

The House of the Scorpion



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF NANCY FARMER

Nancy Farmer grew up in Arizona, near the US-Mexico border, where she helped her parents run a hotel frequented by fugitives. She attended Reeds College in Portland, Oregon, before serving in the Peace Corps in India in early 1960s. Afterward, she studied Chemistry at UC Berkley. In the 1970s, she took her unusual knowledge of insect pathology to Mozambique and Zimbabwe, where she helped remedy the spread of infectious disease with pest control. She met her future husband, Harold Farmer, at the University of Zimbabwe. Nancy Farmer began writing at the age of 40, after pregnancy prevented her from doing fieldwork. She first published books in Zimbabwe before publishing her first American book, *Do You Know Me?*, in 1993. Since then, her children's and young adult novels have won three Newbery Medals and one National Book Award. Farmer and her husband currently live in the Chiricahua Mountains of Arizona and have one son, Daniel.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

On July 5, 1996, Dolly the Sheep, the first mammal successfully cloned from an adult symbiotic cell, was born in Scotland. Dolly's birth caused much discussion both in the scientific community and the general public concerning the potential of scientific advancements and the ethics of cloning sciences. This advancement was followed by the successful cloning of a variety of other animal species, including primates, which is reflected in Matt's character, who is a clone of the dictator El Patrón in the novel. Beyond the scientific context of the book, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 led to the creation of the Department of Homeland Security in 2002. This aspect of the government eventually led to increased enforcement regarding the flow of undocumented persons over the US-Mexico border, which plays out in the conflict between the corrupt government of Opium and the oppressed immigrant population in *The House of the Scorpion*.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The House of the Scorpion is a futuristic dystopian novel; the roots of this genre reach back to classics such as George Orwell's [1984](#), Aldous Huxley's [Brave New World](#), and Ray Bradbury's [Fahrenheit 451](#). The 2005 novel, [Never Let Me Go](#) by Kazuo Ishiguro is an example of a more contemporary work that also deals with the subject of clones created and raised for the purpose of donating organs to regular humans. Both novels use the topic of clones to explore themes of humanity and

individual choice, but [Never Let Me Go](#) is more introspective in plot and tone, whereas the characters in *The House of the Scorpion* directly confront and overthrow the sociopolitical forces which oppress them. [The Hunger Games](#) by Suzanne Collins is another young adult science fiction novel where a teenage protagonist confronts the corrupt government of a dystopia. In 2013, Nancy Farmer published a sequel to *The House of the Scorpion*, entitled *The Lord of Opium*. The sequel continues to follow Matt immediately after the events of the first book, as he becomes the leader of Opium and continues to struggle with his agency and morality as the clone of a cruel dictator.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The House of the Scorpion
- **Where Written:** United States
- **When Published:** 2002
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Young Adult Fiction, Science Fiction, Dystopian Novel
- **Setting:** Opium, a fictional country occupying what was once the US-Mexico border.
- **Climax:** Matt narrowly escapes being killed by fleeing Opium.
- **Antagonist:** Matteo "El Patrón" Alacrán
- **Point of View:** Third Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Strong Language. According to Farmer, her publisher made her edit out parts of *The House of the Scorpion* where Celia, the main character's caretaker, says "Damn" because "good" characters are not allowed to swear in children's literature. "Good" characters are also not allowed to be written smoking. Farmer herself disagrees with these rules and says she would break them if she were to write the novel all over again.

Close to Home. Farmer was partially inspired to write *The House of Scorpion* after she and her husband encountered a dying Mexican man in the Chiricahua Mountains of Arizona. The man was severely dehydrated and lost after fleeing from border patrol. Farmer and her husband gave the man water and helped him to the nearest city, but never learned what happened to him after that.



PLOT SUMMARY

In the futuristic country of Opium, a scientist grows a clone from the cells of the powerful drug lord, Matteo “El Patrón” Alacrán. The clone, known as Matt, spends the first six years of his life hidden away inside a house in a poppy field with his beloved caretaker, Celia. Matt’s small, safe world suddenly expands when he is discovered by three children, Steven, Emilia, and María, who bring him to a large mansion beyond the fields. A man named Mr. Alacrán appears at the mansion and becomes enraged and disgusted with Matt. Suddenly, Matt is locked in a room with the cruel maid, Rosa, and the cold doctor, Willum, supervising him. Matt lives in filth there, until Celia and María rescue him. Matt meets El Patrón, the owner of the mansion and the head of the Alacrán family. Matt and El Patrón immediately get along, and El Patrón declares that Matt shall receive an education and no one shall ever hurt him.

Matt lives inside the mansion with Celia and Tam Lin, his bodyguard. Tam Lin shows Matt the oasis just beyond the estate and teaches him outdoors skills. He also speaks with Matt about the ability to mold one’s own personality by choosing to do what is moral and kind. He also tells Matt about the eejits, people with computer chips implanted in their brains so they can do nothing but follow simple orders. All the other servants and family members, except for the kind María and the wicked Tom, ignore Matt. Matt is not sure why, but he begins to realize everyone’s dislike of him has something to do with him being a clone.

Matt excels at academics and learns to play beautiful music. He hopes one day his accomplishments will change society’s perception of him despite his status as a clone. At El Patrón’s birthday party, Matt demands that María kiss him in front of all the guests to show he deserves to be treated better than an animal. María is angry at his cruelty toward her. Later, Tom tricks Matt and María into seeing another clone, this one with its brain destroyed. María is horrified and stops speaking to Matt; Matt hides María’s beloved dog so she will have to come find it and talk to him. Somehow, the dog dies, and Matt is blamed. After this incident, both María and Tam Lin leave Matt alone at the mansion.

Matt and María reunite at the funeral of El Viejo, El Patrón’s grandson. They discover Felicia, Tom’s mother, killed María’s dog to blame Matt. María forgives Matt and makes him promise to live a moral life before she leaves again for school. Matt continues to explore the estate and the nature surrounding it. He learns from Farm Patrol agents that Tam Lin is a former terrorist who accidentally killed 20 children in a bombing. Late one night, El Patrón has a heart attack and Matt is rushed to the hospital. However, Matt himself becomes suddenly sick and passes out. When he wakes up, El Patrón has survived by receiving a heart transplant.

Matt begins to mature and grow into a man. He reunites with Tam Lin but is confused and angered by both Tam Lin and Celia’s secretive behavior. He begins to contemplate all he has heard about clones in his life, and he realizes that clones in Opium are created for organ transplants. He reasons that El Patrón could not possibly intend to kill him for organs, because El Patrón gave him a quality education and a luxurious life.

The entire Alacrán family comes to the estate for Steven and Emilia’s wedding. El Patrón has another heart attack, and Matt is captured and brought to the hospital to donate his heart to El Patrón, despite María’s attempts to help him escape. Celia reveals that she has been feeding Matt poison so he cannot donate organs. El Patrón dies. Mr. Alacrán orders Tam Lin to kill Matt, but instead Tam Lin helps Matt escape over the mountains in the country of Aztlán.

In Aztlán, Matt comes under the custody of the Keepers, men who are in charge of the Lost Boys, the orphans of people arrested by Farm Patrol while crossing the border into Opium. The Keepers enforce a hypocritical, collectivist regime, so Matt escapes with the Lost Boys Chacho, Fidelito, and Ton-Ton. They find María and her activist mother, Esperanza, in the convent where María goes to school. Esperanza tells Matt that Opium has been on lockdown since El Patrón’s death and only El Patrón’s DNA can override the security system. She tells Matt that not only must he be the one to open up Opium again, he is the rightful leader of Opium because he is the genetic copy of El Patrón.

Matt returns to Opium, planning on assuming leadership and undoing the crimes El Patrón committed. He finds out that only Celia and a few other servants are still alive. Before his death, El Patrón set aside a bottle of special wine for all his family and servants to drink at his funeral. He poisoned the wine, so that everyone died and Opium could not go on after his death. Tam Lin knew of this plan but drank the wine anyway, in order to atone for his crime of killing the schoolchildren. Matt is angry at Tam Lin for abandoning him and he does not know how he will begin the difficult work of undoing the injustices of El Patrón. However, he knows he still has friends, like María, Celia, and the Lost Boys, to help him.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Matteo “Matt” Alacrán – Matt is the protagonist of the novel. He is the clone of El Patrón, created for the sole purpose of harvesting his organs in order to extend El Patrón’s life. He enjoys learning all kinds of information, as well as playing and listening to music. As he grows up, he struggles between his impulses toward selfishness and jealousy and his desire to be a kind, moral person. The majority of other characters in the novel, especially Mr. Alacrán and Tom, treat him as less than

human because he is a clone, and Matt wishes to become so accomplished he changes their opinions. Matt's caretakers, Celia and Tam Lin, love and protect Matt throughout his life and encourage him to be a moral person. María, Matt's childhood friend and love interest, also motivates Matt to be kind to others. Matt has a complicated relationship to his creator, El Patrón, as he loves the old man for the education he gave him and feels a kinship with him due to their genetic connection as clone and original. However, Matt comes to realize El Patrón is a cruel man who created him only for the purpose of organ transplants and who exploits everyone around him for his own gain. Matt asserts his free will over El Patrón's preplanned destiny for him when he escapes from his home country of Opium. However, Matt returns to Opium at the end of the novel when he realizes he can use his genetic sameness to El Patrón to take over the country and choose to end the injustices of the old man's empire.

Matteo "El Patrón" Alacrán – El Patrón is the patriarch of the Alacrán family and the leader of the country of Opium. At the beginning of the novel, he is over 140 years old, and has created a clone, Matt, with the intention of extending his own life by harvesting Matt's organs for himself. He is a corrupt and cruel leader, who expects everyone in his empire, from the enslaved immigrants known as eejits to his own family members, to serve him. Everyone who lives on his estate, including Matt's caretakers Celia and Tam Lin, fear him and therefore avoid speaking badly of him. He is affectionate and generous toward his clone, Matt, out of vanity, because he vicariously enjoys watching his genetic copy enjoy all the privileges he never had during his poor childhood in Mexico. His possessiveness and cruelty present an immoral example for Matt to struggle against as Matt matures and must choose between good and evil. El Patrón is in weak health for much of the novel, due to his advanced age, and eventually dies of a heart attack after Matt is unable to provide a donor heart. After he dies, however, he poisons his entire family so Opium cannot continue after his death, showing how far he will stretch his power in order to maintain his possessions even in death.

María Mendoza – María is the youngest daughter of Senator Mendoza and Esperanza, the younger sister of Emilia, and the friend and love interest of Matt. She has black hair and olive skin and grows up to be a beautiful young woman. She is kind and affectionate, but also emotionally sensitive and easily upset. She feels great empathy for the suffering of eejits and clones in the country of Opium, just as she cares deeply for animals. She encourages Matt to be virtuous so that he may go to the heaven. She struggles with the idea of Matt being a clone because she knows this means he will ultimately be killed for his organs. El Patrón arranges for her to marry Tom and she accepts this fate. As she grows older, she becomes more rebellious against her convent education and her family's expectations. She is initially compliant with the abusive regime

of the Alacrán family, but after she falls in love with Matt, she defies their discrimination against clones in order to try to save his life.

Tam Lin – Tam Lin is the bodyguard of both El Patrón and Matt. He has blue eyes and curly brown hair, is very muscular, and is covered in scars. Matt observes that Tam Lin shows a hint of friendliness under his otherwise tough intimidating demeanor. Tam Lin lacks a traditional education, but he wisely advises Matt to choose to be kind and decent rather than embrace his wicked selfish side like El Patrón. Tam Lin also teaches Matt camping and outdoors skills, and later helps Matt reject his fate of dying for being a clone by escaping into the mountains. Matt eventually describes Tam Lin as his father to others. Before coming to work for El Patrón, Tam Lin was a Scottish nationalist who attempted to bomb a government official but accidentally killed 20 innocent children. Meeting Celia influences Tam Lin to try to make amends for his past mistakes, which leads Tam Lin to helping Matt but also to drinking poison and dying along with the rest of the family at El Patrón's funeral.

Celia – Celia is Matt's primary caretaker and a cook in El Patrón's house. She comes from the same village in Aztán as El Patrón, and therefore was not turned into an eejit when she was caught illegally crossing the border. Celia is deeply religious and loves Matt intensely and selflessly. She provides him with guidance throughout his life to teach him to be kind to others, as well as to keep himself safe. Matt will later describe Celia as his mother to others. She bravely defies El Patrón by secretly feeding Matt poison so he cannot be an organ donor. Celia's concern for Matt allows him to exercise his free will by choosing to be moral and also by avoiding his supposed destiny of dying so that El Patrón may live. For this crime, she is sentenced to become an eejit but is rescued by Tam Lin. As a result, she is one of the few members of the household who survives El Patrón's purge at the end of the novel.

Tom – Tom is the illegitimate son of Mr. MacGregor and Felicia. He has red hair and blue eyes like his father. He is cruel and vicious, attempting to kill animals and tormenting Matt and María as children. However, he also acts polite and friendly when it suits him. El Patrón hates him but keeps him in the family because the old man never lets anyone leave him. El Patrón has arranged a marriage between Tom and María, and María hopes she can change Tom's evil ways. Thus, Tom is a rival to Matt both for María's affection and for the approval of the family. Tom's characterization shows how even a morally bankrupt human can hold a higher standing in society than a clone like Matt.

Gustavo "El Viejo" Alacrán – El Viejo is El Patrón's grandson and Mr. Alacrán's father. Unlike El Patrón, El Viejo will not use clone organ transplants in order to extend his life. El Viejo is deeply religious and believes choosing not to treat his cancer is following God's will. Thus, El Viejo presents a foil to the extreme use of science in novel to extend one's life.

Justin “Mr. Alacrán” Alacrán – Mr. Alacrán is the great grandson of El Patrón, the son of El Viejo, the husband of Felicia, and the father of Benito and Steven. He uses language to dehumanize Matt for being a clone and is openly cruel to him when El Patrón is not present. His treatment of Matt exemplifies the discrimination and dehumanization of clones by society in the novel.

Felicia Alacrán – Felicia is the wife of Mr. Alacrán and the mother of Benito, Steven, and Tom. She used to be a concert pianist, but after having a nervous breakdown, only plays alone in the music room. She runs off with the rival drug lord, Mr. MacGregor, and the pair have an affair which produces the illegitimate son, Tom. But El Patrón forces her to come home, showing his extreme possessiveness and destructive authority. Felicia consumes large amounts of alcohol and opium due to her misery over being trapped on El Patrón’s estate. She loves and advocates for her son, Tom, to the point of being cruel and vindictive toward Matt, whom she sees as his rival.

Benito Alacrán – Benito is the oldest son of Mr. Alacrán and Felicia, and the great-great grandson of El Patrón. The family assumes he is the heir-apparent of Opium—however, he is both unkind and unintelligent. El Patrón forces him to marry Fami, a woman Benito hates, showing how El Patrón disregards the wishes of his family members for his own ambitions.

Steven Alacrán – Steven is the second son of Mr. Alacrán and Felicia, and the great-great grandson of El Patrón. He initially appears kinder than his older brother, Benito, and helps Matt before he realizes Matt is a clone. Afterward, he ignores Matt but is never openly cruel to him, unlike Mr. Alacrán. According to El Patrón’s wishes, Steven marries Emilia. Steven betrays Matt by preventing his escape, showing that growing up in a society which discriminates against clones and values greed and ambition has influenced Steven.

Mr. MacGregor – Mr. MacGregor is the second-most powerful drug lord in Opium. He is a close friend and ally of El Patrón and the father of Tom. He has red hair and blue eyes. Like El Patrón, MacGregor creates clones so that he can harvest organs from them in order to extend his own life.

Senator Mendoza – Senator Mendoza is a powerful U.S. senator, the father of Emilia and María, and the ex-husband of Esperanza. He is a close political ally and family friend of El Patrón. His political opinions change frequently to suit his ambitions. He is disgusted by Matt for being a clone, and expects his daughters to do whatever El Patrón and the Alacrán family wishes.

Emilia Mendoza – Emilia is the eldest daughter of Senator Mendoza and Esperanza and the older sister of María. She is the childhood friend and later wife of Steven. Unlike her younger sister, she is not horrified by the dehumanization of eejits and clones, and sides with the Alacrán family in all matters.

Esperanza Mendoza – Esperanza is the ex-wife of Senator Mendoza and the mother of Emilia and María. She left the family when María was a young child, leaving María to believe she had died in the desert. Esperanza is a passionate, strong-willed activist against the crimes of El Patrón and the country of Opium. She pursues her causes with a single-minded, at times emotionally detached ambition. She encourages Matt to return to Opium to take over leadership of the country after El Patrón’s death.

Daft Donald – Daft Donald is the bodyguard of El Patrón. He is similar in appearance to Tam Lin, with a brutish, tough exterior, and was also a Scottish nationalist before coming to work for El Patrón. He cannot speak due to an injury he sustained in the bombing that haunts Tam Lin’s past. He survives El Patrón’s purge only because Tam Lin warns him not to drink the poisoned wine.

Rosa – Rosa is a servant in El Patrón’s house and the mistress of Dr. Willum. She imprisons Matt as a child and neglects and abuses him. She treats him like an animal because he is a clone. Matt fears her cruelty and her anger. As punishment for hurting him, El Patrón has her turned into an eejit. Seeing the contrast between her former violent self and her passive state as an eejit causes Matt to realize the cruelty of the scientific process which turns people into obedient machines.

Willum / The Doctor – Willum is the primary doctor for both El Patrón and Matt. He is also the boyfriend of Rosa before she becomes an eejit. He is cold toward Matt and only cares for him for the sake of El Patrón’s health. He serves the scientific establishment that wishes to exploit clones like Matt in order to extend the lives of the powerful.

Mr. Ortega – Mr. Ortega is Matt’s music teacher. He is deaf and therefore desperate enough for work to teach a clone, when all other human teachers avoid Matt. At the end of the novel, he cannot hear the call to attend El Patrón’s funeral and therefore is one of the few members of the household to survive the purge.

Teacher – Teacher is an eejit brought in to teach Matt. The facts that she is only addressed by her function shows the loss of identity caused by the computer chip in her brain. She is the first eejit Matt meets, causing him to become aware of the creation of eejits in his society.

Raúl – Raúl is the first Keeper Matt meets over the border in Aztlán. Raúl supervises the Lost Boys, the orphans who lost their parents to the Farm Patrol. He repeats the Keepers’ dogma about everyone working hard to contribute to the general good of society, however Matt never sees Raúl doing any actual work himself. Thus, Raúl shows the hypocrisy of the Keeper’s corrupt collectivist system.

Carlos – Carlos is the head Keeper in charge of the plankton factory in near San Luis. Like the other Keepers, he is hypocritical, professing the values of equality to the Lost Boys

while enjoying exclusive privileges himself. He is eventually overthrown by the Lost Boys, showing the instability of the Keepers' corrupt oppressive system.

Jorge – Jorge is a Keeper at the plankton factory. He lectures the Lost Boys on the importance of collectivism and scolds Matt for his aristocratic manners. He is vindictive and abusive, beating both Matt and Ton-Ton for supposedly violating the rules. He also threatens to beat the young, weak Fidelito. His actions show the intense cruelty of the Keepers' corrupt system, though he eventually receives justice when Chacho and Matt fight him.

Fidelito – Fidelito is a Lost Boy, who was orphaned by Farm Patrol and now lives under the authority of the Keepers. He is the youngest and smallest of the Lost Boys. He is desperate for affection and incredibly loyal to his friends, Matt and Chacho. He is very weak because he is too young to meet his production quotas, meaning that the Keepers often deny him food. His suffering shows the cruelty and neglect caused by the Keepers' strict and unfair dogma.

Chacho – Chacho is a Lost Boy and friend to both Matt and Fidelito. He acts tough and often swears at and talks back to the Keepers. Like all Lost Boys, he foolishly hopes that his father is living a wealthy life in the United States and will soon send for him. When Chacho is crushed in the boneyard, Matt shows his ability to choose compassion by remaining with him through the night.

Ton-Ton – Ton-Ton is the Lost Boy in charge of driving the plankton harvester and cleaning the Keepers' quarters. At first, he appears to be unintelligent, but later he proves himself to be observant and diligent. He helps Matt, Chacho, and Fidelito escape the Keepers. He feels loyalty to Jorge for saving him from Farm Patrol, but he eventually stands up to Jorge and tells others about the Keepers' abuse of their power.

