him secretive glimpses into various parts of the house. One day, Matt overhears a heated discussion between Mr. Alacrán, a doctor named Willum, and Mr. Alacrán's father, about refusing chemotherapy and a liver transplant. Confused by the context but understanding the potential danger of being caught, Matt retreats, determined to keep the secret passage hidden.

Music becomes an irresistible allure for Matt, compelling him to take risky trips to the music room. He perfects his skills with the piano by ear, echoing Celia's songs and even catches Tam Lin's attention. Tam Lin, acknowledging Matt's talent, promises to find him a music teacher, overcoming the difficulty of finding someone willing to teach a clone. Eventually, Matt begins lessons with Mr. Ortega, a desperate and deaf musician who teaches by feeling music through the piano.



As Matt delves deeper into his studies and musical expressions, he drowns his insecurities with achievement. He becomes not only a proficient pianist but also excels in academics, learning subjects beyond his years, and becoming proficient in languages. Driven by the desire to be something beyond a clone, Matt pushes himself to learn as much as possible, dreaming that his accomplishments will overcome the stigma of his birth and win the love and acceptance he desperately craves.

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## Chapter 10 Summary: A Cat With Nine Lives

In Chapter 10 of the story, titled "A Cat with Nine Lives," we find Matt in his room, enjoying the safety and comfort of the darkness. María, his friend, disrupts his solitude by coming in and opening the curtains, reminding him of the importance of El Patrón's birthday. El Patrón, the patriarch of the Alacrán family, is celebrating his 143rd birthday, and Matt reflects on his deep connection and debt to him, recalling how El Patrón rescued him from a life of misery.

As the celebration draws near, Celia, Matt's caregiver, warns him to be cautious and to seek her out if anything goes wrong during the party, though she can't specify the nature of the potential danger. Matt, noticing her unusual distress, promises her to do so.

The narrative then shifts to María's concern over her missing dog, Furball. Together with Matt and Tom, another boy who seems untrustworthy to Matt, they search for Furball and find him trapped in a toilet. Matt suspects Tom of putting the dog there but knows he won't be believed if he accuses him, since Matt is a clone, often disregarded and devalued within the family.

Despite these tensions, the atmosphere of the birthday party makes Matt feel briefly empowered, as it is one of the few times he can command attention and respect from the Alacrán family. This annual event is not just for El



Patrón but also, in a way, a celebration for Matt.

As the party unfolds in the splendid garden, filled with dignitaries like senators, generals, and even dictators, Matt notices a man with a bristly red hair named Mr. MacGregor, who is surrounded by other Farmers—the powerful figures who, like El Patrón, control the drug empire along the border. María finds Mr. MacGregor creepy, and Matt senses something off about him as well.

The guests are then summoned to greet El Patrón in the salon. Contrary to Matt's fears of finding him more frail, El Patrón walks in under his own power, astonishing everyone. El Patrón, addressing his distinguished guests, recounts his rags-to-riches tale from a poor village in Durango and laments the loss of his siblings. This story, meant to explain his indomitable will to survive and thrive, seems overly familiar to the guests.

El Patrón credits his longevity to a miraculous new treatment from the world's best doctors, who are also set to treat Mr. MacGregor. As the old man wraps up his speech, he characterizes himself as a cat with nine lives, determined to keep going as long as there are challenges to face.

The chapter closes with El Patrón preparing to rest before dinner, leaving the guests in a mixture of awe and anticipation for the night's festivities.



## Chapter 11 Summary: The Giving and Taking of Gifts

Chapter 11 centers on a grand birthday party for El Patrón, the powerful and ancient head of the Alacrán family, attended by various dignitaries and guests. Matt, a clone of El Patrón, is navigating the complex social dynamics surrounding him. As the festivities unfold, Matt's feelings of alienation and resentment are heightened by his interactions with the various characters present at the event.

Matt observes the opulence around him, including elaborate ice sculptures and a fountain of wine. As always, his place is set beside El Patrón while others like Mr. MacGregor, Mr. Alacrán, Felicia, and other family members are seated at the head table. Notably, El Viejo, Mr. Alacrán's father, is there, referred to as "El Viejo" due to his advanced age and refusal to undergo life-extending brain implants that El Patrón endorses.

A significant subplot involves Matt's animosity towards Tom, a young member of the Alacrán family, whom he perceives as cruel, especially after an incident involving María's dog, Furball. Matt's decision to relocate Tom's place card to the "baby table" leads to a confrontation with María, Tom's defender and Matt's friend, who is deeply upset by Matt's actions.

In a conversation with María, Matt reveals his belief that Tom attempted to drown Furball, an accusation María struggles to accept. The argument



escalates when El Patrón intervenes, favoring Matt and overriding concerns about Tom's exclusion. El Patrón's approval of Matt's behavior is underscored by his own philosophies of power and control, further isolating Matt from the other guests.

Maria's father, Senator Mendoza, attempts to mitigate the situation, but Matt's insistence on enforcing his will during the party pushes María to tears, as she is caught between her loyalty to Matt and her affection for Tom. El Patrón encourages Matt's assertive behavior, reinforcing the disturbing values of dominance and control, reminiscent of his own youth.

The chapter also delves into the significance of the gifts exchanged at the party, which El Patrón views as an indicator of affection, emphasizing gifts coming "in" rather than giving. As guests shower El Patrón with lavish presents, Matt receives a hand-knitted sweater from Celia, a book from Tam Lin, and an expensive toy car from El Patrón himself, symbolizing El Patrón's form of affection.

Maria, however, initially refuses to give Matt her gift, driven by anger over his treatment of Tom. However, under pressure, she eventually relinquishes it, leading to a scene that leaves Matt feeling humiliated and disconnected.

The chapter concludes with Matt's internal conflict as he reflects on the events, recognizing his harsh treatment of María and the void he feels



despite being at the center of wealth and power. His loneliness is exacerbated by the realization that, despite being a clone of El Patrón, he yearns for the normal relationships and recognition that seem forever out of reach due to his identity.

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## Chapter 12: The Thing on the Bed

### Chapter 12: The Thing on the Bed

Matt wakes up feeling overheated and uncomfortable in his room, noting that the candle he left burning has gone out and filled the air with a waxy smell. It's late morning when he realizes that the birthday party he had with María ended awkwardly, and now he needs to make amends with her. Unsure of how to approach María, Matt decides to let her cool off, knowing she wouldn't be receptive to his apologies right away. The power and influence he holds as El Patrón's clone seem to vanish, making him feel isolated again.

As the day drags on, Matt occupies himself by practicing guitar without the help of Mr. Ortega, the music teacher, and reading a book on nature gifted to him by Tam Lin, his bodyguard. These activities are categorized as safe, as Matt's well-being is of utmost concern to those around him due to his unique status as a clone.

Tam Lin occasionally breaks from the strict safety protocols by taking Matt on field trips disguised as visits to the Alacrás' facilities, but these journeys detour into the wilderness, offering Matt a thrilling sense of freedom and strength.



Matt's solitude is interrupted by Felicia, a woman from the Alacrán family who has never shown interest in him before. Her sudden visit is strange and unsettling. Felicia, appearing disoriented and smelling of cinnamon, awkwardly compliments Matt's musical abilities and mentions she was once a great concert pianist. The conversation takes a turn when Felicia reveals María cried all night after the birthday incident and that Matt should go see her at the hospital.

Matt makes his way through a desolate, thorny wasteland to the hospital, a place he dreads due to the painful tests he's undergone there. Upon arriving, he finds María in the waiting room, visibly upset. Their initial conversation is tense, with María questioning why Matt chose this location to meet. It soon becomes clear that neither Matt nor María had invited each other to the hospital; instead, they were manipulated into meeting there by Tom, María's cousin.

Tom, who arrives shortly after, reveals he has something grotesque to show them. Despite Matt's warning, María, urged by Tom, insists on following to see what horrors await. They enter a room where they encounter a clone tied to a bed, suffering and screaming. This sight is deeply unsettling, especially for Matt, who realizes for the first time the true nature of his existence as a clone and the hatred society holds for beings like him.



María is horrified and repulsed, clinging to Tom in distress as they leave the room. Matt stays behind momentarily, facing the grim reality that he shares the same fate as the creature on the bed—a revelation that shakes him to his core. After the encounter, Matt slowly exits, wrestling with newfound anxiety and the awareness of his own precarious existence.

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## Chapter 13 Summary: The Lotus Pond

In Chapter 13, "The Lotus Pond," Matt is engulfed in distress and confusion following a revelation that threatens his identity. Overwhelmed by the suspicion that he might be a clone, Matt is haunted by the thought that he could deteriorate as he ages, much like clones are rumored to do. Seeking solace, he instinctively turns to Celia, his caregiver and confidante, in hopes of finding reassurance and understanding.

When Matt reaches the kitchen, Celia immediately senses his turmoil and whisks him away to her private quarters for a heart-to-heart conversation. Here, amid the safety and warmth of Celia's embrace, Matt finally breaks down, sharing the harrowing experience and knowledge of a clone in the hospital. Celia reveals unsettling truths about the Alacrán family dynamics and the hidden lives within its walls, explaining that Tom, the malicious boy, is the product of a scandalous affair between Felicia and MacGregor, a powerful figure in their world.

As Matt processes this complex web of relationships, he learns a distressing fact: clones like him are typically rendered brain-dead by a drug to prevent them from realizing their origin. However, he discovers that El Patrón, the formidable patriarch of the household, had overridden this fate for Matt. Gratitude and a sense of uniqueness fill Matt as he contemplates being spared to live as a 'real human.' But questions remain about his future safety



and whether he might still face harmful interventions.

Later, Matt's anxiety mounts as María, a girl he cares deeply for, continues to evade him. He decides on a drastic plan to capture her attention: to abduct her dog, Furball, and demand a secretive meeting. In his preparation, Matt sneaks into a hidden passage within the estate to obtain laudanum—a potent sedative—from Felicia's secret stash, although he hesitates to use it on the dog.

The narrative takes a darker turn when Matt attempts to carry out his plan. Despite initial success in putting Furball to sleep without the sedative, events spiral beyond Matt's control. María's dog goes missing, leading to a frenzied search by the household that excludes Matt, unbeknownst to them, as the orchestrator of its disappearance.

Matt's hopes for reconciliation and a peaceful resolution crumble when he's suddenly caught in a security setup arranged by El Patrón's men. Under harsh lights and probing interrogations, Matt finds himself accused by Senator Mendoza, María's father, of murdering Furball. His earnest protests of innocence fall on deaf ears as both Tam Lin, his mentor, and Senator Mendoza refuse to believe him, seething with contempt and disappointment.