MINOR CHARACTERS

MacGregor's Clone – The clone whom Mr. MacGregor creates in order to harvest the clone's organs. Unlike Matt, scientists destroyed MacGregor's clone's brain as a baby, in accordance with the law. Tom uses the clone to horrify María and make Matt feel less than human.

Fani – Fani is the daughter of a wealthy Nigerian president and the wife of Benito. She has always hated Benito, but her father forced her to marry him in order to be tied to El Patrón's powerful family, thus showing El Patrón's international influence.

Hugh – Hugh is a Farm Patrol agent, who captures Matt thinking he is an immigrant who illegally crossed the border into Opium. He tells Matt about Tam Lin's crime of accidentally killing schoolchildren.

Ralf – Ralf is a Farm Patrol agent, who captures Matt thinking

he is an immigrant who illegally crossed the border into Opium. He tells Matt about how most Farm Patrol agents are Europeans who got in trouble for brawls surrounding soccer games.

Flaco – Flaco is the oldest Lost Boy at the plankton factory. After being inspired by Matt, he leads the Lost Boys in a rebellion against the Keepers.

Luna – Luna is a former Lost Boy and Keeper-in-Training who works in the infirmary. His character reveals how the majority of Lost Boys hope to one day become Keepers so that they may enjoy the privileges and powers that used to oppress them.

Guapo – Guapo is an elderly Aztlán man who helps Fidelito and Matt when they escape to San Luis. He is the brother of Consuela.

Consuela – Consuela is an elderly Aztlán woman who helps Fidelito and Matt when they escape to San Luis. She teaches Matt about the Day of the Dead. She is the sister of Guapo.

Sister Inéz – Sister Inéz is a nun at the convent in San Luis. She protects the injured Chacho from the Keepers.

Furball – Furball is María's beloved dog. Matt is often compared to Furball, which he resents because this emphasizes how his society considers clones to be animals. Felicia murders Furball and Matt is blamed, driving a wedge between Matt and María, as well as between Matt and Tam Lin.

Eduardo – Eduardo is the scientist who grows Matt in the lab, despite his complicated feelings over Matt's fate as a clone.

Lisa – Lisa is Eduardo's colleague and fellow scientist.

Anna – Eduardo's wife.

Wee Wullie – Wee Wullie is a Farm Patrol agent.



THEMES

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



FREE WILL VS. PREDETERMINATION

Matteo "Matt" Alacrán, the main character of *The House of the Scorpion*, is a clone of the powerful drug lord, El Patrón, created for the sole purpose of providing organ transplants. Matt's society sees his destiny as therefore prefixed. Even Matt's DNA is supposed to determine his traits to be exactly like El Patrón. However, Matt asserts his free will by escaping from El Patrón's estate and choosing to be kind whereas his creator was cruel. After this break from his prescribed destiny, Matt returns to the estate in order to use his DNA link to El Patrón to take control of the country of

Opium, while also using his free will to right the wrongs of El Patrón's rule. Matt's progression, from a clone to a free man to a fair and just future leader, shows how one can take advantage of their predetermined circumstances in order to do what they believe is morally right.

Matt's society, specifically El Patrón and the rest of the Alacrán family, believes Matt's destiny is fixed because El Patrón created him to donate organs. Society believes that Matt must either fulfill the destiny for which he was designed, or be disposed of. This shows how society can oppress an individual's free will on the basis of a predetermined plan. El Patrón frequently marvels at how similar, in personality as well as appearance, Matt is to himself at a younger age, even though the two characters grow up in completely different circumstances. This shows how El Patrón sees Matt's personality as fixed by his DNA, just as that DNA also determines Matt's future as El Patrón's own personal organ donor. As El Patrón explains to Matt that he is about to kill him for a heart transplant, El Patrón tells him, "I created you, Mi Vida, as God created Adam." This shows that El Patrón thinks of himself as a god, creating Matt for a specific purpose, disregarding Matt's free will in favor of a preplanned destiny. El Patrón is not the only member of Matt's society who believes Matt's one possible future is donating organs to his creator. After El Patrón dies, Mr. Alacrán, El Patrón's great grandson and the new head of the family, orders Matt to be executed, because he can no longer fulfill the purpose he was created for. For Mr. Alacrán and the rest of society, an individual like Matt must follow the path chosen for him before his birth, or else he is useless.

Matt, though he may be exactly like El Patrón in his DNA, is young and can still choose to be compassionate and moral. Throughout the novel, Matt will exercise this ability to choose to act with kindness or cruelty, showing that he is more complex than the one-dimensional role that El Patrón and the rest of society define for him. As an individual, he has the free will to determine his own moral character—for better or worse. Matt chooses to be cruel when he demands María kiss him at El Patrón's birthday party. El Patrón encourages Matt here because El Patrón himself demands that everyone does as he says. Matt's insistence that María kiss him, even though she doesn't want to, show that Matt is capable of choosing to be as cruel as his creator. Yet Matt is also capable of choosing to be kind and selfless, unlike El Patrón. Matt shows this most clearly when he chooses to help the Lost Boys resist the oppressive Keepers after he escapes El Patrón's estate and Matt's choice to stay with another Lost Boy, Chacho, after Chacho gets stuck in the boneyard when the Keepers dump him and Matt there. This shows that Matt can choose to be kind and just even though he is created in the image of a cruel and greedy man. Here, Matt's free will as an individual has a greater influence on his life than a genetic predisposition.

Matt's genetic link to El Patrón brings him back to the Alacrán estate after he escapes, but he exercises free will in order to bring justice and fairness to the country. This shows how predetermination still dictates Matt's life, but he can use his free will to do the greatest moral good possible given his circumstances. With the help of his bodyguard, Tam Lin, Matt escapes from the Alacrán estate rather than be killed for being El Patrón's clone. Matt's choice to leave shows his life has purpose and value beyond the destiny El Patrón created him for, thus showing his ultimate ability to assert his free will over his destiny. Once Matt escapes to the country of Aztlán, he is compelled to return to his home country because of his shared DNA with El Patrón. His home country has gone into lockdown, and only El Patrón's DNA signature can unlock the way into the country. The activist, Esperanza, tells Matt that because he is genetically identical to El Patrón, not only can he enter the country, but he is also the rightful ruler. Matt agrees and returns, showing that his DNA and the fact that he's a clone continues to influence his actions and shape his future. Once Matt returns to his country and decides to take over El Patrón's leadership, he resolves that he will use his position to resolve the problems El Patrón created, such as the exploitation of the workers known as eejits. This shows how both predestination, which made Matt the leader of the country, and free will, which allows him to choose to be a just leader, both have a significant impact on shaping an individual's life. Thus, the novel demonstrates that while one is not controlled by their destiny, an individual can use the unique circumstances of their birth to make the decision to help others.



SCIENTIFIC ETHICS AND ABUSE

The medical advances in the futuristic country of Opium in *The House of the Scorpion* show the miracles science could achieve, as well as the high human costs of those miracles. In the novel, scientific advancement allows society to overcome diseases like cancer and Alzheimer's, but at the cost of the lives of clones. The country of Opium has created the most efficient workers by robbing illegal immigrants of their free will. Dictator and drug lord, El Patrón, is able to live for over 140 years thanks to medical advancements, but only at the cost of cheating and continuously fearing death. The widespread abuse of science in the Opium shows how, when one disregards the underlying ethics and human cost of progress, scientific advancements can create horrible consequences.

Opium creates clones for the sole purpose of harvesting them for organs. This allows powerful people like El Patrón to live long lives but causes great suffering and eventual death for the clones. The novel's first introduction of questionable scientific ethics happens as the scientist who grew Matt (El Patrón's clone) as an embryo wonders if he is doing the right thing by not destroying Matt's brain as a newborn. The scientist knows

this will allow Matt to be aware of his situation as a clone, living only to die later in an organ transplant. This shows that the scientist is aware of Matt's future suffering, and yet grew him as a clone anyway. When scientists choose to ignore the consequences their work might cause, they ultimately perpetuate human suffering rather than creating progress. Positioning a clone, Matt, as the protagonist of the novel allows the reader to experience the intense suffering of a victim of the future's scientific advancements. At first, Matt denies the horror of his fate, believing that because El Patrón had him educated, he must not plan on using him for organ transplants. When Matt comes to terms with his predetermined purpose, as El Patrón plans to harvest his heart, Matt feels an intense sense of hopelessness and betrayal. By giving the reader's a firsthand account of the emotional tole of the scientific process of creating clones, the reader can understand the emotional distress brought about by compromised scientific ethics. The horrors of cloning science are further detailed when Matt encounter's a clone of MacGregor, another powerful drug lord. Unlike Matt, scientists destroyed this clone's mind at birth. The narrative describes the clone's restrained, soiled body, made even worse by the sense that a life force is trapped within that body. The details highlight the cruelty of the scientific advances which knowingly created this doomed, tortured individual.

The drug lords of Opium are able to amass great wealth through the use of eejits, humans who have had computer chips placed in their brains by scientists, so that they can do nothing but follow simple orders. Matt witnesses firsthand the loss that comes with using science to rob these people of their free will. Science has completely robbed the eejits of their ability to act without orders. Eejits can't even drink water when they are dying of thirst if they have not been ordered to. The horror this scientific abuse is shown when Matt and Tam Lin pass the body of an eejit who needlessly died in the poppy fields due to dehydration. Celia, Matt's caregiver, confronts El Patrón about the cost of his use of eejits, when she speaks of the thousands of bodies buried out in the poppy fields. Here, the reader sees that while scientists created the eejits which allow El Patrón to obtain great wealth, they were only able to do so by causing the death of thousands.

El Patrón uses science to avoid his own death, but the novel details how this turns him into an unnatural being. Thus, El Patrón's use of medical advancements costs not only the lives of others, but El Patrón's own humanity. Multiple characters refer to El Patrón as a vampire or a chupacabra, a mythical creature who sucks the blood of animals. This is not only a reference to El Patrón's withered, aged appearance, but also to how his attempts to use medicine to prevent death have separated him from the natural world. These mythical creatures also live off the life force of others, emphasizing how El Patrón uses science to live off the suffering of others. After Matt escapes to Aztlán, he witnesses a Day of the Dead

celebration. When he questions how one could celebrate death, Consuela, an Aztlán native, says it's because death is a part of everyone. This argues that death is a natural part of life, and El Patrón and the scientific experiments he enforces are unethically denying the natural order by avoiding death at all costs. *The House of the Scorpion* presents a future where one could live forever and where workers labor without objection, but the narrative also presents the horrible human cost of these advancements. Science, as the novel argues, when unchecked by considerations for human suffering, can create just as many abuses as it does miracles.



LANGUAGE, LAW, AND DEHUMANIZATION

The leaders of Opium, the futuristic country in which the novel is set, use language and law to strip clones and eejits (enslaved people who have computer chips in their brains) of their humanity. Once those in power deny these groups their humanity, they can exploit their bodies for their own gain. However, both the clones (like Matt) and eejits (like the Lost Boys' parents) prove their inherent, undeniable humanity through Matt's ability to learn and create, his lack of DNA difference from humans, and the eejits' enduring human relationships. Thus, the novel argues while authority figures may try to manipulate language and law in order to rob people of their humanity, these factors can be reclaimed or overcome for the opposite purpose, showing that there is an enduring personhood in all individuals that cannot be taken away.

Authority figures like Mr. Alacrán use language to deny Matt's humanity as a clone. But Matt's beloved friends, Celia and Tam Lin, show how kinder words can acknowledge Matt's inherent worth as a person. This shows the power of language to build up or tear down one's humanity. When Matt first enters the Alacrán house, the servants and the children living there address Matt as "he" and "kid", until Mr. Alacrán enters. Mr. Alacrán knows Matt is a clone, so he calls Matt "it" and "beast" as he throws him out of the house. Mr. Alacrán's choice of words classify Matt as an animal rather than a person. This shows how language can deny an individual's dignity and personhood, allowing Mr. Alacrán and others to treat Matt as less than human. Celia and Tam Lin, by contrast, speak about Matt as a boy who is growing into a man. This language affirms Matt's personhood by acknowledging his identity, age, and gender. Because Celia and Tam Lin recognize Matt's humanity, as shown through their use of language, drives them to help Matt escape execution for being a clone. This shows how language is a key part of both affirming and denying one's human rights.

Authority figures also use the law to strip clones and eejits of their humanity, and therefore their rights, so the leaders can exploit them for their own gain. Matt learns that clones are grown inside cows, therefore making them livestock under the

law, even though there is genetically no difference between Matt and any other human. The clones being legally classified as livestock means that the Alacrás can kill them for organs. Thus, authority figures like the Alacrás use technicalities of the law so they can take away clones' rights and harvest their organs. This shows how in general, laws can be manipulated to support the dehumanization and exploitation of others. Eejits are individuals who were attempting to cross through Opium to illegally immigrate either to the United States or Aztlán, and Opium uses this crime as justification for implanting commuter chips which turn them into mindless workers. Farm Patrol is the law enforcement agency within Opium who capture the people trying to cross illegally through the country. The laws of Opium allow the illegal immigrants to be stripped of their humanity by turning them into machines. This shows how the law can be used to justify the dehumanization of those who violate it. Once dehumanized, people can be exploited for their labor. Dehumanizing laws go beyond the country of Opium in the novel. Activist Esperanza tells Matt that international law "unpersons" a clone because two versions of the same person cannot exist at the same person. Matt can only become a "person" in the legal sense after El Patrón dies. This further emphasizes how the law can take away an individual's legal personhood due to a technicality.

Despite the language and the law's attempts to dehumanize clones and eejits, throughout the novel they show an inherent humanity that cannot be erased. Despite being called a beast, Matt shows his humanity through his ability to enjoy and create music. This shows that despite what dehumanizing language one might face, they are still capable of human endeavors such as art. As Matt worries about being discriminated against in Aztlán for being a clone, Tam Lin tells him no one in Aztlán will know he's a clone, because there is a no genetic difference between a clone and a human. No one will know he's a clone unless they were previously told. This shows that law and language cannot change the humanity inherent within one's DNA. The Lost Boys and Girls, children of immigrants who were caught by Farm Patrol and turned into eejits, still long for their parents and dream of reuniting with them one day. Knowing the children miss their parents motivates Matt find a way to reverse the implantation and give the eejits their free will back. This demonstrates how human relationships, such as the bond between a child and a parent, can maintain an individual's humanity even as the law seeks to take it away. The language and laws of society in *The House of the Scorpion* attempt to rob groups like clones and illegal immigrants of their humanity. In many ways, society succeeds in denying these groups their personhood, such as when clones are killed for their organs or illegal immigrants are robbed of their free will through becoming eejits. However, signs of their inherent humanity endure these oppressions, shows that an individual can never fully be separated from their personhood.



ABUSE OF POWER AND CORRUPTION

In *The House of the Scorpion*, Matt encounters two very different systems of government: his home country of Opium, where all power is centered around one individual (El Patrón), and the orphanage in the neighboring country of Aztlán, where every individual is required to labor for the collective good of society. Despite their differences in the distribution of power, both systems are corrupt and abusive. While El Patrón exploits his family, his clones, and his workers for his own greed, the Keepers of Aztlán oppress the orphaned Lost Boys and Girls with principals they themselves do not follow. Each system shows how different types of governments can corrupt authority to exploit the most vulnerable. As Matt ascends to power as the new leader of Opium, he decides to help, rather than abuse, those beneath him. Thus, the ending of the novel offers hope that one can wield power justly if one chooses to uplift the formerly oppressed.

The country of Opium concentrates power in a highly individualistic society. Specifically, all power is held by one individual, El Patrón. He uses his power to exploit his family, clones, and workers, all in the service of his own desires, regardless of the costs to others. This shows how a centralized, authoritarian government facilitates a single corrupt leader serving his own greed. As both a leader of a country and the patriarch of a family, El Patrón dictates his family members' lives to the point of arranging the marriages of his children in order to solidify political alliances for his empire. He does not care about the opinions of those getting married, as shown by Benito being married to a woman he hates, or the kind María being married to the cruel Tom. As María herself says, all the family must listen to him because he is in charge. This shows how an individual can abuse absolute power in order to disregard the wishes of others and serve his own desires. When confronted at the end of his life with the details of all of the clones he has killed for organ transplants and the eejits he has killed to build his drug empire, El Patrón says he is owed all those lives because his siblings died young. This demonstrates how one powerful individual can create a narrative to justify their exploitation of others. The amount of lives lost to build up El Patrón and his empire shows how destructive greed can become when in the hands of a corrupt power.

Unlike the country of Opium, where all power is centered on one individual, Aztlán supposedly operates on collectivist, Marxist principals of every individual working for the common good of society. However, the Keepers, the leaders who are in charge of the orphans of illegal immigrants caught before they can make it to Aztlán, exploit the orphans, also known as the Lost Boys and Girls, by using these collective principals to justify forced labor. This shows how power can be abused in even a collectivist government, when the powerful are still allowed to oppress the vulnerable. From the moment Matt falls

into the hands of the Keepers, Keepers like Raúl berate him with slogans celebrating the collective good, such as “The orderly production of resources is vital to the general good of the people” and “work is freedom. Freedom is work. It’s hard but it’s fair.” However, Matt comes to realize the Keepers themselves do not do any actual work, as they order the Lost Boys around while living in luxury and taking large amounts of drugs. This shows that corrupt authority figures can manipulate language in order to create a system which benefits some and not others. The Keepers abuse the Lost Boys by making them work long hours of hard labor and denying them food if they fail to meet their high quotas. While the system is supposed to promote a good life for all, the Keepers oppress those who have no one to stand up for them, because they are orphans in a foreign country. This shows how corrupt authority figures can exploit even the most theoretically fair system by abusing those without power.

Matt watches both El Patrón’s individualist, authoritarian system in Opium and the Keepers’ hypocritical, collectivist system in Aztlán fall due to their own corruption. Afterward, he becomes Opium’s new leader, a position he intends to use to free the *eejits* from their slavery. This offers hope that a government can wield power without abuse or corruption, if that government decides to protect, rather than exploit, its most vulnerable groups. Matt sees both regimes of Opium and the Keepers fall due to their own corruption. Because El Patrón believed his family all belonged to him and his country should not continue after his death, he poisons every single one of his family members. The country falls in lockdown until Matt can return to it. The Keepers of Aztlán fall after the Lost Boys rebel against their cruelty and tell the rest of Aztlán about their abuses. Both these downfalls show that not only is a corrupt government highly abusive, it is unsustainable in the long run. At the end of the novel, Matt, being the clone of El Patrón, becomes the *de facto* leader of Opium after El Patrón and his entire family’s death. As Matt returns to Opium, he observes the *eejits* out in the poppy fields and decides he will free them from their constant labor and attempt to reverse the process that made them into mindless workers. This ending demonstrates how one can rule without abuse or corruption, if one remembers to protect and uplift the least powerful members of society.

When Matt returns to Opium at the end of the novel to take control as its leader, he has the potential to reinstate the authoritarian, corrupt, abusive rule of El Patrón. But Matt knows he will not make that immoral choice to exploit everyone around him for his own gain. Nor will he model the hypocritical, corrupt, exploitative rule of the Keepers. Instead, Matt intends to right the wrongs of El Patrón’s rule by freeing the enslaved *eejits*, thus showing how a government can stand above abuse of power and corruption, if it chooses to help the most disenfranchised members of society.



SYMBOLS

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



SCORPIONS

Scorpions are the emblem of the Alacrán family and represent El Patrón’s cruelty toward others, as well as the connection that exists between him and his clone, Matt. “Alacrán” means scorpion in Spanish, symbolizing the family’s poisonous, back-stabbing nature. El Patrón says that Mexico is a crowded with people as it is with scorpions. Comparing people to scorpions shows how El Patrón often reduces people to animals, so as to justify disposing of them for his own gains. El Patrón also describes himself and Matt as a pair of scorpions. This shows that he believes he and Matt share the same traits of viciousness and cruelty, like a couple of poisonous animals. Matt rejects this presumption of scorpion-like characteristics by attempting to be kind and compassionate when El Patrón is cruel and deadly. Scorpions further signify the link between Matt and El Patrón, as drawings of scorpions mark entrances to passageways that can only be opened up by El Patrón’s DNA, which Matt shares despite his rejection of his destiny as El Patrón’s clone. Thus, scorpions represent the predetermined link between Matt and El Patrón, which Matt rejects when he leaves the Alacrán mansion, decorated with an image of a scorpion, but which he also embraces when he connects his DNA to the marks of scorpions in order to open locks closed to everyone but El Patrón.



EL VIRGIN

Matt grows up with a statue of the Virgin of Guadalupe beside his bed, given to him by Celia. The statue represents Matt’s inherent kindness and morality despite the evil corruption that surrounds him throughout the story. Matt thinks about El Virgin whenever he is faced with moral conflicts. For example, when Matt is imprisoned in the room covered in chicken litter, he hoards a dove feather that he describes as soft and gentle, two virtues that El Virgin loves. He contemplates the feather after he throws a rotten orange at his bully, Tom, and will feel guilt for not acting with the same gentleness as El Virgin. In this way, El Virgin represents Matt’s consciousness and the virtues of kindness and compassion he must choose over his darker impulses in order to be a moral person unlike his original, El Patrón. Notably, two characters who encourage Matt to be kind and moral are also associated with El Virgin. Celia, who advises Matt throughout as his caretaker, brings the Virgin of Guadalupe statue with her when she immigrates to the country of Opium. Matt’s friend María, who argues that Matt has a soul and should choose to be moral so that he can go to heaven, goes to school in a convent

dedicated to the Virgin of Guadalupe. The use of El Virgin as a symbol is also ironic, because the Virgin Mary gave a miraculous birth to Jesus and Matt himself is the product of an untraditional origin, being a clone.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Atheneum Books for Young Readers edition of *The House of the Scorpion* published in 2004.

Chapter 1 Quotes

“Don’t fix that one,” said Lisa, hastily catching his arm. “It’s a Matteo Alacrán. They’re always left intact.”

Have I done you a favor? thought Eduardo as he watched the baby turn its head toward the bustling nurses in their starched, white uniforms. *Will you thank me for it later?*

Related Characters: Lisa (speaker), Matteo “El Patrón” Alacrán, Matteo “Matt” Alacrán, Eduardo

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 4

Explanation and Analysis

Eduardo, a scientist, creates a clone of the dictator, El Patrón, in a lab. He prepares to destroy the thinking capabilities of the baby, Matt, as this practice is the law for clones in the country of Opium. Addressing the baby as “a Matteo Alacrán” shows how society views Matt as only one of multiple reproductions of a person, rather than a human individual in his own right. Eduardo’s questioning of whether or not he is helping Matt by not destroying his brain shows that he is aware of the suffering that awaits Matt in the future as a clone. Yet Eduardo has created Matt, anyway, showing how a scientific establishment can willfully ignore the human suffering it causes for the sake of medical advancements. The idea that robbing a living being of their thinking capacity (and therefore their free will) protects them from their suffering is a dehumanizing attitude applied to both clones and eejits in the novel, which allows society to exploit them for the benefit of others. Matt’s movement toward the nurses in this quote highlights his humanity, and hints that he will maintain his free will to think and act despite the predetermined fate he has been assigned, which will become essential to his character as he develops throughout the novel.

Chapter 4 Quotes

“I should have known what he—*it*—was the minute I saw it. No servant would be allowed to keep a child or live away from the others. Benito told me about the situation, only I thought it was living somewhere else. In a zoo, maybe. Wherever those things are kept.”

Related Characters: Steven Alacrán (speaker), Benito Alacrán, Matteo “Matt” Alacrán

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 26

Explanation and Analysis

Steven speaks about Matt after he discovers that Matt is a clone, and not the son of one of his servants as he previously thought. Steven’s comment that he “should have known” Matt was a clone shows that society has taught him that clones are so separate from (and inferior to) humans that he should immediately be able to recognize a clone. In reality, there is no physical difference between a human and a clone. This shows how a society can construct a dehumanizing hierarchy based on the social and legal enforcement of a perceived difference, rather than on logical facts. Before Steven knew Matt is a clone, he used the pronoun, “he,” to describe him, acknowledging him as a human boy. However, now Steven adjusts his language to refer to Matt as “it” like he is an object or an animal. This shows how the society in the novel strategically uses language to dehumanize clones. Steven’s reference to clones being kept in zoos further emphasizes how society considers clones to be the same as animals.

Chapter 5 Quotes

Celia said the Virgin loved all kind and gentle things. She wouldn’t approve of throwing a rotten orange in Tom’s face, even if he deserved it. If She looked inside Matt, She would see the bad thoughts about Rosa and the doctor and be sad.

Related Characters: Willum / The Doctor, Rosa, Tom, Celia, Matteo “Matt” Alacrán

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 46

Explanation and Analysis

When Matt is imprisoned in a locked room alone, he contemplates torturing his captors, Willum and Rosa, and he throws a rotten orange at his bully, Tom. The image of the Virgin of Guadalupe frequently appears in Matt's mind when he is considered moral consequences. The connection he feels to the Virgin, who epitomizes gentle virtue, symbolizes Matt's inherent capacity to make moral decisions despite the predetermined destiny he has been given as a clone. This shows how his upbringing with the kind-hearted Celia, who gives him the statue of the Virgin, gives Matt the moral conscience needed to regret his mistakes and to attempt to improve himself in the future. This will later contrast him with the irreparably immoral El Patrón, the man who Matt is expected to emulate because he is El Patrón's clone. Matt's picturing of the Virgin becoming upset with his actions shows his central conflict as a character, wherein he struggles to choose kindness and gentleness in a generally cruel and discriminatory society.

Chapter 6 Quotes

“You can speak now, *mi vida*,” said Celia, but Matt wasn't ready to go that far.

“*Mi vida*. I like that,” the old man said with a chuckle. “I like it so much, in fact, it's what I'll call him. Can he talk?”

“I think he's in shock. [...] He's very intelligent, *mi patron*.”

“Of course. He's my clone.”

Related Characters: Matteo “El Patrón” Alacrán, Celia (speaker), Matteo “Matt” Alacrán

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 57

Explanation and Analysis

El Patrón meets his clone, Matt, for the first time, along with Matt's caregiver, Celia, after Matt has just experienced a traumatizing imprisonment. The difference in Celia and El Patrón's use of the nickname, “*mi vida*,” which means “my life” in Spanish, shows how each character relates to Matt. As the reader can see by the concern and affection in Celia's tone in this quote, caring for Matt gives her life purpose and value. El Patrón, because he identifies Matt as his clone, rather than his own individual person, views Matt as an extension of himself who can later be exploited to give El Patrón more “life” through organ transplants. So, although Celia and El Patrón refer to Matt with the same term of endearment, it is clear that Celia is motivated by

selflessness, while El Patrón is motivated by selfishness. El Patrón's comment that Matt must be intelligent because Matt is his clone further enforces how El Patrón does not see Matt as an individual—rather, he views Matt's traits as entirely predetermined by his DNA as a clone.

“Matt is to be treated with respect, just as though I were here in his place. He is to be educated, well fed, and entertained. He is not to be mistreated.” El Patrón looked directly at Tom, who flushed red. “Anyone—*anyone*—who harms Matt will be dealt with severely. Do I make myself clear?”

Related Characters: Matteo “El Patrón” Alacrán (speaker), Tom, Matteo “Matt” Alacrán

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 62-63

Explanation and Analysis

El Patrón introduces Matt to the entire Alacrán family before leaving Matt at the estate. El Patrón's demand that Matt be treated the same as him shows how he sees Matt as an extension of himself, because Matt is his clone. The clarity and authority of El Patrón's tone implies that he wields great power over the family, and how all are expected to do as he says. In this instance, Matt is somewhat privileged by his link to El Patrón as a clone, since this status allows him a level of protection and special treatment despite the discrimination he faces from general society. This quote also explains part of why Matt will love El Patrón for his entire life, even as Matt begins to realize El Patrón's cruelty toward others and toward Matt himself, because El Patrón takes a protective role over Matt in this scene. The bond between El Patrón and Matt is revealed to be quite complex. Although it was inherently cruel for El Patrón to create Matt as a clone just to harvest his organs, Matt will always feel an inherent sense of biological connection and loyalty to El Patrón due to their shared DNA and El Patrón's initial protection of him. Thus, this passage foreshadows Matt's core struggle throughout the novel to make sense of his identity and individuality separate from his role as El Patrón's clone.

Chapter 7 Quotes

☞ “I’ll tell you this: El Patrón has his good side and his bad side. [...] When he was young, he made a choice, like a tree does when it decides to grow one way or the other. He grew large and green until he shadowed over the whole forest, but most of his branches are twisted.”

Related Characters: Tam Lin (speaker), Matteo “El Patrón” Alacrán, Matteo “Matt” Alacrán

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 70

Explanation and Analysis

Tam Lin, the bodyguard of both El Patrón and Matt, explain to Matt an individual’s ability to choose to be moral or amoral. This quote is significant because Matt is often told that he does not have the free will to choose his life’s path because he is El Patrón’s clone, and therefore destined to grow up exactly like him. But Tam Lin’s advice shows Matt that because he is young, like El Patrón once was, he has a choice regarding his actions. Tam Lin’s advice establishes him as an important parental figure to Matt as he develops throughout the novel. The idea of El Patrón’s “good side and his bad side” illustrates Matt’s internal conflict moving forward, as he will struggle between committing cruel acts like El Patrón and choosing to be kind like the example Tam Lin and Celia set for him. Tam Lin’s words in general advocate for the idea that one’s choices have a greater impact on their personality than predetermined factors like DNA. This quote is also significant because characters within the Alacrán household very rarely say anything critical about El Patrón, suggesting that Tam Lin will be a divergent influence in Matt’s life.

Chapter 8 Quotes

☞ “The man we saw on the ground probably lagged behind the other workers and didn’t hear the foreman tell them to stop. He might have worked all night, getting thirstier and thirstier—”

“Stop!” shrieked Matt. He covered his ears. This was horrible! He didn’t want to know any more.

Related Characters: Matteo “Matt” Alacrán, Tam Lin (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 82

Explanation and Analysis

Tam Lin explains to Matt how all the laborers on the Alacrán’s farm are eejits (humans who have computer implants in their heads that make it so they can do nothing but follow simple orders) after Matt witnesses an eejit who died of dehydration in the Farm field. Tam Lin’s description of the eejit working himself to death shows the horror of the scientific process of turning humans into eejits, because this specific eejit did not even have enough mental faculties or free will to attend to his own needs before dying of thirst. The description shows the human cost of scientific advancements like those that created eejits. Matt’s avoidance of the subject shows not only his naiveté in his youth, but also his struggle to accept the intense injustices of his society. This avoidance will continue as Matt also contemplates the injustices of his society’s treatment of clones like himself. The fact that Tam Lin even speaks to Matt about such matters, when all other characters avoid such topics like the dehumanization of eejits, shows that he will be an important educational and moral influence as Matt matures and comes to terms with the realities of Opium.

Chapter 9 Quotes

☞ He threw himself into studying everything that came before him. Matt could name the planets, the brightest stars, and all the constellations. He memorized the names of countries, their capitals and chief exports.

He was in a rage to learn. He would excel, and then everyone would love him and forget he was a clone.

Related Characters: Matteo “Matt” Alacrán

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 91

Explanation and Analysis

As a young child, Matt focuses heavily on his academics, both because of his characteristic love of learning and because of his desire to prove that his society’s prejudices against him as a clone are incorrect. Matt’s love of acquiring knowledge is a distinctly human trait, which disproves other character’s attempts to dehumanize him, thus showing that every individual possesses an inherent, unique personhood that cannot be taken away by societal discrimination. This quote also explicitly states one of Matt’s main motivations as a character: to “excel” so much that he can overcome the discrimination he faces as a clone. This shows Matt’s belief

in his own free will over the predetermined category into which he is born. At this point in the story, Matt's desires show he still has hope for being able to control his own destiny, a goal that will be challenged as other characters deny his intelligence and his free will as a clone.

Chapter 11 Quotes

☝☝ The senator didn't know that María had kissed Matt on several occasions, just as she kissed Furball and anything else that pleased her. Matt knew this was different, though. He was humiliating her. If it had been Tom asking for the kiss, no one would have cared. People would have thought it cute for a boy to flirt with his *novia*.

Matt wasn't a boy. He was a beast.

Related Characters: Tom, Senator Mendoza, María Mendoza, Matteo "Matt" Alacrán

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 110

Explanation and Analysis

At El Patrón's birthday party, Matt demands that María kiss him even though she is angry with him. In this quote, Matt shows his capability to choose his dark, vindictive side by "humiliating" María. Notably, Matt is reacting against the dehumanizing he has internalized from his society, as shown by him referring to himself as "a beast," which echoes how many other characters (such as Tom) equate Matt with animals. Ironically, Matt's attempts to show his society he is not an animal, such as having María kiss him, lead to him acting "beastly" by being cruel to his friend. This shows how constant discrimination from society can lead one to begin to internalize and act out that dehumanization. The incident also demonstrates that, while Matt has an inherent kindness and tenderness, he is a complex individual has equal capacity to be selfish and cruel. Unlike El Patrón's ongoing assertion that Matt is predestined to be exactly like him, a ruthless dictator, in reality it is up to Matt to exercise his free will in deciding between moral and immoral behavior.

Chapter 12 Quotes

☝☝ "It's a boy," whispered María.

It was. Only first Matt thought it was some kind of beast, so alien and terrible was its face. It had doughy, unhealthy skin and red hair that struck up in bristles...Worst of all was the terrible energy that rolled through the trapped body. The creature never stopped moving. It was as though invisible snakes were rippling beneath the skin and forcing its arms and legs to move in a ceaseless bid for freedom.

Related Characters: María Mendoza (speaker), MacGregor's Clone, Matteo "Matt" Alacrán

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 119-20

Explanation and Analysis

Tom shows Matt and María the clone of drug lord, MacGregor, a clone whose brain scientists destroyed at birth. The intense description of the clone's "alien and terrible" appearance highlights the unethical nature of scientific advancement which would create such a doomed, tortured life. The constant struggling of the clone in what Matt describes as "a ceaseless bid for freedom" shows that despite science and society's attempts to rob this being of his agency and free will, a sense of humanity and a will to live persists within him. Matt referring to the clone as "it" and a "creature" within the narration shows both how Matt has internalized the dehumanizing language of his society and also sees the brain-dead clone as separate and somewhat inferior to himself, since Matt is a rare clone who maintains his thinking capacity. Matt's reaction suggests that, although he is discriminated against, he is still capable of holding the same prejudice toward individuals just like himself, and must consciously decide to overcome these attitudes.

Chapter 13 Quotes

☝☝ "Are there any others like me?" he asked.

"No. You're the only one," Celia said.

The only one! He was unique. He was special. Matt's heart swelled with pride. If he wasn't human, he might become something even better.

Related Characters: Celia, Matteo "Matt" Alacrán (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 125

Explanation and Analysis

Celia tells Matt that he is the only clone whose brain was not destroyed at birth, because El Patrón broke the law to leave Matt's brain unaltered. Matt's excitement at being "unique" shows his continued struggle throughout the novel to forge his individuality in a society that sees his identity and life path as predetermined by his status as a clone. Matt still holds onto the hope that he has control over his destiny, that he may exceed the expectations of those who view him as less than human. Matt's joy at being "unique" will later prove to be darkly ironic meaning, because after El Patrón dies, Matt learns that El Patrón preserved the brain of other clones, not just him. Thus, the very thing Matt believed made him different only aligns him more closely with El Patrón's other clones. His perception of free will and individuality in this quote turns out to be false, so he must reject his society entirely (by escaping from Opium) in order to achieve the agency he desires.

Chapter 14 Quotes

☝☝ "El Patrón thinks a person belongs to him the same way a house or car or status does," she said. "He wouldn't let that person go any more than he'd throw away money. It's why he wouldn't allow Felicia to escape. It's why he keeps everyone under his control so he can call them back in an instant."

Related Characters: Celia (speaker), Tom, Matteo "Matt" Alacrán

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 140

Explanation and Analysis

Matt asks Celia why El Patrón does not let Tom leave even though the old man hates the boy, and Celia tells him about El Patrón's possessiveness. This quote reveals two central aspects of El Patrón's character: his objectification of others and his hunger for power. El Patrón's need to control everyone, including his own family, shows how an individual can abuse authoritarian power to manipulate the lives of everyone beneath them. This quote foreshadows both El Patrón's attempt to possess Matt by harvesting organs from him, and adds complexity to Matt's struggle to forge his own individuality separate from the inherent connection he feels to El Patrón as his clone. Whereas El Patrón is willing to sacrifice everyone around him for his own personal and political gain, characters like Celia and Tam Lin sacrifice

their own interests for Matt's benefit. This explanation of El Patrón's selfishness, then, will serve as the counterpoint for the selflessness that Matt aims to embody as he matures.

Chapter 15 Quotes

☝☝ For the first time he realized what a terrible thing it was to be an eejit. He hadn't known any of the others before their operation. They were simply there to do boring jobs. But Rosa had been a real, though cruel and violent, person. Now she was merely a shadow with the life sucked out of her.

Related Characters: Rosa, Matteo "Matt" Alacrán

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 147

Explanation and Analysis

Matt orders a horse from the stables and realizes the eejit who brings it is Rosa, the woman who imprisoned and tormented him as a child. Now, because of the computer implant in her brain, Rosa can not think any thought outside of performing her simple task. Matt realizing the horror of the eejit process only after he sees Rosa shows how human relationships, even bad relationships like that between Rosa and Matt, are crucial aspects of being able to humanize people who are different or looked down upon in society. Matt's association with Rosa, then, allows him to humanize the eejits as a whole, despite the fact that his entire society attempts to rob them of their humanity. Matt's realization that it is an injustice to take away the free will of even a cruel person like Rosa suggests that agency and personhood are essential parts of the human experience, and are certainly more important than servitude and profit. This shows an important shift in Matt's character, as he shows is he able to think critically about the injustices of his society, whereas before he merely accepted the status quo. This interaction will cause Matt to contemplate how he will use his free will to challenge these injustices.

Chapter 16 Quotes

☝☝ "You don't have a soul, so you can't be baptized. All animals are like that. I think it's unfair and sometimes I don't believe it. After all, what would heaven be without birds or dogs or horses? And what about trees and flowers? They don't have souls either. Does that mean heaven looks like a parking lot?"

Related Characters: María Mendoza (speaker), Matteo

“Matt” Alacrán

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 159

Explanation and Analysis

Matt and María discuss whether or not Matt has a soul after a priest angrily throws Matt out of a funeral for his supposed link to Satan as a clone. María’s comment that “all animals are like that” shows that at this point in the novel, she still compares Matt to an animal like the rest of their society does, although she does not use this as a basis to discriminate against him. This suggests the power of language to dehumanize others, as even those who are not bigoted toward other groups can still internalize the harmful stereotypes put forth by their society. María’s series of questions, however, shows how she is beginning to question the injustices of her society, a rebellion which will eventually lead to her helping Matt escape his destiny as a clone. The conversation about whether or not Matt has a soul in general represents both characters struggling to understand Matt’s identity and humanity as a clone in a society which strives to dehumanize people like him.

Chapter 19 Quotes

☝☝ It couldn’t be! Matt pressed his hands against his temples to keep the idea inside. If he didn’t think it, it wouldn’t be real.

But it slipped through his fingers anyway. MacGregor had created a clone so he could have transplants when he needed them. The thing in the hospital had every reason to howl! And what was the source of El Patrón’s fetal implants?

Related Characters: MacGregor’s Clone, Mr. MacGregor, Matteo “El Patrón” Alacrán, Matteo “Matt” Alacrán

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 191

Explanation and Analysis

As Matt reaches puberty, he reconsiders what he has seen of clones throughout his life and comes to the realization that powerful men like El Patrón and MacGregor create clones to harvest organs from them. Notably, this quote does not present any new information to Matt or to the reader, simply reframes what has already happened within the novel. This shows how until this point, Matt has denied what he has seen of how his society treats clones, because the horror how clone’s fates is so intense. Matt’s position as

the protagonist of this story allows the reader to see directly witness the suffering caused by the scientific process from a clone’s perspective. In this sense, Farmer implores the reader to humanize Matt and empathize with his pain, allowing the reader to engage in a parallel experience of gradually understanding Matt’s identity and role in society while he is coming to terms with the same questions.