The chapter concludes with Matt facing isolation and a bleak recognition of his precarious position. Confined to his quarters and overwhelmed by the



weight of the accusations, Matt is left with the realization that the departure of Tam Lin and El Patrón will leave him even more vulnerable in this perilous environment. Now reduced to a muted and misunderstood state, Matt's journey becomes an internal battle to assert his humanity against the dehumanizing forces that surround him.

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## Chapter 14 Summary: Celia's Story

In this chapter, we delve into the world of Matt, a young clone in a dystopian society dominated by the powerful drug lord, El Patrón. Matt is grappling with the aftermath of various tumultuous events, including the belief that he poisoned María's dog, Furball. He struggles with guilt and regret over his actions and how they've possibly been misconstrued. However, Matt finds solace in the knowledge that someone, his loyal bodyguard Tam Lin, believes he can be more than just a clone.

El Patrón's estate is grand yet antiquated, reflecting the drug lord's desire to recreate the memory of his impoverished childhood, enhanced by his immense wealth. The estate has opulent gardens and minimal modern conveniences—except during extravagant parties meant to impress celebrities.

Tam Lin provides a stark contrast to El Patrón's oppressive control. He talks to Matt about courage, loyalty, and making tough choices. Unlike El Patrón, whose stories glorify wealth and power, Tam Lin's tales from his Scottish childhood reveal a life shaped by choices and mistakes, though he never discloses why he ended up working for El Patrón.

María's innocent inquiries expose Tom's sinister actions, revealing his involvement in troubling discoveries in the hospital. Consequently, Tom, a



problematic character associated with violence and manipulation, is sent away to a strict boarding school by El Patrón—although this act isn't driven by paternal concern but rather a possessive refusal to lose control over those he considers his.

Celia, Matt's caregiver, shares her harrowing story of migrating from Aztlán, a poor village once home to El Patrón. She describes working in a factory, enduring harsh conditions, and ultimately attempting to cross the border to the United States, only to be caught by the Farm Patrol. Celia's capture leads to a fortuitous meeting with El Patrón, who recognizes her skills and claims her, asserting a possessive ownership over her—something she believes is inescapable.

The chapter hints at the ruthless realities of this world, where power dictates belonging and autonomy is a luxury. Celia's tale reinforces Matt's uneasy situation as a property of El Patrón while highlighting how history and circumstance bind individuals to their fates. The chapter ends with Matt finding comfort in Celia's love, despite the ominous nature of their shared existence under El Patrón's control.

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## Chapter 15 Summary: A Starved Bird

In Chapter 15, titled "A Starved Bird," Matt finds himself alone and contemplative as the days pass by without any significant changes. The absence of María and Emilia, who have been sent to a convent to become proper young ladies, leaves a void in his life. Celia expresses that the convent's primary focus is on taming María, as Emilia is already docile. Matt yearns to communicate with María, but Celia refuses to send a letter, knowing that it would likely be intercepted. This separation from María causes Matt to feel isolated, as his usual company within the Alacrán estate dissipates; Benito and Steven leave for vacation, Mr. Alacrán is away on business, and the remaining relatives, Felicia and El Viejo, are confined to their rooms. The estate becomes eerily quiet, described as a stage missing its actors.

One day, Matt decides to ride a Safe Horse, apprehensive about whether his request would be honored. To his surprise, an eejit brings the horse, and he realizes that the eejit is Rosa, the same woman who once terrorized him. Her lifeless demeanor illustrates the dehumanization caused by the eejit implants, and Matt empathizes with her plight. The threat she once posed is vanished, leaving her as a mere shadow of her former self. This encounter prompts Matt to reflect on the tragedy of becoming an eejit—a state of being in which individuality and agency are stripped away.



This experience ignites a curiosity in Matt to explore outside the controlled boundaries of the estate. He journeys westward to what remains of Celia's little house, reminiscing about his past, but he only finds overgrown poppy fields and ejits tending to the crops. Resigned, he moves towards the oasis in the mountains. There, amidst the natural solitude, he stumbles upon a metal chest. Cautiously, he examines it and discovers a note addressed to him from Tam Lin, his former bodyguard and mentor. The note indicates the supply chest is for Matt's future needs, left behind by Tam Lin, who had to leave on El Patrón's orders.

The chest contains survival essentials, books, and maps, suggesting Tam Lin's care for Matt's well-being and potential independence. This revelation clears Matt's doubts about Tam Lin's loyalty and fills him with gratitude for the treasure trove of knowledge and resources left in his care. With this secret inheritance, Matt feels somewhat more confident facing the uncertain paths ahead.

Returning to the house, Matt finds it in chaos due to El Viejo's death. Celia quickly prepares Matt for the solemn occasion, impressing upon him the importance of attending as designated by El Patrón himself. In the somber atmosphere of the salon, El Viejo's diminutive form is likened to a starved bird within the lavish confines of his casket. Guests, including María, now changed and distanced by time and circumstance, arrive to mourn. María's presence, holding Tom's hand, stirs conflicted emotions in Matt.



The ceremony progresses with the arrival of a priest and an eejit children's choir, whose soulful singing contrasts with the hollow expressions on their faces. Their presence underscores the pervasive control and dehumanization present in this society.

When the time comes to pay respects, Matt is admonished by the priest for his presence, deemed inappropriate as he is considered an unbaptized clone. María courageously stands up for Matt, referencing Saint Francis and establishing a tenuous reprieve by invoking religious compassion for all creatures.

After a tense episode, María and Matt escape to the music room where they share a moment removed from the oppressive environment of the funeral. María's forgiveness and affection offer Matt solace in a world riddled with intricacies and unexpected challenges. Their reunion rekindles emotions and reminds Matt of the complex web of relationships and power dynamics he navigates within the Alacrán estate and beyond.



## Chapter 16: Brother Wolf

In Chapter 16, titled "Brother Wolf," Matt and María find themselves seeking refuge from the oppressive heat inside an eerie, hidden passage within El Patrón's estate—a place laced with voyeuristic peepholes that both intrigue and disturb María. Matt clarifies he uses the passage not for spying but to eavesdrop on those who exclude him from social events, asserting his rejection of María's suggestion that he might be involved in something untoward.

As they explore deeper into the estate, they discover a chilled, hidden room filled with digital equipment. This room, masked from plain sight, underscores the outdated facade of El Patrón's otherwise antiquated household, revealing a stark contrast between appearances and reality. The room's atmosphere, cool and technological, subtly reflects El Patrón's paranoid need for surveillance and control.

Away from prying eyes, María opens her heart, discussing a story about Saint Francis and a wolf, which becomes an allegory for forgiveness. Inspired by the saint's ability to see beyond the wolf's prior actions and give it a chance for redemption, María decides to forgive Matt for the misunderstanding concerning Furball, her late dog. Matt, feeling misunderstood about Furball's death but longing for María's friendship, agrees to María's plea for him to be "good," if only for the sake of their



fragile trust.

During their conversation, María discusses theological concepts—souls, heaven, and the nature of animals—reflecting her inner conflict about mortality and the afterlife while hinting at her own innocence. Matt listens, refraining from correcting her mistaken beliefs about him lacking a soul, instead cherishing this moment of vulnerability and connection with her.

Their intimacy is abruptly shattered by the return of voices, prompting María and Matt to hide once again. From their concealed position, they overhear a chilling conversation between Tom and his mother Felicia via a surveillance monitor. Felicia, in a drug-induced haze, reveals she had poisoned Furball out of spite for what she perceives as slights against Tom during Matt's birthday party. The revelation leaves María devastated, realizing the true extent of the human malice they'd underestimated.

Tam Lin, Matt's bodyguard, finds the pair and chastises them for the chaos their escapade has caused. With María's father, Senator Mendoza, furious, Tam Lin helps María leave discreetly through the study, advising Matt to remain hidden until it's safe to return unnoticed.

Before parting, María expresses remorse for misjudging Matt, but he reassures her with a reminder that a little extra forgiveness can never detract from their friendship. Her parting words, calling him "Brother Wolf," cement



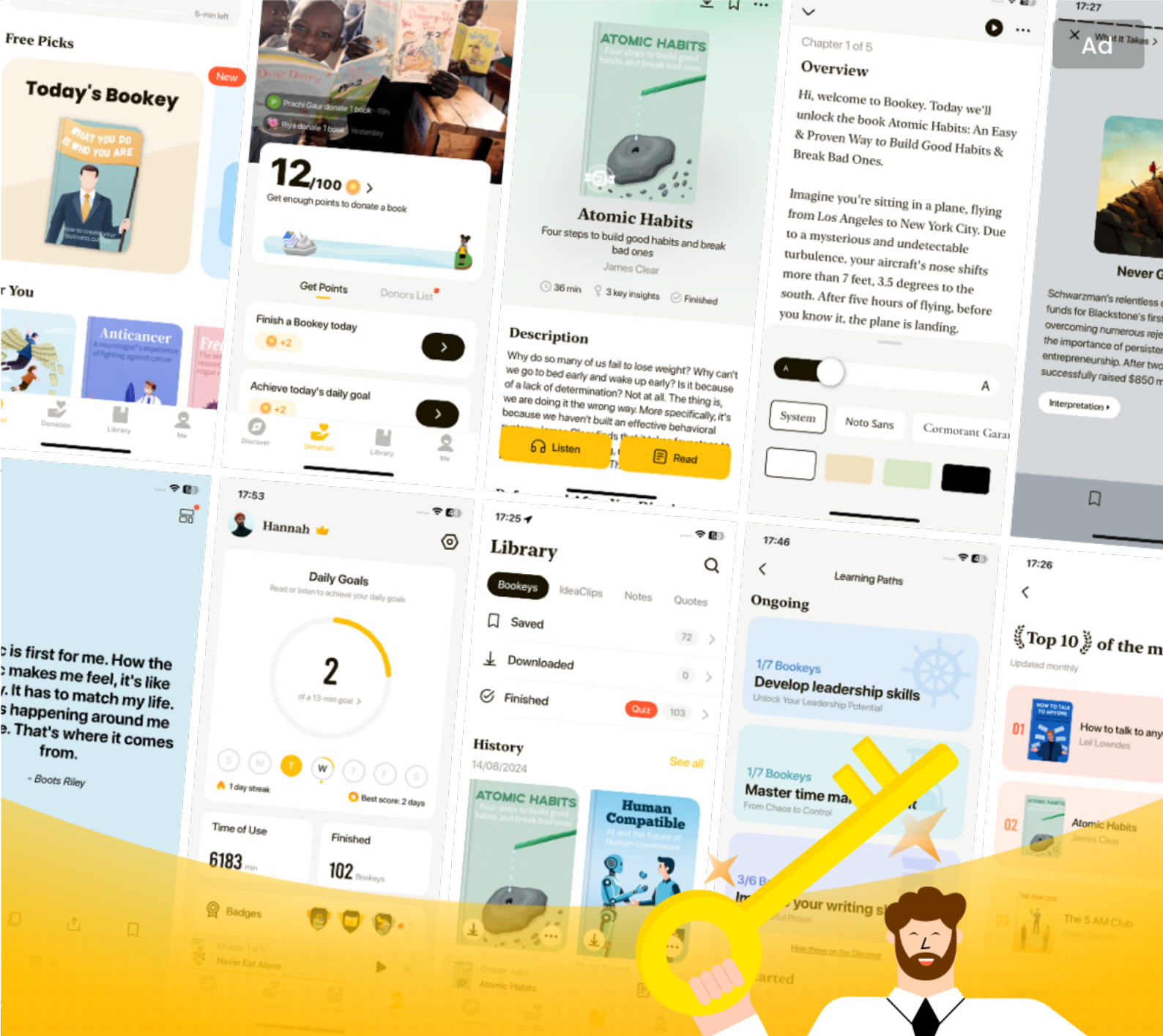
a renewed yet precarious bond, leaving Matt with both the weight of her trust and a quiet longing as she disappears into the shadowy passage again.