Chapter 22 Quotes

☝☝ “He’s livestock,” Steven said with a cold smile. “The law is very clear. All clones are classified as livestock because they’re grown inside cows. Cows can’t give birth to humans.”

Related Characters: Steven Alacrán (speaker), Matteo “Matt” Alacrán

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 226

Explanation and Analysis

Steven explains Matt’s legal status as “livestock” in order to justify his capturing of Matt to be used for organ transplant. Steven’s comments on the law show how an oppressive society can manipulate legal categorization to dehumanize individuals. In doing so, those in power are able to justify exploiting them. Steven also uses language to dehumanize Matt by calling him “livestock” and emphasizing the fact that he was born from a cow rather than a human mother, thus continuing the association of clones with animals that has oppressed Matt for his entire life. The reader is aware that Steven’s dehumanization of clones is false because there is no genetic difference between humans and clones, given that clones have the exact same DNA as the humans they are copied from. Thus, this quote shows how one can use law and language to deny the scientific reality of an individual’s humanity.

Chapter 23 Quotes

☝☝ “There were eight of us,” the old man cried. “We should all have grown up, but I was the only survivor. I am meant to have those lives! I am meant to have justice!”

Related Characters: Matteo “El Patrón” Alacrán (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 233

Explanation and Analysis

El Patrón retells the story of his dead siblings to Matt in order to explain why he is about to have Matt killed and harvest his organs. This quote is significant because it details El Patrón's justification for his terrible crimes of killing both clones and eejits. El Patrón's ability to greatly abuse his power is shown by the fact that he believes that because his siblings died young, he is therefore justified in killing thousands of clones and eejits. This is why El Patrón's mention of "justice" is ironic, since he is a very unjust man. The detail of "eight of us" is significant because, as the reader discovers later, Matt is the eighth clone El Patrón has created with the intent on killing for his organs. Thus, even by El Patrón's twisted logic, he is overextending himself by taking an eighth life with Matt. El Patrón's belief that he is entitled to the lives of others further emphasizes his selfishness, and highlights the grave dangers of not only dehumanizing and exploiting other people for one's own benefit, but of allowing past tragedies and lingering resentment to influence one's decisions.

Chapter 25 Quotes

☝☝ Equally, he couldn't return to the mansion. The only way out was the border of Aztlán. *You can do it*, he imagined Tam Lin saying. *I guess I have to*, thought Matt, turning to look one last time at the quiet meadow, the white plumes of bear grass, and the black-throated sparrows flitting through the trees.

Related Characters: Tam Lin, Matteo "Matt" Alacrán

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 255

Explanation and Analysis

After climbing through the mountains, Matt looks out at his home country of Opium and finally makes the decision to leave this place forever in order to survive. This quote shows Matt's ultimate exercise of his free will, as he realizes must leave Opium, therefore rejecting his predetermined destiny as a clone to be killed and have his organs harvested. His imagining of Tam Lin shows how this character is an important influence in teaching him to exercise his free will over the circumstances of his birth. His thought of "I guess I have to" shows how one must actively overcome their circumstances, rather than merely accepting the status quo, in order to survive. This thought also shows how this decision is difficult for Matt,

representing his lifelong struggle between harnessing his free will and being limited by the destiny that others have set out for him. Notably, Matt turns away from the mansion, which is a tangible representation of the society constructed to oppress him, and toward nature, the enjoyment of which has always affirmed his inherent humanity and therefore his freedom as an individual.

Chapter 28 Quotes

☝☝ "Boys, boys, boys! Hasn't anyone told you labor is shared equally among equals? If one person has to walk, everyone has to."

"You're not walking," Matt pointed out.

Related Characters: Matteo "Matt" Alacrán, Carlos (speaker), Fidelito

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 286

Explanation and Analysis

Carlos, the head Keeper at the plankton factory, responds to Matt's request that he give the young, weak Fidelito a ride back to dinner. Carlos words are indicative of the collectivist dogma that all the Keepers repeat. Notably, he uses the word "equal" twice, but as Matt points out, the situation is not equal because Carlos himself is not walking. This exposes the hypocrisy of the Keepers and exposes the reality of a government that uses a guise of equality in order to oppress and exploit people. They force the orphaned Lost Boys to do hard labor because they say every good citizen has to, yet they do not do any hard labor themselves. This quote, then, highlights the power of language to manipulate and disempower people. Even though the Keepers' rhetoric of equality appears to be the exact opposite of El Patrón's government, where all power and wealth is unequally controlled by one individual, the Keepers' hypocrisy here shows different forms of government are just as capable of abusing power to exploit the most vulnerable members of society.

Chapter 30 Quotes

☝☝ "Some boys have to learn the *hard* way. They have to be broken and mended and broken again until they learn to do what they're told. It may be simple, like sweeping a floor, but they do it eagerly to keep from being broken again. And they do it forever, for as long as they live."

"In other words, you want to turn me into a zombie," said Matt.

Related Characters: Matteo “Matt” Alacrán, Jorge (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 302

Explanation and Analysis

Jorge, a Keeper in charge of the orphans at the plankton factory, explains how he will solve Matt’s continued disobedience through beatings. Jorge’s words about boys being “broken” highlight the cruelty of the Keepers, who beat disobedient children with canes. This cruelty shows how even a collectivist government like that of the Keepers, where everyone is supposed to be treated fairly, can become abusive if authority figures decide to oppress the most vulnerable members of society, like the orphaned Lost Boys. Matt compares the Keepers to the oppressive regime of El Patrón when he says Jorge wants to turn him into a “zombie” the Lost Boys’ word for *eejits*. This shows how extremely cruel the Keepers are, as they seek to dehumanize the Lost Boys by robbing them of their free will through physical violence.

Chapter 34 Quotes

☝☝ What could he do? Where could he go? He couldn’t stay here until Jorge came back to check up on things. But he couldn’t leave Chacho behind, either. He limped back to the basin and sat on the edge. He talked and talked, sometimes exhorting Chacho to come toward his voice, sometimes only rambling on about his childhood.

Related Characters: Jorge, Chacho, Matteo “Matt” Alacrán

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 335

Explanation and Analysis

After the Keepers dump the Lost Boys in the boneyard as punishment, Matt escapes the boneyard, but Chacho remains crushed under the bones. This quote represents Matt’s maturation and progression as a character who is able to use his free will to perform compassionate acts. The two questions at the beginning of the passage, and the weighing of options (whether Matt is worse off waiting to Jorge to come back or abandoning Chacho), illustrate the moral dilemma Matt faces, where he struggles to act kindly and selflessly in a cruel society like that of the Keepers. The moral quandary references back to Matt’s struggle to

exercise his individuality and choose to be moral despite being genetically identical to the evil El Patrón. However, whereas Matt sometimes does act cruelly, here he chooses kindness by staying with Chacho and talking to him. This shows how Matt has developed into an empathetic person who chooses to help others, even at a cost to himself, reinforcing the notion that one is not doomed to conform to their DNA or the predetermined circumstances that others put forth for them.

Chapter 35 Quotes

☝☝ “How can anyone celebrate death?”

“Because it’s part of us,” Consuela said softly.

“*Mi abuelita* said I mustn’t be afraid of skeletons I carry my own around inside,” said Fidelito. “She told me to feel my ribs and make friends with them.”

“Your grandmother was very wise,” said Consuela.

Related Characters: Fidelito, Consuela, Matteo “Matt” Alacrán (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 351

Explanation and Analysis

Consuela, an Aztlán local, helps Matt and Fidelito escape the Keepers and takes them to a celebration for the Day of the Dead, a holiday where people honor their dead loved ones. Matt’s questioning shows how the idea of celebrating death is so different from the society he grew up in. Matt has spent his whole life watching El Patrón covet youth and avoid death at all costs. Consuela’s reply highlights of El Patrón’s avoidance of death is unnatural, because death is a natural part of life, and is a stark contrast to the detrimental obsession with scientific progress that is so prevalent in Opium. Fidelito’s comments show how a society that embraces the idea of death, rather than uses scientific advancements to try to eliminate death at the cost of human suffering, is a friendlier, wiser society. All of this shows how exposure to different ways of living helps Matt to realize the unethical side of scientific progress, particularly when it neglects the human costs of unnaturally extending an individual’s life.

Chapter 37 Quotes

☞ “You can’t have two versions of the same person at the same time,” Esperanza went on. “One of them—the copy—has to be declared an *unperson*. But when the original dies, the copy takes his place.”

Related Characters: Esperanza Mendoza (speaker), Matteo “Matt” Alacrán

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 367

Explanation and Analysis

The activist Esperanza explains to Matt how according to international law, he is not legally categorized as a person until the original person he was cloned from dies. This shows that the dehumanization under the law of clones is not exclusive to the country of Opium. This law, as the reader knows, presents a false reality, because Matt is human, as shown by his use of free will and the lack of any genetic difference between clones and humans. Matt is not the “same person” as El Patrón, as shown by his ability to act with kindness whereas El Patrón only ever acted in selfishness and cruelty. Thus, Esperanza’s explanation shows how the law can be used to dehumanize an individual on the basis of a false logic such as “you can’t have two versions of the same person at the same time.” The use of the term, “unperson,” shows how language can also be used to dehumanize an individual.

☞ “Matt’s human?”
“He always was,” her mother replied. “The law is a wicked fiction to make it possible to use clones for transplants. But bad law or not, we’re going to use it now. If you survive the landing, Matt, I’ll do everything in my power to make you the new reigning drug lord. [...] Only you must promise me that once you’re in control, you’ll destroy the opium empire.”

Related Characters: Esperanza Mendoza, María Mendoza (speaker), Matteo “Matt” Alacrán

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 367

Explanation and Analysis

Esperanza explains to Matt and María how now that El Patrón is dead, Matt can take over the man’s role as the leader of the country of Opium. María finally recognizing

Matt’s humanity shows how up until this point, the law has successfully dehumanized him in order to exploit him for his organs—even to the point that she and others who care about him have been conditioned to believe he is less than human. The law being a “wicked fiction” exposes how a society can construct laws with deny the reality of an individual’s inherent humanity. Esperanza’s request of Matt shows how he can use his predetermined connection to El Patrón to choose to right the wrongs of his society. This represents a shift in Matt’s continued struggle between free will and destiny, where he realizes that his conflict does not have an either/or solution—rather, an individual can use the circumstances of their birth to make their own moral and just choices.

Chapter 38 Quotes

☞ Tomorrow he would begin the task of breaking down the empire of Opium. It was a huge and terrifying job, but he wasn’t alone. He had Chacho, Fidelito, and Ton-Ton to cheer him on. He had Celia and Daft Donald to advise him and María to be everyone’s conscience.

Related Characters: María Mendoza, Daft Donald, Celia, Ton-Ton, Fidelito, Chacho, Matteo “Matt” Alacrán

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 380

Explanation and Analysis

Matt contemplates how he will undo all of El Patrón’s crimes as the new leader of the country of Opium. Matt’s decision to destroy the empire of Opium represents his final development as a character in the novel, where he has learned to use his predetermined circumstances (being the clone of El Patrón and therefore the rightful leader of Opium) in order to choose to do what is just, namely freeing the dehumanized *eejits* and ending El Patrón’s drug empire. Rather than allowing his prescribed destiny to control his life, Matt has shown that one’s circumstances can be accepted and overcome through inner strength and personal agency. The quote highlights how personal relationships are essential for Matt’s development as a moral individual, particularly when he remembers how María will be “everyone’s conscience” and how Celia and Daft Donald will advise him in doing what is just. Placing this quote at the end of the novel offers hope that Matt will be a fair and just ruler, unlike the oppressive authorities of El Patrón and the Keepers, because he remembers his personal relationships and accepts input from others.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1: IN THE BEGINNING

Eduardo, a scientist, examines 36 embryos underneath a microscope. Eduardo is in awe of all the genetic information held in such tiny human cells, how each little drop of life holds the data not only for the person's future appearance, but maybe their personal preferences as well. Eduardo watches as the cells begin to divide into two. He can relax now, knowing the cells will grow.

For reasons unclear to Eduardo, half the embryos suddenly die. He panics, wondering what will happen to his family if he fails at this task and is sent to work in the Farms. His colleague, Lisa, approaches and assures him that everything will be alright. According to her, the cells are over a hundred years old, so it's normal for only a few to survive.

Eduardo implants the remaining embryos in cows to grow. The cows live in a lab where tubes feed them, and machines exercise their muscles for them. Eduardo wonders if the cows, who all have implants in their brains, dream of being outside. All of the embryos die inside the cows except one.

Eduardo struggles to sleep at night and cries out in his sleep. His wife, Anna, asks him what is wrong, but he feels he cannot tell her that if the last embryo dies, he will be sent to the Farms, leaving his family to be turned out into the desert to die.

The one remaining embryo grows into an infant inside the cow. Eduardo watches as the infant grows legs, arms, and a face. He cannot help but feel some affection for the infant, on whom his life depends. When the baby is born, Eduardo tears up as he prepares to scramble the baby's brain. Lisa stops him, saying that the baby is "a Matteo Alacrán," meaning his brain is to be left as it is. Eduardo hands the baby over to a nurse, wondering if he has done the child any good.

Eduardo's awe at the potential of the cells shows the wonder made possible by scientific advancements. His thoughts about how the cells' information will determine personal preferences represents the view that a person's personality is predetermined by their DNA, as opposed to being gradually shaped by the decisions they make in life.



The advanced age of the cells and their fragility suggests a delicate, almost miraculous scientific process is occurring. Eduardo's anxieties over such a precarious process hint at the sinister nature of the organization he works for.



Eduardo's concern for the cows reflects the conflict he feels over the questionable scientific ethics of his society. This conflict suggests a divide between Eduardo's scientific work and his moral values.



Eduardo's inability to sleep shows that he is tormented both by the fear of punishment for his failure, and by the ethical conflicts of his work and his personal beliefs. This torment is so intense it alienates him from his personal relationships.



Eduardo's immediate connection to the baby and his resulting tears shows the intense ethical conflict he feels over his job. He questions whether or not he is justified in shepherding the baby into a life of suffering. Eduardo's tormented mindset is heightened by his knowledge that the child, since its brain is not scrambled, will be aware of this future suffering.



CHAPTER 2: THE LITTLE HOUSE IN THE POPPY FIELDS

Matt stands in front of the front door, preventing Celia from leaving. Celia scolds him for acting so childish, because he is almost six years old. Matt begs her to take him with her, but Celia insists he must hide. Matt screams, angry that he will be left alone all day. Celia pushes him away and yells at him. Matt pouts and Celia hugs him, calling him “mi vida” and telling him she’ll explain everything when he is older.

Celia leaves, promising she’ll bring Matt a present when she gets back. Matt is still angry, because the house is so lonely when she is gone. He didn’t mind being alone when he was younger, but now he looks at the wide, white poppy fields outside the window and sees children riding horses. He wants to go meet the children, because he has never met anybody but Celia and the mean doctor.

The doors and windows are locked, so Matt cannot go outside. Instead, he reads *Pedro el Conejo*, a book about an adventurous rabbit who outsmarts the evil MacGregor. Then Matt goes to eat the snacks Celia has saved him from the Big House. He goes to Celia’s room and looks at the frightening crucifix she has hanging over her bed. He plays with his stuffed animals and watches TV, but is overwhelmingly sad that neither is real.

Matt stops crying when he realizes he hears children’s voices outside. The voices wonder what this little house is out in the field, as someone tries to open the front door. Matt is suddenly afraid. The children, a boy and a girl, look inside the window and see Matt.

The boy recognizes the photograph in the house as Celia, his family’s cook. The boy and the girl debate whether or not to tell the boy’s family that their servant has a child hiding out in the poppy fields. They leave, and Matt shivers with fear over all this new contact with the outside world.

Matt decides not to tell Celia about the children, because she would get mad. She comes home that night and gives him a thrown-out coloring book and cooks him dinner. Matt asks her to tell him about the children in the Big House. He calls Celia “Mamá,” but she tells him not to call her that, because he’s only on loan to her.

The reader can see how Celia truly loves Matt by her affection actions and her language toward him. Celia calls Matt “mi vida” (“my life” in Spanish) because, as the reader will see throughout the novel, protecting and caring for Matt will give her life a purpose.



Matt’s keen observation of his surroundings shows his characteristic intelligence. Matt suffers in isolation because he can see other children doing joyful activities and is beginning to sense he is different from them, when he only wishes to fit in.



MacGregor is a rival political figure in the novel, so his inclusion in the children’s book shows how this society teaches children to align with the government from an early age. Crucifixes like the one in Celia’s room symbolize sacrifice, which will become a defining aspect of Matt’s life as he grows up.



Matt shows his humanity through his desire for human interaction. However, his fear of such contact also shows his isolation living out in the cottage with Celia.



Both the reader and Matt are exposed for the first time to the strict social hierarchy of the novel’s society, where members of the upper class like the boy can control the lives of servants like Celia.



The idea of Matt being loaned to Celia implies that his life belongs to someone other than himself. This shows how society dehumanizes him, not only by treating him as a possession of others, but also by undermining his closeness with Celia, the one person on whom he can depend.



Celia tells Matt about the children of the Big House, including Benito, who is 17 years old and a womanizer, and Steven, who is 13 and kinder than his brother. Steven spends time with Emilia, a family friend. Matt realizes Steven and Emilia are the children he saw earlier. Celia says Emilia has a younger sister, María, who is tormented by Steven's devilish little brother, Tom.

Celia's descriptions of Benito and Tom's mistreatment of others reflects the general selfishness and cruelty of the family in the Big House. The dynamics of the characters Celia describes here shows that while Matt's isolation may make him feel lonely, it may also protect him from these toxic family dynamics.



Celia is exhausted from the day, but she still carries Matt to bed and lights a candle underneath their statue of **The Virgin of Guadalupe**. She goes to bed, while Matt practices how he'll invite Steven and Emilia to play with him when they come again tomorrow.

Celia has created a loving and safe environment for Matt, as highlighted by the saintly icon she has watch over his bedside. The presence of El Virgin, a Catholic symbol of virtue, kindness, and maternalism, is a stark contrast to the cruelty in the Big House that Cecelia has described to Matt.



CHAPTER 3: PROPERTY OF THE ALACRÁN ESTATE

The next morning, Celia leaves for work and Matt waits for the children. Steven and Emilia arrive with Emilia's little sister, María. María excitedly asks Matt if he wants to play. Matt is too stunned to speak. He tries to open the door, but it's locked. Fearing the children will leave, he shows them a funny picture he has on his wall. When María does not understand the joke, Steven calls her an *eejit*.

María shows her characteristic friendliness and excitability in her introduction. Matt's desperation to belong among the children continues as he tries to entertain them with a joke, but it is clear from their reactions that he is somehow different from them. Steven's use of the word "eejit" as an insult shows that the children associate this term with stupidity.



Steven and Emilia begin to walk away, leaving María behind. Matt fears for María being left out alone in the dark, so he breaks open the window with a cooking pot. Steven and Emilia come running back. Matt tells them his name and repeatedly asks them if they want to play. Emilia and Steven begin to leave again, so Matt crawls out through the window, cutting himself on the broken glass and passing out from the pain.

Matt risks getting in trouble with Celia when he breaks the window to protect María, demonstrating that, despite his unfamiliarity with others, he can feel self-sacrificial empathy for a stranger. His reckless act of crawling over glass, as well as his repetition of his request to play, highlights how desperate he is to be accepted by his peers and to escape his isolation.



Matt wakes up to Steven and Emilia carrying him through the poppy fields, with María running behind them. Matt screams because he has never experienced pain like his cuts before. The children carry him to a house with many pillars, statues, and doorways. A carved outline of a **scorpion** sits above the central arch of the house.

Matt's new experience of pain symbolizes the fact that he has now left the safe, sheltered environment he has always known. The detailed description of the Big House's grandeur suggests the materialism and wealthy status of those who live inside it.



Maids help the children bring Matt inside the house, thinking he is Celia's secret son. One maid, named Rosa, begins picking the glass out of his hands and feet. Matt is too dizzy to cry or scream. María notices that Matt has writing branded on his foot which reads "Property of the Alacrán Estate." Suddenly, Steven's father, Mr. Alacrán, appears and begins yelling at everyone to get the animal out of the house. He whispers something to Rosa, who hurriedly picks Matt up and dumps him on the front lawn of the house.

CHAPTER 4: MARÍA

All alone outside, Matt looks up at the starry night sky. He prays for Celia to come get him. He realizes Steven, Emilia, and María are watching him. Steven explains to Emilia that Matt, whom he addresses now as "it," is a clone. Emilia wonders why Matt's brain isn't destroyed like other clones. Steven explains that El Patrón wants Matt to grow up like a normal human, even though clones aren't people.

María asks what a clone is, and Emilia answers, "a bad animal." Mr. Alacrán and the doctor come outside. The doctor scolds Mr. Alacrán for abandoning Matt out on the lawn. They order Rosa to take Matt to the servant's quarters and order Steven, Emilia, and María to go wash themselves and stay away from Matt.

The doctor orders Rosa to hold Matt down, despite Rosa's protests about having to touch a clone. Matt feels suffocated as the doctor removes the rest of the glass. When the doctor is done, Mr. Alacrán suggests they take Matt back to Celia's house. The doctor says they can't now that the children have seen Matt. Instead, they lock Matt in the servant's room. Rosa gives him a bucket and newspapers and tells him Celia isn't allowed to see him anymore.

Terrified of going to bed without Celia, Matt cries. Then he remembers that **The Virgin** is watching over him and feels comforted enough to sleep. He wakes up when María enters the room. She feeds him dinner by hand, as long as he promises not to bite her, and they sit and talk about movies and stories of monsters. Matt is dizzily grateful to receive so much attention from María. He tells her about the *chupacabra*, a monster who sucks blood from goats.

Matt's label as "property" suggests that whoever branded him with this writing considers him an object which can be owned by the Alacrán family. Mr. Alacrán further dehumanizes Matt by calling him an animal, which allows both Mr. Alacrán and Rosa to justify treating Matt as less than human when they throw this injured child out on the lawn.



By calling Matt "it," instead of "he" as he did before, Steven shows that, now that he knows Matt is a clone, he will use language which dehumanizes him. Steven also explicitly states Matt's legal and social standing in society when he says clones are not considered people.



Emilia's dehumanization of Matt as an animal contrasts with her initial friendliness and curiosity toward him as a peer. Mr. Alacrán shows the intensity of his discrimination against clones by ordering the children to wash after touching Matt, as he believes clones are inherently dirty. Through both of these reactions toward Matt, it is clear that clones like himself are considered to be a subhuman underclass in their society.



Rosa saw nothing wrong with touching Matt until she finds out he is a clone, showing that the difference between humans and clones is more of a social label than an inherent quality one would instinctively recognize. Rosa giving Matt a bucket and newspapers, instead of access to a bathroom, further shows how she now views him as less than human.



María demonstrates her characteristic compassion when, even though all the other characters reject Matt, she brings Matt dinner and spends time with him. Matt's disorientating level of happiness at her attention shows how he is still desperate to belong among his peers and to receive the approval of others, despite their mistreatment of him.



Matt likes María more than any of the other people of the Big House because she is little like him, and doesn't insult him like the others. He doesn't know what a clone is, but he can tell from the way others talk that a clone is a bad thing. He hopes María doesn't also turn against him for being a clone. He enjoys telling her stories that capture her attention. He tells her about La Llorona, a dead woman who wanders the Earth looking for her children, whom she murdered herself. María becomes scared and starts crying. She is too scared to leave the room, so she snuggles up to Matt in the bed.

Matt lies awake and wonders about all he has seen and heard that day. He wonders why the others called him an animal and why he has writing on his foot. He used to think that everyone had a tattoo like him, but now he knows that's not the case. María begins to have a nightmare and calls out for her mother.

María thrashes in her sleep. Matt gets up to pee in the bucket, but María rolls over and, startled, he tips the bucket over. Rosa comes running in. She scolds María and sends her out. Rosa then insults Matt for peeing on the floor like an animal.

CHAPTER 5: PRISON

Rosa tells Matt that María has gone home and is never coming back. The doctor comes every day to check Matt's wounds. The doctor treats Matt coldly but gets along well with Rosa. The doctor tells Rosa that El Patrón hasn't asked about Matt in years, not because El Patrón doesn't care, but because he has become senile in his old age. Matt can tell both Rosa and the doctor are afraid of El Patrón. Matt knows he is El Patrón's clone, but he doesn't understand what that means.

Rosa and the doctor leave the room and lock the door. Outside the room's one barred window, Matt can see a wall and a little piece of a garden. He looks out at and appreciates the small bit of sky he can see. His foot has now healed into a scar, disrupting the sentence, "Property of the Alacrán Estate."

Matt's fear of negative attitudes about clones, beliefs he doesn't even understand, shows the harm by caused other character's discrimination. María, being innocent and pure of heart, does not hold these beliefs and clearly does not fear touching Matt like the other characters do. The myth of La Llorona, a mother separated from her children, references Matt's own separation from the safe, motherly figure of Celia.



Though isolation caused loneliness, it also prevented Matt from being aware of his difference from his peers. María's nightmares suggest she, like Matt, has experienced loss and suffering.



Rosa expects Matt to act like an animal, and therefore assumes he is not potty-trained, showing how her discrimination against clones is self-confirming.



The loss of María is especially devastating for Matt because she is the only one in this new environment who treated him as an equal. Though the doctor's job is to provide care, his coldness suggests the larger indifference of the medical establishment to Matt's suffering. Rosa and the doctor's fear of El Patrón implies that there is something sinister about this mysterious man.



Matt's appreciation of nature brings him comfort and joy despite his demoralizing conditions. The disruption of the stamp of ownership on Matt's foot is symbolic of his newfound awareness that he is a clone, and foreshadows a future disruption in Matt's status as property.



One day, Rosa and the doctor are arguing because the doctor is leaving to care for El Patrón. Rosa begs to come with him, but he leaves without her. Rosa screams and pulls Matt's hair. She threatens to kill Matt if he doesn't obey her. She takes his bed and his waste bucket away from him, so he must sleep and relieve himself on the floor. From then on, Rosa ignores him whenever she brings in food. Matt longs for the days when he at least had stuffed animals with which he could talk.

Matt cries as he eats the bland food Rosa brings him, missing Celia's cooking. As days pass, Matt desperately tries to speak with Rosa, but she continues to ignore him. After the bare room begins to smell, Rosa has the idea to fill the room with sawdust like a henhouse. Matt is happy to at least have something different in his small world. He plays in the sawdust until he becomes bored.

The doctor eventually returns and scolds Rosa for filling up the room with sawdust. He doesn't care about Matt's happiness, only his health. Rosa says the sawdust is fine because it keeps other livestock clean. The doctor agrees that Matt is healthy, but he wonders why Matt no longer speaks. Matt decides not to say anything because he worries about making Rosa or the doctor angry.

Matt spends his boring days staring out the window and dreaming of Celia's house. He realizes Celia has probably forgotten about him, and it becomes too painful for him to think about her anymore. He tries to entertain himself by hiding food in order to attract bugs. One day, a dove appears at the window and leaves a feather, which Matt treasures. He sings songs to himself in his head.

One day, a red-headed boy appears at the window and calls Matt ugly. Matt realizes this boy is the evil little boy of the Big House known as Tom. Tom tells Matt to do something interesting so he can report it back to María. Matt flinches when he remembers María. Tom calls Matt a stupid clone who's too dumb to talk. Matt throws a worm-infested orange at Tom's face, and Tom runs away.

Rosa further dehumanizes Matt by worsening the conditions in which he must live. Her view of him as inhuman allows her to abuse him, even though he is just a small, innocent child. Her cruel treatment serves as a foil to the incredible selfless love Celia has shown for him. Matt's desire for human interaction amidst all of this mistreatment shows his suffering in isolation, and refutes the misconception that he is fundamentally different from the people around him.



Rosa constructs Matt's environment like a chicken pen to further enforce the idea that he is an animal and not a human. Matt resists this dehumanization by displaying the human traits of imagination and playfulness, but the misery of his isolation persists.



The doctor is indifferent to Matt's emotional distress, showing his singular focus on his job and his view of Matt as merely a specimen, rather than a complex individual. Rosa's classification of Matt as livestock shows how her language and actions intend to turn him into an animal. Matt's decision to suppress his own speech represents how his own language and personal agency have been lost in his imprisonment.



Matt still longs for love and connection like he experienced with Celia. The comfort Matt takes in both nature, as shown by his pet bugs, and music, as shown by his singing, highlights his attempts to appreciate beauty in order to cope with the isolation and abuse he suffers.



Tom demonstrates his characteristic cruelty that Celia warned Matt about, which is particularly mean-spirited considering Matt is completely powerless. Matt fighting back against Tom shows how, despite the extreme abuse he has suffered and the lack of control he has over his own life, he is still able to use his free will to defend himself. This also shows that he has the capacity to hurt others, just as they hurt him.



Matt feels at peace again, alone in his little world. He has hidden pieces of food in the sawdust to use as toys. He fantasizes about imprisoning Rosa and the doctor. Matt holds the dove feather and remembers how Celia said that **El Virgin** loved gentle things like this. He realizes the Virgin wouldn't like that he thinks dark thoughts about Rosa and the doctor, or that he threw a rotten orange at Tom.

Tom comes back to the window with a peashooter and shoots at Matt's bare skin. Matt runs around and cowers in the corner until Tom gets bored and leaves. When Matt looks up, he realizes his sawdust kingdom is all messed up. He begins to rearrange the sawdust. When he looks up, Celia and María are at the window. Celia sticks her hands through the window and begs him to come and talk to her. But Matt believe if he moves, his dreams of seeing Celia and María will turn into a nightmare. Celia cries, but María assures her that Matt is just traumatized and will get over it soon.

Celia tells María that there's only one person who can save Matt. Celia will give María a letter to take to her father. Celia assures Matt that she'll save him now that she knows where he is. After Celia and María leave, Matt is grateful to be left alone again in his sawdust kingdom.

CHAPTER 6: EL PATRÓN

Matt wakes up to Rosa shouting at him. She takes him to a bathroom and furiously cleans him. She cuts his hair and dresses him in clean clothes. According to her, he's about to meet the doctor and some important people, and he shouldn't say anything about her or else she'll kill him. Matt obeys because he still fears her. She walks him through the house. He sees the brightly painted walls and polished floors and windows which look out onto fountains and gardens.

Matt and Rosa stop in a big room with a luxurious carpet and a table set with tea and cookies. An aged, frail man, addressed as El Patrón, sits at the table and calls out to Matt. Celia appears in the room and tells El Patrón about Rosa and Tom's mistreatment of Matt. Rosa denies this. El Patrón calls for the doctor.

Matt worries about his immoral actions or thoughts show his internal struggle to be kind, as Celia taught him to be, in the face of abuse and cruelty from people like Rosa and Tom. El Virgin represents Matt's capacity for good, as he struggles with his own conscience to make sense of what is right and what is wrong.



The depth of Rosa and the doctor's abuse is shown by Matt's continued fear, even when something positive happens to him, like seeing Celia and María. María shows her emotional intelligence despite her youth and innocence by advising Celia when she is upset. Celia and María's continued concern for Matt shows that their love withstands the separation forced upon him by Rosa and the Alacrán family. Their kind treatment serves as a positive example for Matt that starkly contrasts the inhumane abuse to which he has been subjected.



Celia's plan to save Matt hints at her ability to manipulate the larger power system in her society in order to protect her loved one. Matt's happiness to be alone shows how he has embraced his isolation as a means of coping despite his deep-rooted desire for closeness with others.



Rosa's threats show that she fears punishment from someone for how she has treated Matt. Her continued influence over Matt, even when he leaves the prison, shows the lasting trauma of her abuse of him. The luxurious decorations of the house contrast with the squalid conditions Matt has lived in within the same building, emphasizing the fact that his inhumane treatment is very much intentional.



Celia continues to show her love for Matt by advocating for him when he cannot advocate for himself, and her appeals to El Patrón suggest that the man is powerful enough to help Matt despite how old and sickly he looks.



The doctor comes and determines that Matt is malnourished and has a rash from the sawdust. Rosa says that the doctor knew about the sawdust, but the doctor denies this. Rosa attacks the doctor before two bodyguards drag her out of the room. El Patrón is amused by all the commotion. Matt decides that he likes El Patrón because the old man's face looks instinctually familiar, somehow.

This time, when El Patrón invites Matt forward, he obeys. El Patrón marvels at how young Matt looks and decides he will call Matt "mi vida", just like Celia does. Matt still won't speak, but Celia tells El Patrón that the boy is actually intelligent. El Patrón replies that of course Matt is smart, because he's his clone.

Celia and the doctor leave, and Matt and El Patrón have dinner together. El Patrón tells Matt about his childhood in the country of Aztlán, which used to be called Mexico. According to him, people from his hometown of Durango were called **scorpions** or *alcránes*. El Patrón then recounts how his siblings all died in childhood. Eventually, El Patrón falls asleep. Matt is worried he will have to go back his prison, but Celia takes him to her new apartment in the Big House.

A few days later, María tries to provoke Matt into talking to her. She tells Matt that El Patrón is leaving that day, and everyone in the house needs to say goodbye. Celia comes in and snuggles Matt. She takes him to the front entrance of the house, which is flanked by white pillars and giant statues of fat, winged babies.

Matt sees all of the Alacrán family and all their servants lined up outside the house. He becomes angry when he sees María holding hands with Tom. El Patrón sits in a wheelchair between his bodyguards. He invites Matt approach. He then tells the doctor to lead him around and introduce him to the entire family.

The doctor introduces Matt to Mr. Alacrán, who was the man who threw Matt onto the lawn the first night he came to the Big House. Matt meets Felicia, a sickly woman who is Mr. Alacrán's wife, and a very old man who is Mr. Alacrán's father. Matt can tell that none of them are happy to meet him, but they all act politely toward him because they are afraid of El Patrón.

The doctor's denial of Rosa, whom he previously appeared fond of, shows his selfish, calculating nature. El Patrón's enjoyment of the chaos and violence of the scene suggests an underlying wicked nature despite Matt's positive instinct about him. Matt's automatic affinity for El Patrón suggests an inherent connection and kinship between the two characters.



El Patrón's demonstrates a clear fondness for Matt, as shown by his appropriation of the "mi vida" nickname. El Patrón's comments on Matt's intelligence shows that the old man recognizes and takes pride in the similarities between himself and Matt.



El Patrón's recounting of his impoverished, tragic childhood within moments of meeting Matt suggests the importance of these memories to his character. The dramatic change of environment between Rosa's prison and Celia's new apartment after El Patrón's introduction to Matt suggests the old man's power to change an individual's life—for better or worse.



Matt's continued inability to speak shows the lasting trauma of the prejudiced abuse he has experienced. The winged baby statues in front of the house suggest an obsession with or fetishization of youth, which is significant considering El Patrón's feeble state as an elderly man.



The presence of all the household suggests the intense reverence all the family and servants feel toward El Patrón—whether genuine or forced. El Patrón's instruction for Matt to be introduced to the family implies that he wishes Matt to also be held in reverence, perhaps because he views his clone as an extension of himself.



Mr. Alacrán's politeness contrasts with his cruelty toward Matt when they first met, showing the domineering influence that El Patrón's opinions have on everyone else in the Big House. El Patrón's intimidation of the family is so strong that even Matt, a child and an outsider to this society, can perceive it.



El Patrón makes a speech to the whole family in which he says that Matt is most important person in his life and should always be treated with respect, just as they would treat El Patrón with respect. He declares Matt is to be educated and well-treated. He then asks Matt to pick one of his bodyguards to stay behind and protect him. The bodyguards are both burly, rough-looking men from Scotland because, El Patrón says, one should always pick his bodyguards from another country. Their names are Daft Donald and Tam Lin.

Matt picks Tam Lin to be his bodyguard because he sees a hint of friendliness in his eyes. El Patrón says goodbye to him and leaves. Afterward, all the family members and servants, except for María, ignore Matt as they leave. Soon only Celia and Tam Lin are left with Matt.

El Patrón appears to care deeply for Matt, as shown by his declaration that Matt is the most important person in his life and his promise to give Matt special privileges. Additionally, El Patrón's comment about selecting bodyguards from other countries suggests the old man is involved in some form of international socio-political conflict.



The look in Tam Lin's eyes offers hope for a friendship between the him and Matt. By contrast, the family's indifference toward Matt proves that their respect for him is only a false display for El Patrón, implying that their reverence for the old man is performative, rather than genuine.



CHAPTER 7: TEACHER

Matt doesn't like leaving Celia's apartment, but does so when María and Celia persuade him to do so. The servants, Steven, and Emilia all turn away from him when they see him. Matt also doesn't like to see Tom, who often tease María until she cries. One day, Tom follows María to Celia's apartment. Tom tears the ear off one of Matt's stuffed animals, inciting Matt to hit him. The boys tussle until Tam Lin breaks them up. Tom calmly apologizes. Matt is still angry, and makes María and Tom leave.

Tam Lin spends his days sitting with a newspaper in the apartment while Celia and María attempt to get Matt interested in playing or eating. The doctor often visits because Matt has developed a cough. One night, Matt wakes up and cannot breathe, until Tam Lin slaps his back and makes him cough up a wad of mucus. Afterward, Matt enjoys watching Celia and María panic when he coughs because it makes him feel cared for.

María announces that she must leave for school. Matt, sad to lose his friend, ignores her, which upsets María. After she leaves, Tam Lin tells Matt he should have been nicer to her. He explains that he's been observing Matt and has determined that Matt is exactly like El Patrón. El Patrón, according to Tam Lin, has a good side and a bad side. When El Patrón was young, he chose to favor the bad side. Tam Lin informs Matt that he is still young, so he must choose to be kind now, so that he grows into kind man.

Tom shows his dual nature as both aggressive and violent, and calm and calculating. Matt's continued display of unfiltered anger shows that he is more genuine than Tom about his true feelings. However, genuineness is not valued in this society, as shown by the fact that Matt's anger separates him from his friend, María.



Matt's enjoyment of Celia and María's concern shows his continued desire for the attention of others. Matt's exploitation of Celia and María's worry, however, suggests that Matt has a tendency toward selfishness, and indulges his darker impulses to have others serve him. This likely stems from the lack of care he suffered during his imprisonment under Rosa, and the fact that he's never had a model of what a healthy, caring relationship looks like.



Tam Lin's statement shows that he believes Matt has control over his moral development. His words also suggest that good and bad are not traits one inherently possesses, but instead are moral codes one cultivates through practice. This notion contrasts with the viewpoint of Eduardo (the scientist who created Matt), who believed that the clones' inner makeup and personality were determined in utero. Tam Lin's advice empowers Matt to determine what kind of person he becomes in the future, rather than resigning himself to society's expectations.



All the other children of the house have left for school except Matt. Matt examines himself in the mirror and wonders how he is so different from everyone else if he looks like a child on the outside. He thinks about how the doctor once said that clones fall apart when they get older.

Matt's new teacher, who just goes by Teacher, arrives at the apartment. She speaks with a cheery voice and has an odd laugh. Teacher makes Matt copy letters and color in pictures all day, until Tam Lin says Matt needs a break. The rest of the day, Teacher has Matt count objects over and over again. She keeps telling Matt that his mother will be proud of him, even though Tam Lin already told her Matt is an orphan. Tam Lin later remarks that Teacher is very strange.

The next day, and all the following days, Teacher has Matt repeat the exact same activities. Matt becomes so frustrated that he yells at Teacher and throws her supplies around the room. Teacher cowers and whimpers. Tam Lin comes in and comforts her. Matt calms down when he realizes he can talk again. Matt tells Tam Lin that Teacher is an *eejit*. Tam Lin says Matt doesn't really understand what that means, and suggests he and Matt go on a picnic.