This chapter unfolds against the backdrop of El Patrón's sinister estate, a character in itself embodying secrets, paranoia, and control, mirroring the tangled relationships and hidden truths within its walls. Through their clandestine interaction, Matt and María navigate the complexities of guilt, forgiveness, and the search for redemption amidst a quagmire of treachery and deceit.

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## Chapter 17 Summary: The Eejit Pens

In this chapter, Matt navigates the complex emotions of being the only clone in a world where few see him as truly human. The Mendoza family leaves after a tense encounter, and Matt finds himself both isolated and connected by the affection of Maria and Tam Lin. His effort to emulate what he believes they admire leads him into a study of Saint Francis, whose all-encompassing love contrasts sharply with the harsh reality of Matt's life.

Matt's solitude is punctuated by a persistent sense of being surveilled, a fear reinforced by the discreet but malevolent presence of Felicia and the unyielding security around him. Seeking comfort and a semblance of agency, he frequents the stables and visits a catatonic Rosa, whose eejit-like state prompts Matt to contemplate the ethics of such existence.

As Matt indulges deeper into these philosophical reflections, he encounters a book titled "A History of Opium" by Esperanza Mendoza, which provides a harrowing backstory to the world he's growing up in. He learns that the country of Opium was formed through a corrupt alliance spearheaded by Matteo Alacrán—El Patrón. This revelation connects Matt to a larger, darker legacy as he grapples with Esperanza's denouncement of El Patrón, sparking both pride and fury within him.

Venturing to grasp the intricacies of the opium empire, Matt is inadvertently

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drawn to the eejit pens—a haunting residence for the mind-controlled laborers. It's there, witnessing the deplorable conditions, that he resolves to one day emancipate them. His ambition broadens: not to inherit El Patrón's empire fully but to redefine it with humanity.

Matt unexpectedly encounters members of the Farm Patrol—Hugh, Ralf, and Wee Wullie—who mistake him for an escapee. Their attitudes soon shift when Matt confidently declares his identity as El Patrón's clone. Through a tense exchange, Matt learns that these men share a violent past similar to Tam Lin's, revealing the brutal network sustaining Opium's borders.

The chapter thickens with the disclosure of Tam Lin's involvement in a bombing as part of the Scottish nationalist movement, a stark contrast to the nurturing figure Matt admires. The chapter concludes with Matt absorbing the weight of these revelations, recognizing the complexities within those he trusts and the world he inhabits, hinting at the intricate future he must navigate.



## Critical Thinking

**Key Point:** Recognition of Personal Responsibility

**Critical Interpretation:** In this chapter, you witness Matt's profound resolve to transform the world he inhabits. Despite facing isolation and the suffocating shadow of being a clone, he emerges with a determination to reshape the opium empire with compassion and empathy. This key moment inspires you to acknowledge that regardless of the intimidating legacy or daunting challenges we inherit, there lies within a potential to redefine the future with humanity and kindness. It urges you to take personal responsibility for change, illustrating that through awareness, courage, and empathy, even the mightiest empires of control and fear can be transformed. Matts demonstrates that embracing the complexity of your surroundings, and using it as fuel to drive positive impact, is where true empowerment lies.



# Chapter 18 Summary: The Dragon Hoard

## Chapter 18: The Dragon Hoard

In this chapter, Matt is abruptly woken from sleep by Celia, who urgently propels him into action, indicating an emergency. The narrative starts with a sense of immediate tension, rooted in the worry and hurried atmosphere established by Celia's actions. As Matt disentangles himself from the sheets and sluggishly follows instructions to wash his face, memories of the unsettling encounter he had with the Farm Patrol haunt him. These are agents tasked with securing the borderlands, who transform from menacing threats into seemingly benign figures once they identify him as Matteo Alacrán.

Celia's insistence that Matt eats, despite his protests and the bad taste of the previous night's air, underscores her anxiety and hints at an ominous situation. The narrative builds suspense as Matt is hastily escorted through the mansion's darkened corridors by bodyguards, leading him to suspect something amiss with El Patrón, the patriarch he regards with a complex mix of love and awe.

Upon learning El Patrón has suffered a heart attack, Matt is propelled into shock, resulting in physical illness and hallucinations that portray his inner



turmoil. His visions mix the comforting presence of Furball, a pet from his past, and the reassuring but complicated figure of Tam Lin, his bodyguard with a mysterious and violent history. This blend of hallucination and reality blurs as Matt grapples with his own fears and past experiences.

With dawn comes clarity, and Matt learns from Tam Lin about El Patrón's condition—stabilized through a piggyback transplant involving a child's heart. The chapter delicately portrays the deep irony of life's precarious value in the world Matt inhabits, where the powerful monopolize vitality until the bitter, resource-drained end.

Matt's hospitalization serves as a prelude to the broader narrative of mortality and the relentless pursuit of power, embodied by El Patrón's vast wealth. When presented with the idea of giving away his amassed riches—to which Matt refers as the "dragon hoard," echoing his child-like imagination and Tam Lin's folklore wisdom—El Patrón's vehement refusal highlights his obsession with possession. This refusal ignites a temporary vigor in him, reminiscent of his younger ambitions, juxtaposed with the emptiness that now occupies his existence.

Tam Lin's storytelling further illustrates this concept of a "dragon hoard," an allegory for El Patrón's greed. The tale recounts dragons that, much like El Patrón, guard their treasures fervently and react with visceral hostility to any loss, however insignificant. It serves as a moral tale, veiling the narrative's



criticism of avarice under the guise of myth and childhood intrigue.

The chapter ends with a reflective afternoon in Celia's garden, a setting enriched by the blooming flowers symbolizing growth and potential, contrasting the sterile opulence of El Patrón's wealth. Here, Matt processes the weight of his experiences and the moral complexities of his world. The dialogue between Matt and Tam Lin reveals an underlying wisdom: that the value of life and the happiness it brings cannot be measured by material accumulation, a poignant commentary on the lives manipulated and controlled by El Patrón.

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## Critical Thinking

**Key Point:** The emptiness of material wealth

**Critical Interpretation:** This chapter offers a profound insight into the fleeting nature of material wealth and its inability to guarantee true fulfillment or extend one's legacy meaningfully. When you witness El Patrón's obsession with his 'dragon hoard'—a massive accumulation of riches and power—juxtaposed against his frail health and ultimate isolation, it becomes profoundly clear that life's true richness is measured in relationships and experiences, not possessions. By understanding this, you could find inspiration to reassess your priorities, focus on cultivating meaningful connections, and invest in experiences that enrich your soul rather than pursuing an endless and hollow chase for material wealth. This perspective shift encourages you to live a life that leaves behind emotional and moral wealth, rather than just a trail of amassed treasures.



# Chapter 19 Summary: Coming-Of-Age

## Chapter 19: Coming-of-Age

In this chapter, the frail and aging patriarch, El Patrón, momentarily finds solace in music played by Matt, a young clone. Matt's high, angelic voice, admired by Celia, suddenly cracks one day, indicating a shift in his adolescence—a symbolic coming-of-age moment. El Patrón observes this transition quietly, hinting at deeper implications that seem unbeknownst to Matt.

Celia, Matt's caregiver, reacts emotionally to Matt's vocal change, suggesting it marks the beginning of a significant transformation. Her tears and forced smile betray an underlying concern possibly related to Matt's clone origin, which is emphasized by her comparison of him to a lamb turning into a ram. This emotional response from Celia unsettles Matt, leading him to ponder his role and identity as a clone.

During a celebratory yet subdued gathering hosted by Celia and Tam Lin, Matt probes about his age and origins, sparking a conversation that reveals snippets of his unsettling genesis. Tam Lin, under the influence of alcohol and frustration, exposes the brutal truth that Matt was "harvested" from a cloned embryo nurtured in a cow and that his biological predecessor was



'sacrificed.' These revelations parallel the dark practices within the Farm where clones like him are created, often to serve the needs of wealthy individuals such as El Patrón and his acquaintance MacGregor, who utilize clones for organ transplants.

Haunted by a chilling realization, Matt connects the dots: clones are purposefully made for spare parts. As he contemplates his fate, Matt grapples with the ruthless nature of his existence laid bare by Tam Lin's words. Yet, he clings to the notion that El Patrón's intentions for him differ because he has been nurtured, educated, and protected—luxuries unusual for clones who are typically brain dead.

Despite his panic, Matt discerns that El Patrón sees a reflection of his younger self in Matt, driven by vanity rather than cruelty. He surmises this motivation, acknowledging that his existence diverges because he is not destined for organ harvesting. Still, the ethical quandary of cloning—the chilling fates of his 'brothers'—and his maker's dark reputation linger heavily in his thoughts.

The shadow of El Patrón's tyranny looms large even as Matt recognizes Celia and Tam Lin's protective roles amid a morally fraught environment. As the chapter closes, Matt processes the weight of his identity, realizing the complexity of being an individual valued beyond his utilitarian purpose. Despite the unsettling truths, he acknowledges his place within a narrative



much larger and darker than his own, foreshadowing future confrontations and self-discovery.