CHAPTER 8: THE EEJIT IN THE DRY FIELD

Matt and Tam Lin ride a horse, just like the *bandidos* in the cowboy TV shows Matt likes to watch. Matt talks excitedly about all the nature he sees as he and Tam Lin ride through the poppy fields around the Big House. The poppy flowers are as tall as the belly of the horse and then the petals fall away to reveal seedpods. Matt sees the Farm laborers slashing the pods with knives. Tam Lin explains that the laborers do this to release the opium.

Matt sees that the laborers don't speak or wipe away sweat from their faces. Matt spots a man lying on the ground. Tam Lin inspects the man, then keeps riding away with Matt. Matt begs Tam Lin to go back and help the man until Tam Lin shouts at him and explains that the man died either from the heat or dehydration.

Matt's continued feelings of loneliness and isolation highlight how he perceives difference between him and his peers, but wishes to resist this difference and belong among the other children instead of accepting his subjugated position in society.



The teacher's identification solely as "Teacher" suggests that she does not have an individual identity beyond the societal function she serves. Her constant repetition of activities and social mistakes suggest that something is deeply wrong with her thought process, which Tam Lin, as a foreign outsider, immediately perceives.



*By comforting Teacher, Tam Lin shows his characteristic compassion. Teacher's breakdown further emphasizes her strangeness. Matt's use of the word *eejit*, a word he does not know the meaning of, shows how he has internalized the insulting context of the term used by the other children.*



Matt's love of cowboy television shows demonstrate his childish innocence and his desire for exploration beyond the confines of his isolation. Tam Lin's explanation of the Farm laborers releasing opium shows his desire to help Matt understand the larger context of the society into which Matt has been born. Whereas others have only been interested in keeping Matt captive and ignorant, Tam Lin clearly wants to open the young boy's mind and encourage him to think for himself.



The laborers inability to swipe the sweat from their faces and the man's death from heat or dehydration suggests that for some reason, these individuals are unable to act in their own interest.



Tam Lin and Matt come to a range of hills and stop underneath a cliff. The horse doesn't drink water until Tam Lin orders it too. Tam Lin tells Matt that it's a Safe Horse, meaning it will neither leave the Farm nor do any action unless told to.

Tam Lin's explanation of the Safe Horse shows that this animal cannot act in its own interest, relating the animal to the laborers Matt observed in the previous scene. The lack of agency these people and animals have over themselves suggests that Matt is far from the only member of this society who is thoroughly and inhumanely controlled.



Tam Lin and Matt walk up the hills alone. They climb a boulder and find an oasis with a pond and trees. Tam Lin explains that no one else knows about the oasis and Matt must keep it a secret. Tam Lin says he wants to teach Matt important information, because he's a clone and has no parents to tell him such things.

The natural landscape of the oasis contrast with the artificial nature of the manmade poppy fields. Tam Lin's shared secret with Matt suggests that both characters are beginning to diverge from the rest of their society.



Matt asks if he is a machine. Tam Lin explains that scientists took a piece of El Patrón's skin and grew it into an exact copy of the old man. Matt is this copy. Thus, according to Tam Lin, Matt is like a photograph. He tells Matt that because he is a clone and therefore different, many people will hate him. But some people, like María and Celia, will still love him.

As an outsider (being a foreigner from Scotland), Tam Lin is able to be honest with Matt unlike anyone else in his life. His words encourage Matt to prioritize genuine relationships, like Celia and María's love, over shallow societal approval.



Tam Lin says no human teachers will consent to teaching a clone, so El Patrón assigned an eejit to Matt. An eejit, Tam Lin explains, is someone who has a computer chip implanted in their head, making it so they can only perform simple tasks. Matt realizes the Farm laborers are all eejits. Tam Lin explains that the Farm's overseer forgot the man in the field, causing the laborer to work until he died.

The scientific process of implanting computer chips robs the eejits of all free will. The fact that Tam Lin (a foreigner in the secretive location of the oasis) is the one to inform Matt of this process suggests the corrupt and sinister nature of mainstream society.



Tam Lin and Matt spend the rest of the day exploring the environment. Tam Lin teaches how to identify different parts of nature. They leave through the now empty fields. Matt realizes that Teacher is, in fact, an eejit.

Tam Lin's expansion of Matt's knowledge in the freedom of nature contrasts with the Teacher's limited lessons, and suggests that Matt (unlike other subjugated members of society) still has the capacity to choose between what has been predestined for him, and what he truly desires. Matt's newfound understanding of the eejits contrasts with how he used the term as an insult before Tam Lin expanded his perspective—the eejits are not inherently bad or stupid, they have been unjustly robbed of their ability to think and act for themselves.



CHAPTER 9: THE SECRET PASSAGE

Matt continues his education through video learning. Though his life is pleasant, he feels hollow, because he knows he is "only a photograph of a human." He constantly dreams of the eejit man in the field dying of thirst.

Matt's distress over the idea that he is a copy of a human and his observation of the dead eejit man shows how knowledge can increase one's suffering, rather than alleviate it.



María comes to visit him and brings her beloved dog, Furball. Matt hates how often she compares him to the nervous little beast. When Tom visits, he and Matt often fight. Only Tom is punished for these fights, which Matt resents, and Furball is never disciplined either.

María's comparison of Matt and Furball shows the contradictory perspective of her character, where she cares for Matt but still views him as an inferior animal. But Matt's frustrations and will to fight show that he is emotionally complex and capable of moral choices, unlike an animal.



When he's alone, Matt entertains himself by wandering around the house. He hides and listens while Felicia ferociously plays the piano in the afternoons. She plays until she is exhausted, and the servants bring her a drink.

Felicia's passionate playing and her constant drinking are likely coping mechanisms for the intense suffering she experiences living under El Patrón's authority. This suggests that although she is not a clone like Matt, she is in some way oppressed.



One day, when Matt is alone in the room with the piano, he considers touching the keys. When he hears voices in the hallway, he runs into the nearest closet to hide. Inside, he finds a switch and flips it. A wall in the closet moves and reveals an empty passageway. Matt flips the switch again and the wall closes back in place. Matt leaves the closet, vowing to keep the secret of the passageway all to himself.

Matt's curiosity toward the piano suggests an inherent human need to create art. The presence of the hidden passageway hints at the sinister secretive nature of the house and whoever created it. Matt's decision to keep the passage a secret shows how he is beginning to understand the complexities of his society, and exercise his individual autonomy rather than bending to others' rules.



Later, Matt slowly begins to explore the passage. Inside, he finds peepholes to empty rooms throughout the house, as well as into more dark closets. One day, he enters one of the other closets. In the next room, the doctor and Mr. Alacrán are imploring Mr. Alacrán's father to use chemotherapy or get a liver transplant. Mr. Alacrán's father says God is calling him. Matt is afraid he'll get in trouble for eavesdropping and leaves.

The peepholes hint at the presence of an individual who wishes to observe others without their consent. Mr. Alacrán and the doctor's insistence on medical intervention suggests the high value they place upon science. The father's religious objections to medical treatment show how one's moral codes can come into conflict with the scientific advancements of society.



One day, Matt is hiding and listening to Felicia play when the doctor enters. Felicia complains to him and the doctor offers her an injection. He gives her the shot and then carries her away when she falls asleep. Once they are gone, Matt moves forward and presses a key on the piano. After this, Matt begins to play the piano whenever no one else is around. The music brings him joy and allows him to forget for a while that he is a clone.

The doctor's encouragement of Felicia to use an injection to sooth her discontent shows another abuse of the medical establish, to use drugs to avoid dealing with an individual's complaints. Matt's enjoyment of music shows how he is beginning to develop his own identity apart from the oppression he feels as a clone.



Tam Lin discovers Matt playing one day. He says this must mean that El Patrón is musical too, he just never had the time to try playing an instrument. Tam Lin attempts to hire a music teacher for Matt, but the only person he can find is a deaf musician, Mr. Ortega. Soon, Matt is as proficient at music as he is many other academic subjects. Matt hopes that if he learns enough, everyone will forget he is a clone.

Matt's unique accomplishments are still attributed to his link to El Patrón. Matt's hopes that he can overcome society's prejudices against him as a clone show his desire to take control of his life, rather than to live in El Patrón's shadow. These hopes demonstrate his faith in his ability to change his circumstances.



CHAPTER 10: A CAT WITH NINE LIVES

María comes to Matt's room and scolds him for hiding in his den like an animal when it's El Patrón's birthday. Matt hates to see how frail El Patrón is because he loves the old man. Recently, all El Patrón says is, "Am I dead yet?" Celia gets Matt ready for the party and tells him if anything goes wrong tonight, he should come to her immediately.

Matt accompanies María to her room because she wants to bring Furball to the party. But Tom is already in María's room and Furball is missing. The three of them search all over the room but cannot find the dog. Finally, Matt hears whimpering from the bathroom and finds Furball underneath the toilet lid. Matt knows Tom tried to drown the dog, but as usual, Tom acts innocent. Matt knows there's nothing he can do to punish Tom since he himself is just a clone, but he also hopes tonight might be different.

El Patrón's birthday is also a celebration of Matt. Everyone, even Tom, has to be nice for him. The lawn is lavishly decorated for the party with a table set with gold and silver. Outside, there is a stack of presents for El Patrón. Politicians, actors, generals, and the Farmers (the aristocrats of the country) attend the party. Matt sees a red-haired man, who María tells him is the powerful Farmer, Mr. MacGregor.

To the party's delight and surprise, El Patrón walks in, no longer in a wheelchair. Matt hears someone call El Patrón a vampire. Having made his entrance, El Patrón sits down in a wheelchair beside Mr. MacGregor. He welcomes everyone to his 143rd birthday party. He then awards \$1 million checks to the doctors who helped him walk again. He calls Matt to come stand by him.

El Patrón tells the crowd of guests about how, on one Cinco de Mayo as a child, he and his family attended a parade. The mayor threw coins at the poor townspeople to watch them scramble. After the parade, the ranchero who owned their land held a big feast for the poor, where El Patrón's little sisters caught typhoid and later died. In the following years, all of El Patrón's brothers also died young, leaving El Patrón the only one of his siblings still alive today.

El Patrón's repetition of "Am I dead yet?" shows his fear of death, which increases with his deteriorating mental faculties. This explains why there are elaborate statues of babies outside of the Big House—El Patrón is seemingly obsessed with youth and his own mortality. Meanwhile, Celia's warning to Matt hints that she is aware of something sinister that may happen at the party.



Matt's frustration over his inability to accuse Tom shows Matt's increasing conflict with his independent desires and his oppressed status as a clone. Matt's hope for the night of the birthday party, however, suggests that he has plans to challenge the power dynamic that considers him beneath such an immoral person as Tom.



The description of the expensive party decorations and the famous and powerful guests shows both El Patrón's wealth and his political power. Matt's inclusion in the party is an example of how El Patrón expects others to treat Matt well—not because Matt is an individual who is worthy of respect, but because he is an extension of El Patrón himself.



El Patrón's regained ability to walk, thanks to the doctors he rewards, shows the almost miraculous accomplishments he is able to make with medical advancements. Yet the accusation of El Patrón being a vampire suggests there is something unnatural and monstrous about his efforts to cheat the aging process.



The mayor throwing coins to the poor shows how the powerful can use their status to abuse the oppressed. Both the wealth of the mayor and the rancher show the intense inequality under which El Patrón grew up. El Patrón wields the narrative of his childhood tragedies to highlight the accomplishment of surviving to such an advanced age.



CHAPTER 11: THE GIVING AND TAKING OF GIFTS

Matt wanders around the party. He moves Tom's place card from the main table to the children's table and María's card next to his own. He continues to wander, pausing to wonder whom the 200 bodyguards along the perimeter of the party are actually guarding against. María scolds him for moving Tom's card. She doesn't believe him when he says Tom tried to drown Furball. He physically blocks María from returning Tom's place card.

El Patrón sees Matt and María struggling, and asks if María is Matt's girlfriend. Mr. Alacrán finds the suggestion disgusting, but El Patrón says it's fine because Matt is his clone. Felicia wonders where Tom is. El Patrón says María will sit next to Matt and Tom will stay at the children's table. Despite María's protests and Tam Lin's questioning looks, Matt forces her to stay by his side.

El Patrón and MacGregor discuss "fetal brain implants" while Felicia and María eat their dinner miserably. Matt notices that Felicia keeps looking at MacGregor. El Viejo, Mr. Alacrán's father, makes a mess of his dinner. El Patrón marvels to Matt about how El Viejo is, in fact, El Patrón's grandson. Mr. Alacrán explains that El Viejo is very religious and therefore doesn't want the medical treatments which would prevent the effects of aging. Felicia openly worries about Tom, and El Patrón yells at her.

El Patrón begins to open his gifts. He receives expensive presents like jewelry and moon rocks, but he only seems to like the gift that is a statue of winged baby. All the Farmers give El Patrón guns and bombs.

Matt opens his own presents. Celia gives him a sweater and Tam Lin gives him a book on desert plants. El Patrón gives him a giant toy car, which Matt knows, from El Patrón's own advice, means El Patrón loves him a lot because the gift is very expensive. María takes away her gift to Matt because he was mean to Tom. Matt angrily tells her to give it back. María refuses, but her father, Senator Mendoza, orders her to comply. She throws the gift on the ground. Matt demands she pick it up and give it to him. Tam Lin tells Matt to knock it off, but El Patrón encourages Matt.

In spite of the fact that Matt has been brutally controlled and oppressed by those around him, he also displays an immoral desire to dictate the lives of others, as shown by his rearranging the place cards. He demonstrates his temptation toward selfishness and vindictiveness when he refuses to respect his friend María's wishes regarding Tom. The large number of bodyguards in this passage suggest a context of a larger conflict surrounding the party.



El Patrón embodies a patriarchal worldview in which men possess and control their female partners when he insists Matt's "girlfriend" sit next to him, despite her objections. Tam Lin's questioning looks suggest his disagreement with Matt's choice to control María.



El Patrón's bewilderment at his own grandson reveals how he believes weakness, especially due to old age, as shameful. Felicia and María's misery, as well as El Patrón's verbal abuse of Felicia, imply a family dynamic which is indifferent or even hostile to the personal feelings of the individual over the demands of the leader, especially when the individual is a woman.



El Patrón's affinity for the winged baby symbolizes his obsession with youth. The guns and bombs suggest a threat of violence surrounding El Patrón, further hinting at the power he possesses and untold conflicts in which he may be involved.



Celia and Tam Lin's gifts are thoughtful, showing their genuine care for Matt. El Patrón's gift shows his materialism, which Matt is beginning to imitate. Senator Mendoza's pressuring of his daughter to obey show how even those outside the family are desperate to please El Patrón. Matt chooses to act out of anger toward María, even though Tam Lin tries to encourage Matt to make a more moral choice.



María finally gives her gift to Matt. Matt is angry at her for embarrassing him in front of the party. He thinks about how he's unjustly treated differently because he is a clone. He demands María give him a birthday kiss, because he can have anything he wants on his birthday. El Patrón agrees proudly. Senator Mendoza objects because Matt is a clone, but El Patrón, suddenly appearing angry and dangerous, demands that María comply. Matt begins to regret the scene he has started, but he cannot go back on his demands now.

María has kissed Matt before, but Matt knows that this time is humiliating for her because the whole party will see her kiss what they believe to be an animal. Matt feels sorry for her, but El Patrón seems too happy for him to object now. María kisses him and then runs to her father. They leave the party.

El Patrón becomes exhausted and leaves the party. The rest of the guests now ignore Matt. He collects his gifts and leaves. He opens María's gift, a box of handmade taffy, and thinks about how María is always hoarding useless items to cope with her mother's desertion the family when María was five years old. Realizing the taffy is wrapped in María's treasured old gift tissue, Matt feels awful for his treatment of her. He looks at the statue of **the Virgin** and feels ashamed.

CHAPTER 12: THE THING ON THE BED

Matt wakes up the next morning and knows he must make amends with María once her temper subsides. With the party over, the servants and the family treat Matt with the same coldness as always. He tries and fails to amuse himself with music and the nature book Tam Lin gave him. In addition to giving him the book, Tam Lin has taken Matt on many nature excursions that would be deemed too dangerous for El Patrón's clone if others were to find out.

Felicia unexpectedly comes to see Matt. She complements Matt on his music ability. She talks about how El Patrón used to listen to her play when she was a concert musician, before her nervous breakdown. Felicia says that she has come to help him, and tells Matt that María is waiting for him at the hospital.

Matt's demand that María kiss him after becoming outraged at his status as a clone shows how he is responding to the cruelty of his society by becoming cruel himself. The demand of a kiss specifically suggests a patriarchal attitude which demands women be subservient to the wishes of powerful men. Yet Matt's regret shows his emerging moral conflict with El Patrón's use of power.



María's humiliation shows how, even though she loves Matt, she still internalizes the prejudices of her society that categorize clones as animals. El Patrón's delight shows he has no regard for the distress of others.



Matt's consideration of María's gift and his regret for his actions at the party proves he is capable of reflecting on his mistakes and committing to make moral choices in the future. The reference to the Virgin also shows Matt's increased concern for his conscience, as Celia gave Matt the statue as part of her religious and moral instruction of him.



Matt's commitment to apologizing shows his capacity to make moral decisions, although he shows apprehension over the consequences of María's anger. Tam Lin's breaking of the rules to teach Matt nature skills suggest Tam Lin has a greater motivation behind these excursions.



Matt's immediate acceptance of Felicia's sudden empathy for him emphasizes how Matt is still desperate to be accepted by members of the family who acts indifferent or hostile toward him.



The hospital is a part of the Alacrán estate Matt does not like to visit. He finds María in the waiting room. María reveals that she thought Matt had invited her to the hospital. Matt admits he was wrong to act like he did at the party, but he did really like her present wrapped in the special gift paper. María is silent for a moment. Matt wonders if he could kiss her now, to make up for the night before.

The presence of the hospital on the Alacrán estate suggests the importance of science and medicine to the family. Matt's anxiety surrounding the hospital hints at his discomfort with the unnatural and unethical ways science is used in his society. Matt's desire to kiss María once they reunite shows how he now sees intimacy not as something he is owed, but as the expression of a loving relationship.



Tom appears in the waiting room. He was the one who told María that Matt wanted to meet her at the hospital. He tells them he wants to show them something scarier than Halloween. With a gleeful smile, Tom leads María and Matt down the hall. Matt holds onto María's hand. They hear yowling, like a cat, in the distance. María thinks there's a cat somewhere in need of rescuing.

Tom's delight in frightening Matt and María emphasizes his characteristic wickedness and cruelty. Matt and María's act of holding hands shows their restored friendship after Matt apologized, showcasing their mutual capacity for kindness and genuine connection in contrast with Tom's coldness. María shows an instinctual compassion and righteousness by her impulse to rescue the unseen cat—not unlike the virtues of El Virgin that Matt admires.



Tom takes them to a room where a creature Matt does not recognize lies strapped to a bed, screaming. María realizes that the creature is actually a boy, but now its body is twisted and trapped. Tom says that this is a clone. Matt has never seen another clone before. He has only wondered why humans hate clones, if clones are supposed to be like pets. María lets go of Matt's hand and Tom holds her as she looks terrified.

The description of the clone as trapped and tortured hints at the general suffering of clones in Matt's society, suffering Matt has largely been prevented so far from witnessing firsthand. María's release of Matt's hand suggests that this harrowing sight has reminded her of Matt's status as a clone, and that this association disturbs her despite her ambiguity toward clones as a lesser subspecies of humans.



Tom reveals that the clone belongs to Mr. MacGregor. Matt cannot comprehend how he could be similar to the clone on the bed. He realizes the clone looks a lot like Tom. María begs to leave until Tom agrees to go with her. Matt stays behind for a moment, but then follows them.

María's abandonment of MacGregor's clone contrasts with her righteous passion back when she thought the suffering clone was a cat. This shows how María's sense of activism is still immature and easily crushed by the reality of suffering in her society.



CHAPTER 13: THE LOTUS POND

Matt doesn't understand how he can be a clone if what he just saw is also a clone. He thinks about how the doctor said clones fall apart as they age, and wonders if the same will happen to him. He goes to find Celia and tells her what Tom showed him and María. Enraged, Celia tells Matt that Tom is actually MacGregor's son, even though he acts like a **scorpion** like the rest of the Alacrás. Tom was conceived when Felicia briefly ran off with MacGregor. El Patrón then stole Felicia back and imprisoned her on the estate.

Matt's struggle for identity is caused by the conflict between his own sense of individuality and society's categorization of him as a clone. Matt's broadened knowledge of clones, as he connects his observation of MacGregor's clone with what the doctor previously said, highlights how Matt's increased consciousness of the fate of clones only heightens his sense of suffering.



Matt asks about MacGregor's clone. Celia hesitates, because someone is always listening within the walls of the house. With Matt's persuasion, she reveals that scientists destroyed the brain of MacGregor's clone at birth, because the law requires them to. El Patrón broke this law for Matt. Matt takes this as a sign of El Patrón's love for him, sparing his mind so that Matt may become someone greater than a clone or maybe even a human. Although Celia assures Matt that he'll be safe for his entire life, she starts crying.

Feeling more at ease, Matt goes to take a nap. He contemplates how he will show María that he's totally different from MacGregor's clone. He wonders why MacGregor would replace his lost son Tom with a brain-damaged clone.

María continues to avoid Matt, but he knows if he could just speak to her alone, she would see that he's different from all other clones. MacGregor comes back from his medical procedures, looking progressively healthier. Matt decides he must bring María to him by stealing Furball. But first, he must make sure Furball doesn't bark and alert other people to his scheme.

Matt knows from past exploration that part of the secret passage leads to Felicia's closet. There, he finds laudanum ("opium dissolved in alcohol"), which Felicia uses to sleep. He steals a bottle and goes out to the beautiful, Egyptian-inspired lotus pond. There, he makes a bed for Furball. He runs into Tom, who is nailing frogs to the ground. Matt threatens to tell María what Tom is doing, but Tom is unnervingly calm. He talks about the natural food chain one can observe out by the pond.

Matt attempts one last time to speak to María outside her apartment, but she makes an excuse to avoid him. After she leaves, he sneaks into her room and temps Furball out with a piece of hamburger meat. He feeds the dog until it falls asleep and then leaves a signed note for María. He takes Furball out to the pond without even having to use the laudanum. He sets the dog and the bottle down and returns to his apartment.

Matt's interpretation of El Patrón's decision not to scramble his brain shows how Matt is desperate to remain unique in a society which erases his personal identity for being a clone, as well as his desire to use his success to overcome his society's prejudices. Celia's tears suggest she does not truly believe her own statement about Matt being safe forever.



Matt's continued confusion over MacGregor's treatment of his clone shows the conflict between what Matt has been told about clones and the reality he has witnessed. His uncertainty implies that the clones serve a purpose beyond what is able to make sense of at this point.



Matt's commitment to reconcile with María shows he is still motivated by the hope that he can prove his individual worth to others in spite of their prejudice toward him. This motivation leads him to the complicated scheme to kidnap Furball, suggesting the naiveté and futility of Matt's ambitions.



The "Egyptian-inspired" pond references a nostalgic obsession with a kingdom of the past, further showcasing El Patrón's obsession with unnaturally preserving antiquated things—including his elderly self. Tom's torture of animals and his calculating calmness highlights his violent and cruel nature. His food chain comment references the natural superiority he feels over clones, perhaps because he feels lesser within the family for being an illegitimate son.



María's continued avoidance of Matt suggests her internal conflict between her personal relationship with Matt and what she has learned about clones. Her inability to connect with Matt due to this conflict motivates Matt to commit the morally dubious act of stealing her dog.



That night, Matt sneaks out to the lotus pond, though he is still a little scared of the monster myths of his childhood. He goes to where he left Furball, but suddenly all the lights around the garden turn on. Daft Donald and Tam Lin grab him and drag him out into the lawn. Senator Mendoza appears and calls Matt worse than an animal, swearing that Matt will never see María again. Matt doesn't understand, until Senator Mendoza accuses him of killing Furball with laudanum. Matt says he wouldn't commit such a crime because he loves María, which further infuriates Senator Mendoza.

Senator Mendoza leaves while Matt insists that he didn't kill Furball and didn't even use the laudanum. Tam Lin says Matt's fingerprints were on the laudanum bottle. He tells Matt that the most cowardly thing a person can do is lie. Matt argues that he is telling the truth, but Tam Lin believes Matt accidentally overdosed Furball and now is lying about using the laudanum. Tam Lin tells him María is leaving soon, and so is El Patrón. Tam Lin will be leaving with El Patrón.

CHAPTER 14: CELIA'S STORY

Matt hears María leave in a hovercraft. He has never been in a hovercraft because El Patrón usually discourages modern inventions like this, having designed the estate to match the home of a wealthy rancher from his childhood over a hundred years ago. El Patrón recreated the winged baby statues, tile fountains, and gardens all from memory, except he made these even grander because of his wealth. All technology in the house is antique, with no air-conditioning or gas stoves.

El Patrón leaves. Matt lies in his bedroom, thinking and rethinking everything that has gone wrong since the birthday party. He knows it was Tom who killed Furball with the laudanum, but all the evidence points to Matt. He regrets Tam Lin's last words about his cowardice. He knows Tam Lin, unlike María, holds him accountable for his supposed actions because Tam Lin sees Matt as human. Tam Lin was the only person to ever treat Matt as an equal.

Matt remembers how Tam Lin used to tell him about all the mistakes he himself made as a child growing up in Scotland. Matt thinks about the picnics where Tam Lin told these stories, and he begins to cry. He feels a little bit hopeful, however, because if Tam Lin sees him as more than an animal, maybe Matt can be better than society's view of him. Matt promises himself to be the man Tam Lin expects him to be.

Ironically, Matt's plan to prove he is worth more than a clone ends with him being accused as being less than an animal, showing the futility of Matt attempting to prove his humanity to those who strive to dehumanize him. This dehumanization is further highlighted by Senator Mendoza's anger at the implication that Matt and María could ever genuinely love each other.



Tam Lin's disappointment in Matt for lying shows that he expects Matt to act morally, in contrast to the rest of Matt's society, who expect him to act like an amoral animal. This heightens the injustice Matt feels at being falsely accused of killing Furball. This is a devastating loss to Matt, as he lost two of the few friends he has in a society that hates him.



El Patrón's exact recreation of the wealthy rancher's mansion from his childhood, as well as the inclusion of the winged baby statues, shows his continued obsession with the pursuit of youth and the unnatural preservation of antiquated things. It also demonstrates his coveting of the wealth and status he was denied as a poor child, and suggests that this disenfranchisement may be why he is now fixated on maintaining power over others



Tam Lin recognizes Matt's inherent humanity when he expects Matt to use his free will to make the right moral choices. This increases Matt's devastation at disappointing and then losing Tam Lin, for a crime he did not commit, because Tam Lin is one of the few people who affirm Matt's humanity.



Tam Lin's tears suggest the character is tormented by something greater than the average childhood mistakes. The inspiration Matt feels from Tam Lin's expectations show how Tam Lin influences Matt both to be more moral and to believe in his own worth, even as he is oppressed.



El Patrón finds out about Tom showing Matt the clone and banishes Tom from the estate, even on holidays. Matt wonders why MacGregor does not take responsibility for Tom now, but Celia explains that El Patrón never gives up anything or anyone he believes belongs to him. He has a secret tomb underground where he hoards all his valuable gifts, and where he wants to be buried like an Egyptian pharaoh. El Patrón holds onto Felicia and Tom, even though he doesn't like them, because he wants to maintain possession of people.

El Patrón's anger over Matt seeing another clone suggests that there may be a sinister purpose to cloning that he is trying to hide in order to keep Matt ignorant and obedient. El Patrón shows his characteristic possessiveness and controlling behavior by not allowing Tom or Felicia to leave, even though El Patrón personally does not like them. The comparison of the material gifts El Patrón hoards to the people he holds onto shows how El Patrón essentially views people as objects, rather than individuals, hinting that his kindness toward Matt is ingenuine.



Celia says Matt wouldn't get in so much trouble if he just knew more about the world. She tells Matt she grew up in the same impoverished village as El Patrón. As a girl, she worked in a factory and would climb on top of the building to look across the border into the country of Opium. Beyond Opium was the United States, a country Celia had heard was full of luxury. She lived in the factory for years and eventually learned cooking from an older woman.

The fact that Celia and El Patrón come from the same background, and yet Celia is kind and selfless while El Patrón is authoritarian and possessive, contributes to the idea that free will, rather than predetermined circumstances determines a person's moral character. Celia's wish to immigrate to the U.S. hints at the geopolitical conflict surrounding Matt's life.



One day, Celia meets a coyote, a man who supposedly helped people illegally immigrate from Aztlán to the United States by crossing through the country of Opium. However, after a dangerous journey through the mountains, the coyote led the group Celia joined straight to the Farm Patrol, the law enforcement agency responsible for catching undocumented immigrants in Opium.

The dangerous circumstances of Celia's immigration suggest further injustices in Matt's society, and also mirror some of the real-world issues immigrants face today. The actions of the coyote and the Farm Patrol shows how one can abuse their power to exploit the most vulnerable.



Farm Patrol arrested Celia and dumped out her possessions. While she begged them to stop, El Patrón entered. He recognized her accent as coming from his hometown. He asked if Celia had any skills. Celia says that from that point on, she has always belonged to El Patrón. This thought makes Matt feel cold. The rest of the people from Celia's group caught by Farm Patrol were turned into eejits.

Matt's conflicted feelings suggest that, thanks to Celia's information, he is beginning to become aware of the dangers of El Patrón's possessiveness, despite Matt's enduring love for the man. The rest of Celia's group being turned into eejits reveals the extreme punishment for illegal immigration in Matt's society, emphasizing the insular and oppressive nature of the country.



CHAPTER 15: A STARVED BIRD

Without visits from María, Matt's days pass by with uninterrupted boredom. María and her sister, Emilia, now live and go to school in a convent. Matt wonders if María misses him or has forgiven him. The house is ghostly quiet without her or the other children.

Matt's intense loneliness once again emphasizes his need for human contact and his desire to belong among his peers. Matt's thoughts about María shows the special significance of her friendship to him.



One day, Matt goes to the stables to order a Safe Horse. An eejit brings the horse to him. Matt realizes with terror that the eejit is Rosa, only now her face lacks all cruelty. She shuffles off without acknowledging her past relationship with Matt. Matt realizes how terrible of a fate becoming an eejit is, after seeing how bland Rosa is compared to her former angry, violent self.

Matt rides out into the poppy fields. Here, the plants are still young and short. He sees a few eejits weeding the fields. He wonders what would happen if they all woke up suddenly and attacked him, but he knows the eejits will never do anything except what their master orders them to do. Matt looks for the house he used to live in with Celia, but it's gone.

After the fields, Matt goes to the oasis. He orders the horse to drink and tells it to stop in the shade. He walks into the mountains alone for the first time. The oasis is bare and lonely in the dry season. As he eats lunch, he discovers a man-made arbor. There, he spots a large metal chest, along with a blanket and water bottles. Matt wonders who could have left all these supplies behind, as it couldn't have been an eejit or an immigrant on the run.

Matt opens the chest and finds it filled with many packages. He finds a letter addressed to him, from Tam Lin. The letter, written in misspelled, messy handwriting, explains that Tam Lin left this chest behind in case Matt should ever need it after Tam Lin returns to El Patrón. Matt opens the packages, which are filled with dried food and other camping supplies. At the bottom of the chest, Matt finds a few books, including one entitled *A History of Opium*.

Matt returns home and finds servants running around and hovercrafts landing. Celia tells him that El Viejo has died. Matt doesn't mourn the man because he barely knew him, but Celia seems distressed. She takes him to the salon of the house, which has been decorated with hundreds of candles for the funeral. At least 50 people are gathered around the coffin.

Matt only fully realizes the injustice of the scientific process which creates eejits after he sees the change in Rosa. This shows how relationships, even bad relationships like the one between Rosa and Matt, can humanize a person even after science has attempted to dehumanize them.



Matt's thought of the eejits rebelling shows that he now recognizes how the eejits suffer injustices worth revolting against. This realization implies that he may come to feel the same way about himself and other clones as he learns more about their societal function. The disappearance of Celia's house symbolizes the loss of Matt's innocence now that he is more aware of the injustices of his society.



Matt asserts his free will by going to the oasis alone. However, the barren atmosphere of the oasis represents Matt's loneliness without Tam Lin to accompany him. The mysterious appearance of the metal chest suggests the oasis will have greater significance for Matt than just a recreational area.



Tam Lin's letter reveals that he suspects one day Matt may need the supplies to survive in the wild, suggesting Tam Lin is aware of a danger that Matt and the reader are not. The inclusion of books shows Tam Lin's continued dedication to educating Matt beyond his societally-approved education.



Celia's distress suggests she is upset by something larger than the death of a member of the family. The large number of candles and people at the funeral shows how seriously the family considers death to be.



Inside the coffin, El Viejo's body looks like an emaciated bird. Celia cries. Matt sees Benito, Steven, and Emilia. MacGregor arrives, looking much younger than when Matt saw him before. Matt wishes he could leave the hot, smoky room. María enters, looking much more grown up. Matt marvels at how beautiful she is, and then realizes she's holding hands with Tom.

Celia cries because she is an empathetic character who feels sympathy for the dead man, regardless of the cruelty of the family that she has witnessed in the Big House. MacGregor's youthful appearance suggests the effectiveness of the medical procedures he underwent at the estate's hospital, and is an unnatural contrast to El Viejo's natural death which exemplifies science's potential to cheat the aging process. Matt's acknowledgement of María's beauty shows how both characters have matured since they last saw each other, and that they are beginning to transition out of childhood.



El Patrón, Tam Lin, and Mr. Alacrán arrive at the funeral. Mr. Alacrán is the only person there who appears truly sad. Matt wants to thank Tam Lin for leaving the chest but knows he cannot mention it in public. A priest enters with a children's choir, who sing in perfect, sweet voices because they are all *eejits*. Matt looks into their eyes and sees only emptiness. The children hold perfectly still as the priest commands them.

*Mr. Alacrán expresses genuine emotion in a very insincere family. The knowledge that children can also become *eejits* further emphasizes the cruelty of this scientific process. Matt specifically notices that the children are robbed of their ability to enjoy music, which is significant because creating music is what validates Matt's own humanity.*



At the priest's invitation, Mr. Alacrán says a few words for El Viejo, his departed father. Then everyone lines up to say their goodbyes to the body. Celia makes Matt get in line. As Matt approaches the body, the priest begins yelling at him, tell him he does not belong there, just like a dog doesn't belong in church. Celia says El Patrón wants Matt at the funeral. María appears suddenly and argues that Saint Francis brought a wolf to church. The priest debates her, saying Saint Francis preached to a wolf outside of a church. María defiantly takes Matt's hand and leads him out of the salon.

The priest's outrage at Matt shows how one can use religion to justify discrimination against those who are different from the majority. María's example of Saint Francis presents how, by contrast, religious rhetoric can also be used to uplift the oppressed. María's defense of Matt shows how her character has developed in her time away from the estate to become more rebellious against the injustices of her society.



María takes Matt, who is in a daze, into the music room. She complains about how El Patrón won't allow air conditioning anywhere in the house. Matt is still overwhelmingly happy María is talking to him. María hugs and kisses him, saying she missed him and has forgiven him. Matt asks her why she avoided him after seeing MacGregor's clone. She says she can't tell him, because people might be listening out in the hallway. Matt leads her into the secret passage.

María's complaints about El Patrón show how she is beginning to question what is wrong or illogical about authority figures. María's conflict over MacGregor's clone suggests she knows more about clones than Matt and is tormented by the information she has. Her perception that she cannot speak freely in public also shows that she senses the truth is dangerous.



CHAPTER 16: BROTHER WOLF

María wonders who made the secret passage. Matt guesses El Patrón made it to spy on people. María insinuates that El Patrón is creepy, but Matt defends him. Matt and María attempt to escape the intense heat of the passage and end up in an air-conditioned room full of computers.

Matt's defense of El Patrón shows his enduring loyalty to the man, at the expense of conflicting with his friend, María. The presence of the many computers in this hidden area suggests a greater, potentially darker purpose for the room.



María says she decided to forgive Matt after reading about Saint Francis, a Catholic saint who convinced a wolf to stop terrorizing a town and to become vegetarian. Saint Francis decided not to punish the wolf for his past deeds, but instead encouraged him to live an honorable life from then on.

María says she won't hold a grudge against Matt for his past actions, as long as he promises to be moral from now on. Matt agrees because he missed María. He calls María a saint. María talks about all her mistakes at school, and Matt asks if she has been baptized. She says of course, or else she wouldn't be able to go to heaven. Matt asks about the priest's harsh words toward him. María says that society believes Matt doesn't have a soul, just like animals don't, so therefore he can't go to heaven. María disagrees, however, that animals can't go to heaven.

María is happy to be with Matt because he is so easy to talk to. They hear voices coming so they run back into the passage. Through the peephole they see Tom and Felicia enter the computer room. Felicia sits down at one of the computers, which shows security footage of El Viejo's body in the salon. Felicia laments how he is now useless, because one can't harvest organs from person who died of cancer. Tom and Felicia laugh at El Viejo.

Tom and Felicia sit at the computer and scroll through security footage from the house until they see María's black hat abandoned in the music room. They switch to the camera's in Celia's apartment, where Celia sits with Tam Lin. Celia and Tam Lin wonder where María and Matt could have gone, but they hold back their words because they know someone is listening.

Felicia suggests they look at the security footage from outside. She shows Tom the lotus pond and asks him if he remembers what happened there. Felicia tells Tom she saw Matt leaving María's apartment with Furball. Tom asks her if she saw Matt kill the dog. Felicia admits that she herself killed Furball and blamed Matt, because she was angry with how Matt treated Tom at the birthday party. She poisoned Furball with her own bottle of laudanum. Matt and María listen to all this, horrified, from within the passage.

Saint Francis presents a different moral code than Tam Lin's. Where Tam Lin has taught Matt that one must atone for their past mistakes, Saint Francis offers forgiveness as long as one promises to be moral in the future.



María's encouragement of Matt to be moral shows how she is a positive influence on his ability to use his free will to make the right choices. The question of whether or not Matt has a soul mirrors the question of whether or not Matt is a human. María's comparison of Matt's soullessness to that of animals shows that, although her views are progressing, she still equates him with an animal.



Felicia's comments show how she is just as cruel as Tom, despite her previous appearance as a helpless prisoner. Whereas Matt is trying to deviate from how others have treated him, Felicia has conformed to the cruelty around her. Her comments about El Viejo's dead body also show how their society reduces the value of everyone (not just clones) to their body's ability to sustain the lives of others.



The camera's placed throughout the house further emphasize the sinister nature of the family, because no one is allowed the right to privacy. Celia and Tam Lin's self-censorship shows they are aware of the abuses of their society, such as the constant surveillance, which explains why they are so eager to empower Matt to think and act for himself.



Felicia's vindictiveness is further highlighted by her killing of an innocent animal in order to frame Matt. Her anger at Matt shows how she discriminates against him as a clone, because she is outraged that her human son, even though he is evil, is treated worse than a clone. Felicia's admission holds further significance for Matt's character because it clears his name for María.



Matt and María run into Tam Lin in the passage. Tam Lin says El Patrón told him about the secret passage a long time ago. María reveals to Tam Lin that Felicia killed Furball. Tam Lin offers to sneak María out through El Patrón's study because her father is looking for her. Before she leaves, María scolds Matt for letting her forgive him for a crime he didn't commit. She tells Matt she'll miss him and reminds him of his promise to be good.

María continues to influence Matt to choose to be kind, even though his society is cruel. This scene also heals the rift in Matt and Tam Lin's relationship, so Tam Lin may continue to influence Matt's life. Tam Lin's assistance to María shows how he will help the children defy the authority figures of their society.



CHAPTER 17: THE EEJIT PENS

María leaves the estate and Matt feels lonely, even through he feels better knowing Tam Lin and María know the truth about Furball. He reads a book on Saint Francis. Saint Francis cared for everyone from criminals to insects. Matt thinks Saint Francis wouldn't care for him because as a clone, Matt is not part of the natural world.

Matt has internalized the discrimination of his society to the point where he believes a historical figure who supposedly cared for every living being would not care for him. This shows Matt's continued struggle for identity in a prejudiced society.