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## Chapter 20: Esperanza

In Chapter 20 of "Esperanza," Matt awakens feeling sick and feverish, plagued by fears and suspicions about his future in El Patrón's world. He fears the intentions of those around him, such as Felicia, and considers asking Tam Lin if anyone plans to harm him for organ transplants. However, he struggles with how to approach such a terrifying topic.

To shake off his fear, Matt engages in his morning routine, which includes a hot shower and a breakfast of French toast. He reasons that investing in his education seems unnecessary if he's only meant for spare parts, which provides some temporary relief. As he rides a Safe Horse through the poppy fields, Matt begins to envision himself as an adult and an adventurer. He is drawn towards the idea of exploring beyond his current confines, such as Aztlán, a place full of life as described by Celia.

At the oasis, Matt reflects on his potential escape but hesitates, grappling with the idea of leaving behind Celia, Tam Lin, and María. He ponders the possibility of escape when El Patrón is capable of living for many more years under the care of the best doctors. With Tam Lin's maps and books in hand, Matt plans to strategize his potential departure carefully.

Matt dives into a book by Esperanza, María's mother, which condemns El Patrón's empire built on terror and exploitation. Esperanza details how El



Patrón enslaved workers by creating a labor force of eejits, people with computer chips in their brains who work without awareness of suffering. Matt struggles with her condemnation of El Patrón but is surprised to discover that Esperanza is alive and was married to Senator Mendoza, María's father, despite María believing her mother was long dead.

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## Chapter 21 Summary: Blood Wedding

In Chapter 21, titled "Blood Wedding," the Alacrán mansion is bustling with preparations for the wedding of Steven and Emilia, an event decreed by the powerful patriarch, El Patrón, to solidify ties between the Alacrás and Senator Mendoza's political machine. Despite the lavish decorations and influx of distinguished guests, including politicians and business magnates like MacGregor, Matt, a clone of El Patrón, feels isolated and disheartened. His unease is further exacerbated by his own health issues and a sense of alienation from the human world around him.

El Patrón, the cold and calculating leader of the Alacrán dynasty and ruler of the drug kingdom of Opium, orchestrates marriages for political alliances, demonstrating that personal feelings are irrelevant against the backdrop of power and wealth. For instance, Benito, Steven's brother, is unhappily married to the president of Nigeria's daughter, emphasizing El Patrón's disregard for personal happiness in favor of financial and political gain.

As the wedding approaches, Matt watches the preparations from a distance, cognizant of his lack of invitation due to his status as a clone. His mood shifts temporarily when María, Emilia's sister and Matt's cherished friend, arrives. The two share a secretive, meaningful reunion, talking about their lives and shared burdens. María expresses her discontent with her convent life in Aztlán and Matt confides his fears about El Patrón's failing health and



the ominous plans for his clones.

María reveals a critical piece of information: she knows where El Patrón's piggyback heart was sourced—an evil secret that underscores the dark moral corruption at the heart of the Alacrán household. Their conversation turns to the future, and Matt encourages María to contact her estranged mother, Esperanza Mendoza, who opposes the existence of Opium. This discovery gives María hope that she could avoid a future marriage to Tom, another morally corrupt member of the Alacrán clan, and signifies a potential escape from her prescribed fate.

On the day of the wedding, Matt observes from a hidden passageway as the ceremony unfolds. The event, attended by a motley crowd of significant—even if morally bankrupt—figures, is suddenly overshadowed by a crisis: El Patrón suffers a heart attack. Panic ensues as the doctors, likened to vultures, attempt to revive the ancient ruler. Amidst the chaos, Tam Lin, El Patrón's bodyguard and once a father figure to Matt, carries the frail leader from the room.

The chapter concludes with the spotlight momentarily stolen from the newlyweds, Steven and Emilia, highlighting the true focus of power and attention within the empire—the weakening grip of El Patrón and the uncertain future of Opium. Matt's realization sinks in that despite the veneer of power, the house of Alacrán is built on fragile foundations of ethical



decay and familial deceit.

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## Chapter 22 Summary: Betrayal

### Chapter 22 Summary: "Betrayal"

In a tense atmosphere, Matt is torn between his affection for El Patrón, the powerful patriarch he sees as a father figure, and the chilling realization that his existence is built on deception. Conflicted and alone in a dark passageway, Matt recalls cryptic warnings from Celia and Tam Lin about the sinister side of El Patrón, who is kept alive by using the organs of clones. Memories of El Patrón's admiration for ancient tombs, filled with servants to aid kings in the afterlife, add to Matt's growing anxiety and suspicion.

Matt's turmoil is interrupted by María, who urges him to hide as the household searches frantically for him. She reveals that Tam Lin, Matt's guide and protector, has concocted a ruse to distract pursuers by spreading false rumors of Matt's escape. María plans to help him flee using her father's hovercraft, pretending Matt is her *eejit*, a mindless laborer crafted through brainwashing.

As Matt waits, exhausted and parched, María reappears with water and news: El Patrón's condition has worsened, necessitating a heart transplant—a heart that could come only from Matt, his clone. Despite María's disdainful hope for El Patrón's demise, Matt can't shake his emotional bond to the frail,



old man.

Desperation drives them to seek a secret escape route marked by the Alacrán scorpion emblem, which responds only to El Patrón's fingerprints and DNA, and thus potentially to Matt's as well. Ignoring the lethal risks, Matt triggers the door, opening a passage to the hovercraft field. As they approach the craft, María's plan unravels: her sister Emilia and her fiancé Steven arrive, exposing the ploy. Shockingly, they regard Matt as mere livestock, intent on delivering him to the hospital.

The betrayal is deepened by the revelation that María's mother is alive, a truth Emilia had concealed for years. In the ensuing chaos, María's passionate protests prove futile. Matt, resigned to his fate, walks calmly with his captors, savoring his last moments of freedom amidst the fragrant gardens of the Big House, hoping against hope for an afterlife reunion with those he loves. This chapter starkly illustrates Matt's internal and external battles, underscored by themes of identity, love, and treachery, bringing him to a precarious juncture in his life.

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## Critical Thinking

**Key Point:** Confronting Betrayal and Finding Inner Strength

**Critical Interpretation:** In Chapter 22, Matt faces the painful reality of betrayal by those he trusted implicitly, but through navigating this betrayal, he discovers a newfound strength within himself. As María's plan to help him escape unravels and the emotional fabric of his world is ripped apart, Matt stands steady in the face of manipulation and deceit. Rather than succumbing to despair, he embraces his vulnerability as a catalyst for growth. This powerful example can inspire you to confront and accept betrayals in your own life, transforming them into opportunities for self-discovery and resilience. Like Matt, you too can harness inner strength to navigate through life's betrayals, emerging more self-aware and fortified than before.

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## Chapter 23 Summary: Death

Chapter 23, titled "Death," captures a deeply tense and unsettling moment in the narrative. Matt finds himself strapped to a hospital bed, surrounded by guards and medical machinery, echoing the grim fate intended for MacGregor's clone. Matt is paralyzed with terror and regret for not having escaped when Tam Lin, his mentor and protector, had given him the tools and instructions to do so.

In this world controlled by El Patrón, a powerful drug lord, clones like Matt are created for organ transplants. As Matt lies tied down, he reflects on María, his close friend, who might be drugged like others in her family, and the potential intervention of Esperanza, a fiery activist who wrote "A History of Opium."

Matt is led to a lavishly decorated room where he meets a frail yet still intimidating El Patrón. Despite his fear, Matt feels unexpected affection for El Patrón, who reminisces about his harsh childhood where only he survived, fostering an intense entitlement to reclaim the lives of his deceased siblings through Matt. Celia, Matt's caregiver and a sage-like presence in his life, confronts El Patrón. She reveals that she has been poisoning Matt with tiny doses of arsenic, making his organs unsuitable for transplanting, to protect him. El Patrón, furious at being outwitted, is rushed to surgery, leaving chaos in his wake.



As El Patrón's empire falters, Matt finds himself gripped by grief but also by reflections on his unusual existence, filled with unexpected allies and betrayals. Mr. Alacrán, El Patrón's heir, coldly declares Matt obsolete now that El Patrón is dead. The narrative twist unveils Matt's chilling realization: his purpose was never to inherit the empire but merely to serve as a vessel for El Patrón's survival.

Tam Lin, whom Matt viewed as an ally, reveals his true allegiance by striking Matt and dismissing their past friendship as merely following orders. This betrayal serves to heighten Matt's isolation and the harsh reality of his existence. The chapter ends with a stark betrayal, as Tam Lin, once a paternal figure, edges him closer to doom, leaving Matt to ponder the perilous future and the true nature of loyalty in a world riddled with deception.



## Critical Thinking

**Key Point:** Importance of Using the Tools at Your Disposal

**Critical Interpretation:** Matt's predicament underscores the necessity of seizing opportunities and utilizing the resources at hand. By ignoring Tam Lin's instructions and tools meant for his escape, Matt ends up in a dire situation, questioning what could have been if he acted sooner. This highlights an essential lesson about vigilance and the importance of leveraging the skills, guidance, and resources available to us. In your life, you likely have mentors or resources that can aid you in times of uncertainty. Learn from Matt's moment of regret; embrace opportunities when they arise, and trust in the preparation provided by those who have paved paths for you. Just as Matt's hesitation led him to peril, timely action can set you free and open doors to paths you might not have imagined.



## Chapter 24: A Final Good-Bye

In Chapter 24, "A Final Good-Bye," Matt finds himself in a precarious situation, bound in duct tape by Tam Lin and loaded onto a horse. Initially, he believes Tam Lin is planning to dispose of him near the eejit pens, a place associated with rot and decay where disobedient or non-compliant clones, known as "eejits," are sent to meet their demise. However, as the horse gallops off, Matt realizes that the destination is much different.

As they journey towards the Ajo Mountains, Matt's apprehension turns into a surge of anger about the betrayals he has faced and fights for his life, though his bonds are too tight to break. When the horse finally halts, Tam Lin reveals there are no malicious intentions. Instead, they have reached a hidden oasis, a place that has served as Tam Lin's sanctuary away from the oppressive world of El Patrón, the powerful drug lord who owns both of them, in many ways.

Tam Lin explains his past and the horrific incident where he inadvertently killed twenty children while attempting to assassinate a corrupt official. This revelation, accompanied by his visible scars, sheds light on why Tam Lin was initially drawn into El Patrón's service. Tam Lin candidly shares how the power controlled by El Patrón acts like a drug, ensnaring people into a life of sin and moral compromise. Despite this dark history, it's through Celia, Matt's caretaker, that Tam Lin realizes the monstrous nature he has



been complicit in nurturing.

Tam Lin dismisses Matt's fears about Celia, assuring him that she's safe and remains untouched by the eejit transformation due to his intervention.

Grateful for this news, Matt apologizes sincerely to Tam Lin, recognizing the man's efforts to protect him throughout his life.

Plans shift towards Matt's escape, as Tam Lin instructs him to head to Aztlán, a nation reflective of a culturally rich, more advanced society compared to the timeless, outdated world of Opium. He's urged to cross as a refugee, playing into an unsuspecting guise rather than revealing his cloned nature—a revelation that would stir outrage if discovered.

Tam Lin shares a pivotal insight, whispering that clones are no different from humans, directly contradicting societal prejudices that have plagued Matt throughout his existence. Tam Lin provides Matt with necessities like a backpack filled with supplies, maps, water bottles, and money, guiding him on how to navigate this new world. He prepares Matt for a world far different from Opium, controlled as it is by El Patrón's iron grip over time.

Despite Matt's pleas for Tam Lin to join him, Tam Lin reveals he must attend El Patrón's wake and face the moral consequences of the life he's lived. As they part, Tam Lin hints at a hopeful reunion with María, Matt's close friend, at the Convent of Santa Clara in San Luis. He also introduces the idea of



Esperanza, María's powerful mother, who is described as relentless and fierce, highlighting her effectiveness as an ally in future endeavors.

As Tam Lin departs, Matt faces a new life alone, carrying with him the knowledge and the freedom, both hard-earned commodities, from the empire of El Patrón. It marks the dawn of a journey towards identity, autonomy, and, ultimately, redemption for those he cares about.

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## Chapter 25 Summary: The Farm Patrol

In Chapter 25, "The Farm Patrol" from "The House of the Scorpion," Matt finds himself at a crossroads, both literally and metaphorically, as he navigates challenges on his journey toward newfound freedom in Aztlán.

The chapter begins with Matt at the oasis, reflecting on the whirlwind of events recently. The once comforting campfire now feels isolating, yet it's crucial for safety from potential nighttime animal threats. Tam Lin's thoughtful preparations, including a marked map with creative spellings, guide Matt as he plans his journey. Despite his sadness for leaving behind those he cares about, such as Celia, who is trapped in a perilous situation, he steels himself to move forward.

As Matt sets off, nostalgia and fear intertwine, and he experiences the awe-inspiring yet intimidating vastness of the night sky. Despite the ridiculousness of his fears, he takes solace in cultural beliefs and practices some superstitions for safety. Morning brings an unsettling, all-encompassing vibration, but he shakes off the eerie sensation, gathers his supplies, and resumes the trek.

The journey proves arduous, clogging Matt with dust and testing his endurance as he struggles through tough terrain. However, Tam Lin's insights and preparedness keep Matt buoyant, arming him with tools such as



a machete and an inhaler against unforeseen challenges. With these, he battles through a demanding climb over a steep granite cliff, fueled by an unexpected rage to survive. Overcoming the daunting climb fills Matt with a sense of triumph akin to his complex sentiments towards El Patrón, suggesting a connection he is reluctant to admit.

The landscape transforms around Matt, revealing a vibrant wilderness teeming with life. The animated desert ecosystem offers solace and a semblance of the transcendental peace Matt formerly found in music, providing a temporary escape from his troubles. Despite his grief for those left behind, especially acknowledging the twisted yet profound connection to El Patrón, he presses onward.

After spending the night under the starlit sky, Matt continues toward the unfamiliar world of Aztlán. Encountering a bustling industrial landscape, he's struck by the stark contrast to his preconceived notions shaped by El Patron's tales and Celia's descriptions. The sprawling metropolis, with its smoky factories and chaotic energy, presents itself as both daunting and promising.

His escape plan faces an immediate challenge as he nears the border patrolled by the Farm Patrol. Observing closely, Matt spots a diversion when a group of refugees makes a daring dash for freedom, drawing the Patrol's attention away. Seizing the moment, he sprints for Aztlán, evading capture



by abandoning his backpack and diving into the safety of Aztlán's border.

In reaching Aztlán, covered in oil and grime and symbolically shedding his past connections in Opium, Matt feels the overwhelming promise of a new life ahead. This transition marks the beginning of "La Vida Nueva," or "The New Life," as he enters an unknown future filled with potential for freedom and self-discovery.

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## Chapter 26 Summary: The Lost Boys

In Chapter 26, "The Lost Boys," of the book, Matt—who has escaped to Aztlán—is found by border guards after a perilous crossing. Matt, wary of revealing his true identity, introduces himself as Matt Ortega, borrowing the name from his music teacher. The border guards are unexpectedly kind to him, offering him food and clean clothes after the harrowing ordeal.

Matt learns that he has entered a controlled society where everyone must contribute to "the general good of the people." He is dressed in an olive drab jumpsuit to blend in and is fed beans and tortillas. Here, he encounters Raúl, who views Matt as a young aristocrat due to his manners and piano-playing claim. Raúl suggests Matt work at a plankton factory in San Luis, aligning with Matt's goal to reach the Convent of Santa Clara. Despite not really knowing what plankton factories involve, Matt agrees to the plan.

That night, Matt is taken to a facility filled with other boys, also in jumpsuits, engaged in various tasks like assembling machinery, weaving, or counting pills. The boys are all orphans, captured by the state after border crossing attempts by their families. They live under a strict regime governed by the Keepers, enforcers of the state's collective laws.

Matt observes the boys working on different projects, including Chacho and a small boy named Fidelito. Chacho, a rebellious figure, critiques Raúl's



emphasis on collective good while Fidelito provides insight into his personal hardships, adding depth to the emotional struggles in this orphanage-like setting. The boys chant a rote mantra "It's hard but it's fair," indicating their indoctrination into the state's work-centric ideology.

Throughout this, Matt learns more about the harsh realities of this society. He gains a deeper understanding of other boys' losses and their cynical view towards the systemic control by the Keepers. He begins to realize the importance of authority, as taught by El Patrón, and cautiously builds his influence among his peers. As the chapter closes, Matt is left to grapple with his position in this new and unfamiliar environment and ponder his next steps towards reaching María in San Luis.

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## Critical Thinking

**Key Point:** The Power of Adaptability

**Critical Interpretation:** Chapter 26 illuminates the paramount importance of adaptability as Matt, stripped of his comfort zone and familiar identity, must navigate an unfamiliar and controlled society. As you immerse yourself in Matt's journey, consider how his resilience and agility in adapting to new surroundings can inspire your life. Challenges may uproot you from what feels familiar and safe, but much like Matt, embracing change with an open mind and a willingness to learn can help you find strength and opportunity, even in adversity. Adaptability becomes your compass, guiding you through life's unexpected landscapes and allowing you the flexibility to mold new paths and foster personal growth.

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# Chapter 27 Summary: A Five-Legged Horse

## Chapter 27: A Five-Legged Horse

In this chapter, we follow Matt as he navigates a new environment under the watchful eyes of the Keepers, individuals who oversee a group known as the Lost Boys and Lost Girls—orphans and other outcasts molded by society to become obedient citizens. These children reside in a regimented and drab community where stories abound about the mythical Dreamland, known formally as the country of Opium, and its sinister tales of zombie slaves and a vampire king. Among the boys, many cling to the hope that their parents have reached the United States, a vision of a utopian land filled with prosperity.

Matt befriends and assists younger and smaller boy, Fidelito, by helping him make capsules—a task linked to an unfair rationing system where food is allocated based on productivity. Fidelito, in turn, rewards Matt with deep admiration, though this unintended relationship reminds Matt of a past pet, Furball.

While moving from task to task, Matt converses with Chacho who harbors open resentment toward the Keepers. Chacho shares with Matt his dreams of crafting a guitar from scavenged wood, revealing a bit of hopeful defiance

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and a connection to his father's memory, who he falsely believes is living a wealthy life in the United States.

The daily routine in this community is punctuated by rituals like the recitation of the Five Principles of Good Citizenship and the Four Attitudes Leading to Right-Mindfulness before meals. At night, the boys are treated to "bedtime stories" where Keepers project ideologies through parables. Raúl, one of the Keepers, speaks on "Why Individualism is Like a Five-Legged Horse," promoting the belief that community cooperation is essential for societal success and that straying individualism is detrimental.

Matt's frank question about using computer chips to control a horse, rather than amputate a symbolic 'fifth leg,' shocks Raúl and disrupts the controlled narrative, revealing the Keepers' fear of autonomy and dissent. This unexpected challenge earns Matt admiration from his peers, who revel in his brazen confrontation.

As the night progresses, Matt reflects on his precarious position, the dangers posed by the revelation of his clone tattoo, and his developing understanding of this new setting. He recognizes the solidarity of his new friends as a newfound treasure, contrasting sharply with his past isolation. Yet, thoughts of Celia and Tam Lin's uncertain fate weigh heavily, while the hope of reuniting with María provides comfort and motivation.



The chapter closes with Matt feeling a sense of belonging and worth that he had never before experienced, offering a rare sense of optimism in his otherwise challenging reality.

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## Chapter 28: The Plankton Factory

### Chapter 28: The Plankton Factory

The chapter begins with Raúl, a character associated with the Keepers, giving an inspirational talk to a group of orphaned boys about the deceptive nature of aristocrats. The talk notably omits any mention of Matt, the protagonist, who is among the boys. Despite this, two of Matt's friends, Chacho and Fidelito, consider him a hero after Raúl leaves.

Tasked with laborious duties, Matt finds himself having to measure pills alongside younger children, with his quota being twice as high to “teach him the value of labor.” Despite the harsh conditions, Matt is hopeful about being freed once they reach San Luis. His friends help supplement his meager breakfast by sharing their portions with him.

Later, Raúl announces that Matt, Chacho, and Fidelito will be traveling to San Luis. The journey in the hovercraft is far from luxurious, filled with discomfort and unpleasant odors. As they travel, Matt reflects on Steven and Emilia, individuals from his past connected to the powerful family of Opium. They were responsible for betraying Matt, contributing to his current predicament. Despite the journey's discomfort, Matt remains hopeful about their destination.



Upon arrival, the environment is harsh, characterized by foul smells from rotting fish. The boys immediately feel the oppressive atmosphere, reminiscent of both purgatory and hell. They are forced to clean the hovercraft they traveled in, a task made worse by the lingering smell of vomit.

Inside the facility, Matt encounters Carlos, another Keeper, who takes them on a tour of the plankton factory. Carlos enthusiastically explains the significance of plankton, describing it as essential nutrition made into various food products within the factory. The Plankton Factory is an oppressive and highly controlled environment, surrounded by security fences and a barren desert landscape. This desolate place is meant to be their home until they turn eighteen.

Carlos explains the history of the region, a once-vibrant area that has become a wasteland due to changes in the water system. The Colorado River was diverted to reduce its pollution before being used by Dreamland, contributing to the drying up of the Gulf of California. Meanwhile, labor camps like the plankton factory arose to handle societal outcasts, labeled as "losers," who are trapped in a regulated communal system with no real freedom.

The boys endure a difficult routine, becoming exhausted under the hot sun

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while tending brine shrimp tanks. The shrimp, which thrive on a diet of red algae, are mass-cultured for plankton production. In their monotonous labor, Matt engages in a conversation with Fidelito about his past life in Yucatán, giving a glimpse into his happier days by the seashore before being uprooted by a natural disaster.

The chapter highlights the oppressive nature of the Keepers' regime and the futility of their labor. Carlos denies them food for the night as punishment for Matt's perceived insolence, despite Chacho's plea for leniency considering Fidelito's exhaustion. Despite the hardships, the camaraderie between Matt, Chacho, and Fidelito grows stronger, their shared defiance becoming a beacon of hope in their dismal circumstances.

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## Chapter 29 Summary: Washing A Dusty Mind

In Chapter 29, "Washing a Dusty Mind," Matt grapples with feeling different from his peers in the harsh environment of a shrimp farm, where he and his companions, Chacho and Fidelito, are forced to toil under the supervision of the Keepers. As they make their way back from the shrimp tanks, Matt wonders why he is referred to as "the aristocrat," a title that sets him apart and makes him uneasy. Chacho explains that Matt's refined manners and thoughtful demeanor make him seem different, more like an aristocrat, compared to their usual rough-and-tumble lives.

Throughout the chapter, the oppressive routine of the shrimp farm is highlighted. The dinners of plankton patties and seaweed don't satiate their hunger, with Fidelito suffering the most due to his frail physique. Chacho intimidates another boy into sharing his food with Fidelito, showcasing Chacho's protective nature.

Each evening, the Keepers deliver manipulative bedtime stories to indoctrinate the boys. Jorge, one of the Keepers, tells a story about cleaning the dust from one's mind, comparing it to washing dirt off their bodies after a day's work. This analogy is used to enforce the idea of self-criticism to maintain mental clarity and obedience, clearly drawing a line between conformity and individuality.



Jorge then tries to manipulate Matt into admitting to flaws, using peer pressure from the group. Matt is blindsided when he is chosen to speak, and his attempt to answer the vague self-criticism question leads to a wave of accusations from the other boys, driven by Jorge’s manipulation. The boys criticize Matt for everything that sets him apart, from his speech to his behavior, revealing the venom masked by their outward camaraderie.

Internally, Matt is comforted by memories and voices of those who believed in him: Tam Lin assured him there was no difference between clones and humans; Celia's love reinforced his self-worth; even El Patrón's survival instincts resonated with him. María’s affection and acceptance further buoy his spirits, giving him the resolve to rise above his current circumstances.

Despite feeling deeply hurt by the rejection of his peers, Matt is buoyed by the unwavering support of Chacho and Fidelito, who share displays of defiance against Jorge. The chapter ends on a hopeful note, as Matt recognizes that, with friends like Chacho and Fidelito, he can overcome any adversity, much like El Patrón overcame his childhood poverty. This sense of camaraderie reinforces Matt’s inner strength, emphasizing the importance of personal connections and belief in oneself amidst dehumanizing environments.

| Aspect | Details |
|--------|---------|
|--------|---------|

| Aspect                | Details                                                           |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Setting               | Shrimp farm, under the control of the Keepers                     |
| Main Characters       | Matt, Chacho, Fidelito, Jorge                                     |
| Main Theme            | Individuality vs. conformity; struggle for identity               |
| Key Conflict          | Matt grappling with being different due to his 'aristocrat' title |
| Food & Hunger         | Dinners of plankton patties & seaweed, insufficient nourishment   |
| Support & Loyalty     | Chacho protects Fidelito, highlighting loyalty and defiance       |
| Keepers' Manipulation | Bedtime stories used to enforce self-criticism and obedience      |
| Matt's Isolation      | Peer pressure and accusations emphasize his estrangement          |
| Matt's Inner Strength | Encouragement from Tam Lin, Celia, and memories of María          |
| Resolution            | Friendship with Chacho and Fidelito fosters hope and resilience   |
| Conclusion            | Importance of personal connections to overcome adversity          |



## Chapter 30 Summary: When The Whales Lost Their Legs

In the chapter titled "When the Whales Lost Their Legs," the protagonist Matt, along with fellow characters Chacho and Fidelito, finds themselves immersed in the monotonous routine of working in a shrimp farm. Despite the foul air that initially paralyzes their sense of smell, they slowly habituate to the environment, enduring daily meals concocted from plankton by Carlos, a resourceful character.

As their mundane days unfold, the boys often imagine escaping their oppressive setting. They view the outside world through a perimeter fence separating them from a channel that once mirrored the sea. An unexpected sight piques Chacho's curiosity—something white over the horizon—and he persuades Matt to explore, leaving the more vulnerable Fidelito as a sentinel.

Their venture into the barren landscape leads them to a chasm filled with an eerie mass of whale bones. It dawns on Matt and Chacho that the skeletons are remnants of a time when whales accidentally stranded themselves. Fidelito recounts folklore from his grandmother, who reminisces about whales forgetting their land-dwelling past, resulting in futile beachings.

Matt's introspection about the whales' fate mirrors his own situation—trapped and left hoping for a rain that never comes. Meanwhile, the ominous nightly routines continue, with Jorge, a Keeper, leading



sessions of confessions from the boys, notably targeting Matt for scorn. Jorge employs Matt's refusals to confess as opportunities to cement his control through fear.

A dramatic incident manifests when Ton-Ton, a past sycophant, becomes Jorge's scapegoat for a supposed transgression. In a chilling display of authority, Jorge administers a savage beating under false allegations, a palpable reminder of the abusive power structures extending beyond Matt's previous life under El Patrón's watchful eye.

Matt refuses to confess fictitious sins, even when confronted by Jorge's wrath. However, recognizing the danger his defiance poses to Fidelito, who is inadvertently caught in the crosshairs, he begrudgingly admits to petty acts like dropping soap or discarding food. Despite the ensuing brutal punishment, Matt remains stoic, earning begrudging respect from his peers, who begin to see him as a comrade rather than an outsider.

In the aftermath, Matt is cared for by the group, solidifying his bonds with them. This acceptance marks a turning point as the boys come to view him as 'one of them,' gaining their trust and admiration after standing up against Jorge's unjust system. The chapter closes with Matt's reflections on his predicament, underscoring themes of power, resistance, and camaraderie in the face of adversity.



## Chapter 31 Summary: Ton-Ton

In this chapter, the focus shifts to Ton-Ton, a character who is visibly struggling after a rough night. He's confronted by Luna, a pockmarked boy who's training to become a Keeper—a role of authority among the boys in the compound. Luna smugly informs Ton-Ton and Matt that they too could become Keepers if they adhere to the Five Principles of Good Citizenship and the Four Attitudes Leading to Right-Mindfulness by the age of eighteen. However, Matt, who is also present, questions the practicality of the process since there are only twenty Keeper positions and over two hundred boys. This gap highlights a flaw in the system, although Ton-Ton and Luna brush it off.

Ton-Ton, whom others often underestimate, proves to provide valuable insights about life inside the Keepers' compound. Despite being tasked with menial jobs like cleaning and dishwashing, his observations reveal an environment rich with comforts and luxuries—television, swimming pools, and parties with delicious food—the Keepers enjoy, and the boys do not. The stark contrast between the two worlds does not seem to bother Ton-Ton or Luna; they believe these privileges are earned.

As events unfold, it's clear that Ton-Ton is deeply troubled by a recent punishment. His loyalty to Jorge, a high-ranking Keeper who once saved him from vicious dogs, appears to conflict with his punishment, causing



emotional turmoil. The reality of the Keepers' indulgent lifestyle, including their consumption of laudanum, surfaces through Luna's candid remarks. This addiction means that every night, the Keepers are in a drug-induced stupor, leaving the factory—and the fence that surrounds it—unguarded.

Matt seizes upon this realization, seeing an opportunity for escape, as the fence would be unmonitored. He makes plans fueled by memories of his past mentorship with Tam Lin, who taught him critical lessons on escape and self-sufficiency. Intent on including his friends Chacho and Fidelito, Matt wrestles with the logistics of the escape, including the potential danger and the risk of leaving Fidelito behind due to the arduous journey.

The chapter further delves into emotional terrain when Ton-Ton shares stories of his past in San Luis—a city of beauty and color, in stark contrast to his current life. His vivid recollections of family, now out of reach, reveal an underlying yearning for what he's lost. In turn, Matt, drawn into this nostalgic moment, reveals details of his own past, showing vulnerability and an emotional connection to his past caretakers, Celia and Tam Lin.

Filled with interplay between doubt and hope, the chapter lays the groundwork for the characters' potential actions and relationships. Ton-Ton, revealed to have a rich inner world and hidden strengths, is a key to understanding the inner workings of the Keepers, while Matt's growing strategic mindset foreshadows further plans for escape. The interactions add



layers to the themes of longing, loyalty, and the desire for freedom, setting the stage for future events and realizations within the story.

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## Chapter 32: Found Out

In Chapter 32 of the story, the protagonist Matt finds himself grappling with internal and external conflicts in the oppressive environment overseen by the Keeper, Jorge. Jorge, who has a keen sense for exploiting weakness, pressures Matt to confess to more crimes. Matt's mind, however, retreats to the comforting memories of Celia's apartment, a precious safe haven amidst his current distress.

Jorge's sadistic tendencies become apparent when he targets a young boy named Fidelito, intending to use him as a pawn to manipulate Matt. Jorge spins a narrative about worker bees, arguing that punishing one delinquent prevents others from following suit, a philosophy that clearly escapes Fidelito's understanding. Matt is torn between his desire to escape into his mental refuge and the need to intervene in the unfolding drama.

The tension escalates when Jorge threatens to punish Fidelito to break Matt's spirit. In a moment of courage, Matt attacks Jorge, taking the cane and hitting him with it. Chacho, another boy, joins in, striking Jorge and accusing him of unfair cruelty towards children. The other boys cheer their rebellion, driven not only by the injustice they witness but also by the chance to challenge their oppressor. Yet, Matt quickly calls for restraint, realizing the potential consequences of their actions.



Despite the boys' temporary victory, their rebellion is quickly suppressed when the Keepers return armed. Matt and Chacho are captured, bound, and silenced. Carlos, another Keeper, attempts to exert control by threatening punishment for their insubordination. Tensions rise further when Jorge accuses Matt of being an escaped "crot," referring to people who have been turned into zombies in a sinister land known as Dreamland. This accusation is substantiated when a scar on Matt's foot, reading "Property of the Alacrán Estate," is revealed, an indication of his connection to the powerful family that oversees the infamous Dreamland.

Faced with this revelation, the boys' rebellion falters. They've been conditioned to obey, and their fear takes over. Unexpectedly, Ton-Ton, one of the boys, speaks out, arguing that anyone can fall victim to Dreamland's horrors and that it doesn't define their character. However, Jorge dismisses him, exploiting Ton-Ton's insecurities to silence him. The boys are forced back into submission and Matt, along with Chacho, is isolated in a claustrophobic closet, left to contemplate their fate and the shattered trust among them.

Through this chapter, the narrative explores themes of power, control, and resilience. Matt's relationship with the other boys becomes complicated by Jorge's manipulation and their ingrained fear. The mention of Dreamland adds a new layer to the story's world, revealing the extent of the Alacrán family's reach and the dehumanizing systems in place. Despite the



oppressive circumstances, a flicker of solidarity and defiance emerges among the boys, hinting at the potential for resistance against their captors.

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## Chapter 33 Summary: The Boneyard

In Chapter 33, titled "The Boneyard," Matt and Chacho find themselves in a dire predicament as they are taken by the Keepers to a desolate place called the Boneyard. This chapter unfolds with high tension as Matt and Chacho, bound and thirsty, are transported in a solar-powered cart driven by Jorge, a Keeper with a grudge against Matt. They are taken to the edge of what once was a filled basin, but now is a graveyard full of whale bones, stretching like a macabre landscape of thorns.

Upon arrival, Jorge vindictively throws them into the boneyard without water, leaving them to fend for themselves among the bleached remains. Their predicament calls to mind the warnings Matt remembers about troublemakers being left in the Boneyard to emerge docile and broken. With their mouths free from tape but ankles still bound, Matt and Chacho must figure out how to escape the pit of shifting bones and avoid a grim fate.

The complexity of their situation is heightened by Jorge's refusal to show mercy, highlighting the totalitarian control and brutal methods employed by the Keepers. Jorge's malicious action serves as a grim reminder of the constant struggle for survival in oppressive environments—a struggle Matt is all too familiar with from his past in Opium, where he witnessed the enforced labor of eejits.



Matt and Chacho attempt to cut their bindings using the sharp bones around them. Their conversation shifts between humor and despair, revealing their inner fears and determination. When Chacho panics at the presence of bats, Matt reassures him that they are harmless despite Chacho's fears of them being bloodsuckers. As they battle their anxieties, the bats become a symbol of their struggle against the suffocating weight of the boneyard.

A sudden storm rolls in, offering a chaotic chance at survival as hail and rain pelt down into the pit. Matt and Chacho seize the opportunity to quench their thirst by catching rainwater, giving them a brief respite and renewed energy. The storm serves as a metaphor for hope amid desperation, demonstrating the unpredictable mercy of nature in their bleak surroundings.

As night falls, they continue their painstaking escape through the bones, striving towards the pit's edge. In a moment of solitude and vulnerability, Matt reflects on his life, his mentors Celia and Tam Lin, and the harsh realities of existence within El Patrón's oppressive world. Matt's introspection reveals the depth of his character—a figure forged in adversity, embodying resilience even when hope seems dim.

Eventually, Matt reaches the edge and pulls himself to safety, utterly spent but alive. Despite his exhaustion, he listens to the reassuring sound of Chacho's snores, confirming that his friend, too, has survived the ordeal. The two boys have faced the grim threat of the Boneyard and emerged,



albeit battered, not as passive victims but as symbols of endurance and defiance against the suffocating reality imposed by the Keepers.

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## Chapter 34 Summary: The Shrimp Harvester

In Chapter 34, titled "The Shrimp Harvester," we find Matt enduring a harsh, cold morning in the desert. He's just narrowly escaped the pit, a harrowing ordeal, and is desperate to locate his friend Chacho, who is somewhere buried under a heap of bones. Despite his shouts and pleas, Chacho doesn't respond, leaving Matt helpless and on the verge of despair.

In this bleak setting, Matt recalls his past life, touching on memories of El Patrón and others like María and her dog, Furball, hoping his voice might reach Chacho and give him some will to survive. As the day advances, Matt sees a brown patch—Chacho's factory uniform—not far from the pit's edge, signaling where Chacho is buried.

Just as Matt's pessimism reaches its peak, he hears a mechanical noise and is relieved to discover it's not the hostile Keeper, Jorge, but rather his friend Ton-Ton riding his shrimp harvester with little Fidelito. Fidelito is ecstatic to find Matt alive, while Ton-Ton calmly offers help, focusing on the task of rescuing Chacho. Using the harvester's mechanical arm, Ton-Ton carefully removes bones, eventually freeing Chacho, who's in shock but alive.

Ton-Ton's practical side shines as he administers strawberry soda to Chacho, revealing an unexpected knowledge of treating dehydration. This moment of relief transforms into a bittersweet celebration as Matt and his friends savor



the soda, likening it to an exquisite luxury from Matt's past. Ton-Ton's leadership becomes evident as he plans to escape to San Luis, inspired by the safety and healing it promises. Fidelito, emotionally driven, claims some credit for the plan, but Ton-Ton firmly steers the focus on the mission.

They embark on their slow journey aboard the shrimp harvester. The vehicle's pace is not much faster than a child's skip, but it gets them moving, with Matt contemplating Ton-Ton's surprising decisiveness. The group shares a reassuring meal of various delicacies, and Matt observes an ironic sense of freedom in Fidelito's words.

As they progress, an unsettling smell reminiscent of the *eejit* pens signals their passage near hazardous wastelands. By evening, they reach a pass in the hills, and Ton-Ton acknowledges that the solar-powered harvester cannot continue until morning. A sense of urgency grips Matt as Chacho's fragility becomes more apparent.

Ton-Ton opens up about his past, sharing how he too was abandoned, mirroring Matt's experiences of betrayal. It's a shared moment of vulnerability and unexpected camaraderie. Facing the necessity of getting help for Chacho, Ton-Ton rationally suggests Matt and Fidelito walk ahead to find a doctor in San Luis, while he waits with Chacho.

Armed with flashlights and blankets against the encroaching cold, Matt and



Fidelito prepare to undertake the solemn mission, promising Ton-Ton that they'll return with help or by dawn, whichever comes first. Ton-Ton's dedication to his friends and his calm under pressure exhibit a new depth to his character, making their journey an emotional blend of resilience, hope, and the pursuit of safety across the harsh desert landscape.

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## Chapter 35 Summary: El Día De Los Muertos

In Chapter 35, "El Día de los Muertos," Matt and Fidelito continue their journey downhill, although Matt is fatigued and nursing infected scratches from the previous ordeal. Ton-Ton watches them from a distance as they make their way toward the Convent of Santa Clara. Matt describes the convent as a fantastical castle to entertain Fidelito, weaving a tale reminiscent of their experiences with the Keepers, an oppressive group they recently escaped from.

Fidelito is curious and energetic, but Matt is concerned about their safety, particularly due to the terrifying river they must pass, which is filled with dangerous, unseen creatures. As they approach, the foul smell of the river becomes overwhelming, triggering an asthma attack in Matt. Fidelito runs for help, and soon an elderly couple, Guapo and Consuela, come to their aid, providing Matt with an inhaler.

The couple leads Matt to a cemetery, vibrant with celebrations in honor of El Día de los Muertos, or the Day of the Dead. This traditional Mexican holiday welcomes back the spirits of deceased loved ones with food, music, and colorful decorations. The cemetery is alive with families placing offerings on graves, which astonishes Matt, as he has never encountered death celebrated in this way.



The atmosphere is festive, with skeletal figures and wafts of copal incense in the air, which reminds Matt of Felicia, stirring mixed emotions. He reflects on El Patrón and the Alacrán family's cold mausoleum, realizing the warmth and acceptance of Consuela's words about death being part of life.

Guapo, preparing to attend a fiesta, offers to take the children to see Chacho at the Convent of Santa Clara. Consuela outfits Matt and Fidelito with masks to blend into the festivities, effectively helping them avoid the Keepers, who were not fond of such celebrations. The masks symbolize safety and unity with the celebration but also disturb Matt, evoking uncomfortable memories of his past.

With the kindness and wisdom of Consuela and Guapo, Matt navigates this unfamiliar tradition of honoring the deceased, gradually understanding that death is a natural continuum of existence. They prepare to leave for the fiesta, with Consuela's parting words encouraging Matt to think of the masks not as terrifying but as a bridge to safely approach a world that embraces both the living and the dead.

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## Chapter 36: The Castle on the Hill

### ### Chapter 36: The Castle on the Hill

As Matt followed Guapo past the cemetery, he noticed golden cempasúchil flowers scattered on the graves. Fidelito explained they were for guiding the dead back home. This thought unnerved Matt as they crushed petals beneath their feet on their way to the road.

Guapo coaxed his outdated hovercar—a cheap, nearly-grounded vehicle—into service to ferry them away. They left the graveyard and drove past beautiful houses, much different from the impoverished hovels Matt expected. These homes were stunning structures, shaped like castles, ships, and trees, each with paths of flowers leading to their doors.

As they proceeded, holographic displays in the yards came to life, showing skeletons on rockets, weddings of the dead, and more. Music and the sound of fireworks filled the air as the road became crowded with costumed revelers, and Guapo struggled to navigate through the throng.

Matt observed the festive crowds, dressed as gorillas, cowboys, and astronauts. Even famous figures like Zorro and legendary creatures like La Llorona danced alongside them. Amid the chaos, Matt spotted a figure



resembling El Patrón, followed by eejits. This vision disturbed him, reminding him of what might have been his fate if El Patrón still lived.

Fidelito pointed out several men, "Keepers," on the roadside, figures whom Matt recognized as threatening authority figures from their past. They reminded him of threats he's faced before, but he kept Fidelito from drawing their attention.

Eventually, they reached the base of a hill where Guapo's inadequate hovercar could go no further. Guapo gave Matt a friendly farewell, and Matt felt gratitude for the old man's company. Together, Matt and Fidelito began the climb, hopeful yet anxious about finding María. Despite his eagerness, Matt was self-conscious about his battered appearance.

At the hilltop stood the Convent of Santa Clara, like a castle, with walls and towers encircled by vibrant flowers and glowing lights. Matt and Fidelito removed their masks and began searching for a way in.

They followed a path until they encountered a hidden entrance, cleverly concealed by a hologram. Matt explained to the frightened Fidelito that it was a security measure and reassured him as they passed through.

Inside, they found hustle and bustle as nurses and orderlies cared for the injured, many in costume, adding a surreal element to the scene. A nurse



confronts them, and when Matt cautiously identifies themselves, the nurse guides them privately to see Chacho, explaining his own past as an orphan.

They traversed a storage-laden corridor, recalling nightmares of the Keepers' droning lessons, before reaching a quieter wing. There, they overheard a heated argument involving two Sisters and the loathsome Keepers, Carlos and Jorge, who were attempting to move Chacho, a move that could be fatal for him.

Matt intervened, despite his weary state, driven by adrenaline to confront the Keepers. A scuffle ensued, and it was the commanding arrival of Doña Esperanza, María's mother, that put an end to the chaos. Her authoritative presence silenced the room.

When Ton-Ton was prompted to recount their ordeal, he did so eloquently, free of his usual stammer, emboldened by Esperanza's commanding presence. Despite Jorge's attempts to discredit him, Esperanza saw truth in the boys' tale and informed the group that the Keepers were already under scrutiny for drug trafficking.

Esperanza's intervention led to the arrest of the Keepers, and the boys were finally assured of safety and a chance to cleanse themselves of their grim past. As the tension lifted, María burst in, embracing Matt joyfully and announcing his presence to her mother, Doña Esperanza. The reunion

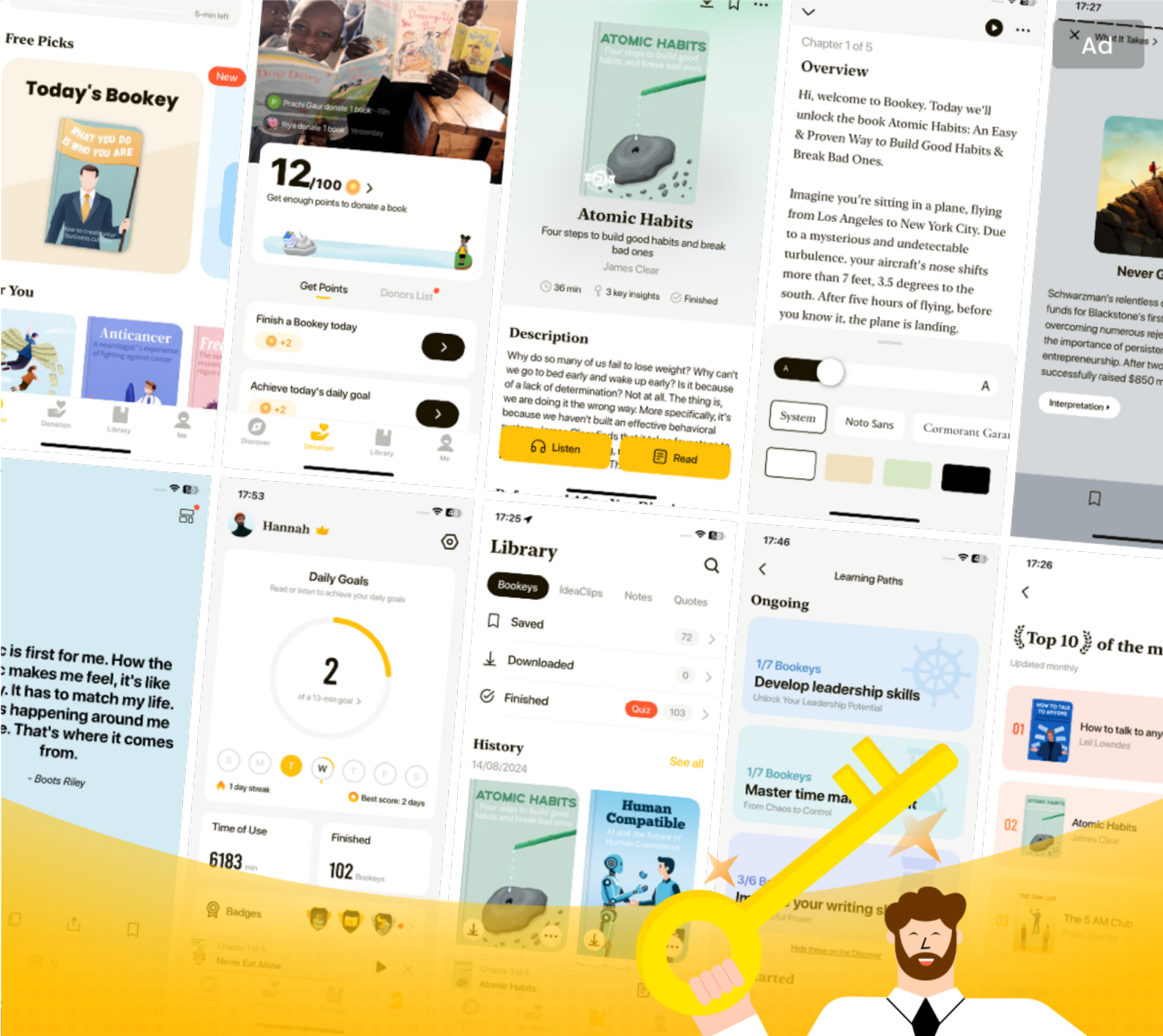


signaled a turning point, a moment of hope and redemption for all involved.

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## Chapter 37 Summary: Homecoming

In Chapter 37 of the narrative, we find Matt embracing a moment of respite at a convent run by Sister Inéz, where he is ordered to rest and recover from his ordeal under the care of nuns. Matt enjoys the comfort of fresh sheets and the sweet scents of the garden, appreciating visits from his friends Fidelito and Ton-Ton, who are staying at a nearby boarding school. However, his true solace comes from María, whose lively stories and optimistic worldview uplift Matt's spirits.

María's mother, Esperanza, who exudes a commanding presence, interrupts one of these visits with a serious discussion. She highlights the dire situation in Opium—a lockdown has been in place since El Patrón's death, causing a halt in opium shipments and threatening the stability of their empire. Esperanza reveals that Matt's fingerprints and DNA match El Patrón's, suggesting he has the power to override the security system and end the lockdown, a realization that traps Matt in a precarious obligation.

Esperanza, knowledgeable in international law, discloses a crucial legal detail: clones, like Matt, are considered livestock and a copy of an original; however, with El Patrón's death, the clone assumes full personhood and ownership of the deceased's holdings. This legal loophole positions Matt as the new ruler of Opium—a transformative shift in his identity.



As Matt grapples with this revelation, he is pressured by Esperanza to promise that once in power, he will dismantle the opium empire, a promise bolstered by international support. Matt agrees, knowing the broad scope of evil and suffering wrought by El Patrón's rule, which now extends to him.

The narrative shifts as Matt undertakes a risky journey to Opium in a hovercraft equipped with a fail-safe for El Patrón. He successfully navigates the security system and lands, feeling the weight of responsibility and anticipation of the unknown. As he explores Opium, he finds a landscape eerily unchanged yet devoid of its usual human activity, hinting at deeper troubles within.

Inside the estate, Matt reconnects with Celia, his surrogate mother, who warmly embraces him in a poignant reunion. Celia, along with music teacher Mr. Ortega and bodyguard Daft Donald, offers Matt insight into the situation. Celia explains the persistent control El Patrón exerted over everyone in his domain, emphasizing their continued belonging to him even after his death.

The tale beautifully balances Matt's transformation from a mere clone to the potential savior and ruler of a devastated land, painted against the backdrop of personal connections, loyalty, and the moral complexities of inherited power.



## Chapter 38 Summary: The House Of Eternity

In Chapter 38, titled "The House of Eternity," Matt reflects on the night of El Patrón's wake. As Celia, Daft Donald, and Mr. Ortega recount the events, Matt envisions the somber gathering. Tam Lin and others formed the funeral procession through the desert, carrying a gold-encrusted coffin heavy enough that six bodyguards, including Tam Lin and Daft Donald, struggled to lift it. The procession moved to the music of eejit children singing El Patrón's favorite piece, drawing an emotional response despite the tyrant's evil history.

The descent into El Patrón's mausoleum reveals a cavernous chamber reminiscent of ancient tombs filled with gold coins, which some bodyguards pilfered. As the eejits and Farm Patrol left, the atmosphere shifted from a funeral to a celebratory wake, beginning with Mr. Alacrán opening a special wine meant for El Patrón's 150th birthday. The celebration took a tragic turn when attendees were poisoned by the wine. Only Daft Donald survived, having been warned by Tam Lin.

As Matt grapples with this poignant finale, he learns that El Patrón intended to take his followers into the afterlife, much like the ancient kings he admired. Tam Lin, having known the old man's intentions, chose not to save himself, seeing it as a path to redemption for past crimes. Through his sacrifice, he liberated the eejits, Matt's primary concern now that he is the



new ruler of Opium.

Determined to dismantle El Patrón's cruel legacy, Matt grapples with the overwhelming responsibilities ahead. His plans include reversing the eejit process and transforming the poppy fields into something beneficial. He envisions a new world where Celia, Maria, and friends like Chacho, Fidelito, and Ton-Ton play crucial roles in rebuilding society.

While contemplating these changes, Matt discovers a hidden passage leading into El Patrón's dragon hoard beneath the mountains. The secret chamber, filled with treasures and symbolic figures, symbolizes the expansive shadow of El Patrón's kingdom that Matt must dismantle.

As the chapter concludes, Matt settles by the fire, contemplating the monumental task ahead of breaking Opium's empire with the support of his allies. Tam Lin's voice encourages him, reminding Matt of the strength and resolve he needs to succeed. With determination, Matt embraces his newfound role, reassured that he is not alone in this fight.

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