Matt always feels like he's being watched within the house. He feels uncomfortable knowing Felicia maliciously hates him. Matt continues to go to the stables and attempts to talk to Rosa while she brings him his horse. He wonders if any part of her former personality is buried deep within her mind, but he never sees her act any differently from an eejit.

Matt shows he can choose to be compassionate by attempting to talk to Rosa and affirm her former humanity, even though she hurt him in the past. This demonstrates his refusal to adopt the prejudiced attitudes of his society, as he still views eejits as humans with individual personalities.



Matt rides his horse to the oasis. He thinks about how Saint Francis's followers gave up all their possessions. Matt relaxes out at the oasis, knowing that none of the animals around him know he's a clone. He begins to read the book, *A History of Opium*, that Tam Lin gave him.

Matt is beginning to perceive that there is no difference between humans and clones, as shown by his knowledge that animals cannot distinguish him from a human. Matt's remembrance of Saint Francis giving up his possessions suggests Matt is beginning to question the materialism of his society.



According to *The History of Opium*, 100 years ago, the United States and Aztlán (which back then was known as Mexico), were in conflict about the thousands of undocumented immigrants who crossed the border from Mexico to the U.S. The most powerful drug dealer in the world, Matteo Alacrán, united with the other dealers and convinced the two nations to give them land along the U.S.-Mexico border for a new country. In exchange, Alacrán promised to catch all the illegal immigrants who tried to enter the United States, as well as to only sell his drugs to Europe, Asia, and Africa.

Tam Lin's gift of a book of history to Matt suggests he wants Matt to become more aware of the greater issues of his society. The history book characterizes Matteo Alacrán as a power-hungry individual willing to exploit international crises for his own ambitions. The novel uses the real-world issue of undocumented immigration to present how an enterprising individual could use this conflict to rise to power.



The author condemns Matteo Alacrán for his plan. Matt sees that the author's name is Esperanza Mendoza and the book was printed in California by an anti-slavery organization. The book continues to explain how different family's ruled different Farms within Opium, with the Alacrás ruling the largest piece of land. A government began to form with Matteo Alacrán as its absolute dictator. The author calls El Patrón evil, which makes Matt mad enough to stop reading.

The mention of the book being published outside of Opium suggests that the author, unlike all the characters within Opium, is free to speak critically of El Patrón. The fact that an anti-slavery organization publishes a book against Opium hints at further human rights abuses within the country. Matt's anger at the author emphasizes his loyalty toward El Patrón, although the reader has been able to infer that El Patrón's loyalty in return is ingenuine.



On his ride back to the house, Matt stops to talk to the foreman of the water purification plant. Matt has realized El Patrón has been educating him so that he may one day help the family run the opium farm. He looks forward to the day when he is in charge of the farm, he will free all of the eejits. Matt asks the foreman where the chemicals from the water go after the water is purified, and the foreman points to ridges out in the distance known as the wastelands.

Matt's hopefulness about helping to run the farm and being able to free the eejits shows his enduring faith in his freedom to choose what to do with his future. The presence of the wastelands, created by chemicals removed from water, suggests the presence of environmental devastation on the Farm.



Matt rides out toward the wastelands. The stench is overwhelming, but Matt sees buildings there with iron bars on the windows. Matt struggles to breathe and uses his inhaler. His horse collapses near a trough and can't get up. Matt is about to faint when a man picks him up and throws him into a truck. Two men in the truck discuss amongst themselves whether Matt is an eejit, or an immigrant about to be turned into an eejit.

The bars on the windows suggest that someone is being imprisoned in the buildings, a punishment made worse by the toxic stench. The indifference of these men toward Matt, shown by their rough treatment of him when they believe he is either an eejit or an immigrant, suggests that people at all levels of society discriminate against these two groups.



Matt realizes he is in a Farm Patrol truck. He tries to act tough, like Tam Lin taught him. He tells them he is El Patrón's clone and got lost. The Farm Patrol agents realize he sounds exactly like El Patrón and are suddenly very polite to him. The agents, whose names are Hugh and Ralf, agree to take him back to the estate. They tell him there is carbon dioxide builds up around the trough and sometimes they have to remove the eejits from their pens, so they don't die.

The Farm Patrol agents completely change their treatment of Matt when they discover his relation to El Patrón, showing El Patrón's fearsome authority over them. The fact that the eejits are kept in "pens" emphasizes how the men view eejits as livestock instead of as human beings, and therefore can justify treating them as less than human.



Matt chats with Ralf and Hugh, who are from England and Wales, and used to play soccer like Tam Lin. There's another agent in the back of the truck, named Wee Wullie, who is Scottish. Ralf talks about all the fights that take place around soccer games, as they drive past the same eejits Matt saw that morning. Ralf explains further that sometimes one accidentally kills a person in a soccer fight, which is why they were sent to work for the Farm Patrol.

The Farm Patrol's makeup of violent criminals suggests a corrupt and unstable law enforcement placed in charge of the eejits and illegal immigrants. The Farm Patrol's casual discussion of soccer shows how violent individuals can appear normal and friendly to people like Matt, implying that characters who have been nice to him thus far in the story may prove to have more sinister motivations.



Matt asks Hugh and Ralf if Tam Lin ever killed anyone. Ralf says Tam Lin is a terrorist. Hugh explains that Tam Lin was a Scottish nationalist who placed a bomb outside the prime minister's house, but the blast accidentally killed 20 children when a school bus arrived at the wrong moment.

This revelation complicates Tam Lin's character, as Tam Lin has always encouraged Matt to choose morality, while hiding a horrible crime in his own past. This calls into question Tam Lin's integrity, while also explaining his tormented behavior.



CHAPTER 18: THE DRAGON HOARD

That night, Celia wakes Matt up and rushes him to get ready. Matt is still trying to reconcile his friendly encounter with the Farm Patrol and the scary stories Celia used to tell him about them. He realizes the agents were cruel to him before they discovered who he was. Celia hurries Matt along but insists he eat first. The food tastes strange and Matt feels sick.

Matt's conflict about the disparity between his experiences with Farm Patrol and Celia's horror stories suggest that the Farm Patrol abuses the lowest members of society. Celia's strangeness surrounding the food hint as something sinister and mysterious taking place.



Two bodyguards lead Matt and Celia to the hospital. One of the guards tells Matt that El Patrón has had a heart attack. Matt suddenly throws up. At the hospital, doctors lift him onto a stretcher. Matt continues to vomit and begins to hallucinate that he sees Furball, then Saint Francis, then Tam Lin. He realizes he is actually in a hospital room with Tam Lin. Tam Lin tells him El Patrón is still alive because the doctors placed a smaller donor heart next to his own heart to regulate it.

The presence of the bodyguards hints at a restriction of freedom and a potential threat for Matt. Matt's hallucinations imply not only his physical illness but his conflicted conscience, as each figure he envisions has had an influence on his concept of moral consequences. El Patrón's survival shows the incredible power of science to extend his life, though at an uncertain cost—it is not specified who supplied the donor heart.



Matt tells Tam Lin he went out to the wastelands and Tam Lin says that must be why Matt was so sick. Tam Lin scolds him for doing something dangerous. Matt wonders silently how Tam Lin can criticize him after what Tam Lin did to those school children. Celia comes in and cries over his bed.

Tam Lin's expectation of Matt to be moral, even though he himself has committed an immoral act, reflects his moral code where he believes that because Matt is young, he must choose to make moral choices before his life goes down the wrong path. Unlike the general consensus of their society, Tam Lin clearly believes that Matt is inherently human and has the capacity to determine his own destiny rather than conforming to others' expectations.



El Patrón survives, but his health is severely declined. Not even diamonds from his secret tomb can bring him happiness anymore. Matt suggests El Patrón donate to the poor, like Saint Francis, to find happiness. This sends El Patrón into a rage. He rants about the empire of El Dorado, where El Dorado lived in a golden house and was worshipped like a god.

El Patrón's outrage further emphasizes his selfishness and his commitment to never letting any of his possessions go. His mention of El Dorado being worshipped as a god references his own view of himself as all-powerful.



Tam Lin later compliments Matt for bringing some emotion back into El Patrón by suggesting he give away a part of his “dragon hoard.” Matt questions if the dragons in the myths are happy with their riches. They have this conversation in Celia’s garden, where she has recently replaced vegetable plants with flowers.

The myth of the dragon hoard implies that El Patrón may share similarly monstrous qualities to a dragon. Celia’s replacement of her vegetable garden with flowers further highlights her increasingly mysterious behavior, suggesting that she is dealing with a situation that is beyond Matt’s knowledge despite their close relationship.



CHAPTER 19: COMING-OF-AGE

El Patrón is still weak and sickly. He keeps speaking about his siblings who died in childhood. Matt plays guitar in order to comfort him. One day, Matt’s voice, unusually high pitched and beautiful, cracks while he’s singing. El Patrón tells Matt to ask Celia or Tam Lin to explain this change. Later, Matt asks Celia why his voice is cracking, and Celia begins crying, saying he is becoming a man. She says she will throw a party to celebrate. Matt examines the acne and stubble recently appeared on his face and feels disappointed by the change.

The changes to Matt’s body show how he is going through puberty and therefore transitioning into a more independent, mature individual. The maturation of his body parallels his mental maturation, as he becomes more aware of the injustices of his society. Celia’s tears reveal her deep love for Matt but also suggest her unspecified anxieties about his future.



That night, Matt, Celia, and Tam Lin have a small party out in the garden. Matt asks how long ago he was born. Tam Lin insists Matt was harvested, not born. Celia tells Tam Lin not to talk about such things, because of the cameras, but Tam Lin begins shouting about secrets and lies. After he calms himself, he explains to Matt that a clone grows inside a cow and then the cow is cut open and “sacrificed” when the clone is harvested.

Tam Lin’s anger shows his increased conflict over the circumstances of Matt’s creation. His mention of secrets shows his additional conflict about the denial of information toward Matt. His fixation on how a cow was “sacrificed” to create Matt hints at his greater fears of another form of sacrifice.



Celia tries to comfort Tam Lin. He laments about how the family treats them all like lab animals. Celia says there’s hope for the future, but Tam Lin tells her whatever she’s planning is too dangerous. Celia says the hundreds of thousands of eejits buried out in the poppy fields are enough. She tells Matt to go to bed.

Celia’s comments about the eejits show that, in addition to being kind and selfless, her character is very brave and has a strong sense of justice. She is also clearly planning something secretive, which Tam Lin sees as risky.



Matt goes to his bedroom angry that, once again, he is not allowed to know information that directly concerns him. Matt knows, however, that whatever this information is, it concerns him as a clone. He wonders why anyone would even create a clone, if clones are so hated. He thinks about how right after he saw MacGregor’s clone in the hospital, MacGregor had been bragging about his new liver and kidneys. Matt realizes, with horror, that MacGregor created his clone in order to harvest organs from him. Matt wonders about the origins of El Patrón’s fetal implants and donor heart.

This is a pivotal moment for Matt as he realizes the horrible destiny his society intends for clones. Notably, Matt is not presented with any new information in this scene. Instead, he reconsiders that evidence that has been in front of him all along and comes to a new conclusion. This revelation shows his newly developed maturity as a character because he is now able to internally infer and confront the injustices of his society toward clones.



Matt reasons that he must be different from all the other clones, because El Patrón didn't destroy his brain when he was a baby, and gave him Celia and Tam Lin to take care of him. He provided Matt with an education, which he wouldn't do if he planned on killing him later. Matt thinks El Patrón cares for him purely out of El Patrón's own vanity, and feels horrible for being so devoted to an evil man.

Celia and Tam Lin come in to say goodnight to Matt. Celia discovers Matt has a fever and goes to make him tea. Tam Lin tells Matt that he is 14 years old.

Matt further shows his newly developed maturity by recognizing El Patrón for who he truly is as a vain, evil person. However, Matt continues to struggle with his connection to El Patrón, as shown by his guilt over still loving the old man.



Tam Lin shows that, in spite of Matt's newfound knowledge that clones are merely used as harvestable resources, he values Matt's individual identity by giving him an important piece of personal information.



CHAPTER 20: ESPERANZA

Matt feels sick when he wakes up the next morning. He knows he can't ask Celia, because she'll be too scared to answer, or Tam Lin, because he might confirm Matt's theories. For now, Matt will just have to be content with the knowledge El Patrón won't hurt him.

Feeling adventurous now that he is a man, Matt rides a horse to the oasis and goes swimming in the water. He enjoys the beauty of the nature around him. He looks out over the mountains and wonders why he doesn't climb over the mountains to escape to Aztlán. He knows he cannot leave Celia, Tam Lin, or María, but he feels better knowing he has the option.

Matt continues to read from Esperanza's book. He reads about how El Patrón needed workers for his opium fields, so he created the Farm Patrol to trap Mexicans trying to cross the border. However, he struggled to control the workers, so he came up with the idea to turn them into eejits. The author of the book rants against El Patrón's wickedness. Matt looks at the author's photograph and realizes she looks like María. The author biography says she is the ex-wife of Senator Mendoza, meaning she is in fact María's long-lost mother. Matt decides he must tell María.

Matt becomes sick from, as he believes, swimming in the oasis. He vomits violently. Later, Tam Lin says Matt's breath smells like garlic. Celia says she'll be more careful with the dosage next time. Tam Lin says she is ruining their plan. Matt continues to be sick, but Celia does not take him to the hospital.

Matt's inability to speak about his theories on clones shows both the intensity of his internal suffering and the isolation he feels in knowing what the rest of the characters avoid talking about.



Matt exercises his free will by independently enjoying nature and by considering his escape. However, his inability to leave due to consideration for his loved ones shows how personal relationships can hinder one's freedom and influence one's choices.



The invention of the process which turns people into eejits shows how El Patrón values profit and control over the free will of others. Esperanza's condemnation of El Patrón characterizes her as righteous and passionate, like her daughter, María. Esperanza's escape from Senator Mendoza, who is a member of El Patrón's inner circle, offers hope that others can escape from El Patrón, despite his extreme possessiveness.



Celia's comment about dosage and her refusal to take Matt to the hospital suggests she is somehow responsible for Matt's sickness. Tam Lin's reference to a plan shows he and Celia are scheming together for some greater purpose.



Once Matt recovers, he spends more time with El Patrón. El Patrón calls Matt the name Felipe and speaks confused nonsense about building an arbor on a desert pool. Matt realizes he is talking about the now-decayed arbor at the oasis. Then El Patrón returns to reminiscing about his siblings. Celia tells Matt that Felipe is El Patrón's dead son. Matt worries that if El Patrón's mind is deteriorating, he will need more fetal implants from a clone. Matt fantasizes about escaping this evil empire El Patrón has built. But he cannot go without seeing María at Steven and Emilia's upcoming wedding.

El Patrón's mental presence within the past not only shows his declining mental facilities but also emphasizes his preoccupation with the past and his youth. El Patrón's connection to the oasis shows how even in the place where Matt feels the freest, he cannot escape El Patrón's influence. Matt's fantasies of escape show his increased desire to leave the restrictions of his circumstances, however his freedom is still hindered by his personal relationships, mainly his connection to María.



CHAPTER 21: BLOOD WEDDING

In preparation for Steven and Emilia's wedding, the mansion is filled with flowers, ice sculptures, and new decor. Matt knows he won't be allowed to attend the party. El Patrón determined long ago that Steven and Emilia would get married, because he wants his family to be connected to a powerful U.S. politician like Senator Mendoza. Fortunately, Steven and Emilia get along, unlike Benito and his bride, Fani.

The wedding decorations emphasize the Alacrán family's materialism and decadence. El Patrón's dictation of his family member's marriages regardless of their wishes shows how he uses absolute power can exploit the lives of his family members for his own gain.



Matt continues to feel sick. He also feels lonely as Celia is distracted and Tam Lin is with El Patrón. MacGregor arrives for the wedding. Felicia drinks herself into a state of unconsciousness. Benito, Fani, and Steven arrive at the estate. Matt thinks that though Steven ignores him, at least neither he nor Emilia has ever mistreated him. Matt hides and watches the rest of the wedding guests arrive. He knows he will never be a part of this crowd like a regular human.

Matt's remembrance of how Steven and Emilia ignored him show how he is so abused by the family he has come to appreciate benign indifference. Matt's acknowledgement that he will never belong among the crowd at the wedding shows a divergence from his former desire to accomplish so much that these same people would forget his status as a clone.



Emilia arrives surrounded by ejit flower girls. None of the guests notice María leaving the room after she exits her family's hovercraft. She meets up with Matt in the music room. María says she missed Matt and tells him how boring her convent school is. She is always in trouble for breaking the rules. She says the convent forbids its students to watch TV because it's not good for their souls. Matt reminds her he does not have a soul. María says she now believes everyone, including animals and clones, has a soul.

María's further development as a rebel is shown by her breaking of her convent's rules and also by her divergent theological opinion that clones have souls. This belief demonstrates that she is beginning to believe more and more that Matt is an individual with rights, offering hope that she will help him in his goal to escape his abusive society.



Matt tells María about the ejit pens, Farm Patrol, and El Patrón's heart attack. Matt asks María if she knows about clones being harvested for organs. María begins to cry, but Matt assures her El Patrón does not plan on killing him. Matt tells her one day, he'll help run the estate, because he's smarter than Benito and Steven, and El Patrón hates Tom. María tells him that El Patrón has arranged for her to marry Tom. Matt is outraged, but María hopes she can change Tom's cruel personality.

Despite everything he has learned about clones, Matt still holds onto the hope that he will be able to use his free will to take a leadership role on the Farm. María's belief in the power of her own free will over her circumstances is shown by the fact that she believes she can change Tom's evil nature. El Patrón continues to exercise his unchecked power over the family by arranging the marriage between María and Tom.



Matt shows María the book her mother, Esperanza, wrote. María is outraged that her mother has been alive this whole time and yet has never come back for her. Matt tells her El Patrón would never have allowed that, after all Esperanza wrote about Opium. He tells María that Aztlán hates Opium, so Esperanza may be able to come to María's convent and rescue her.

María has to leave before Emilia notices she is missing. She will not be able to see Matt tomorrow during the wedding. María kisses him on the cheek and he kisses her back before they say goodbye.

Matt watches the wedding from the security footage in the computer room through a peephole in the secret passage. The room is filled with bodyguards. At the wedding, Matt sees a choir of eejits, Mr. Ortega, and El Patrón, who is flanked by Tam Lin and Daft Donald. Matt looks at the dressing room where María moves with life and energy, unlike everyone else in the room, who appear dull and unhappy.

The wedding begins and Matt can see the entire family gathered up at the altar. Both Felicia and Fani are drunk. Matt also recognizes that Benito is hopelessly stupid, and Tom is still evil. Matt watches as Emilia and Steven say their vows. Suddenly, one of bodyguards begins shouting about El Patrón. Matt sees on the footage that El Patrón is having a heart attack. Doctors rush in and Tam Lin carries El Patrón out of the room.

CHAPTER 22: BETRAYAL

Matt remains in the passage, conflicted between his love for El Patrón and his fear and hatred of El Patrón's creation of clones for organ transplants. Matt remembers how Celia told him if there was ever any trouble, he should come find her. He also realizes Tam Lin gave him all the camping supplies at the oasis in case he ever needed to escape. Matt realizes this means they always knew El Patrón intended to use Matt for his organs.

María's anger over Esperanza shows her continued belief in the power of one's free will over their predetermined circumstances, because she believes that if Esperanza abandoned her family, it must be because she chose to, rather than being forced to by the injustices of Opium.



This kiss, given freely between two people who love each other, contrasts with the time Matt cruelly forced María to kiss him at the party. The gesture further emphasizes the fact that both Matt and María are maturing, and are thus beginning to fully realize their capacity for freedom and choice despite their oppressive circumstances.



The presence of many bodyguards in the surveillance room highlights the controlling, secretive nature of El Patrón's estate. María is the only one who shows any happiness or excitement, emphasizing how the rest of the family is miserable and ingenuine under El Patrón's rule.



The descriptions of all the family members as either intoxicated, incompetent, or immoral highlights how El Patrón's influence has corrupted the entire family. The chaos surrounding El Patrón's heart attack shows the importance the entire society places upon his health and increases the tension of the story as it is unclear how Matt (having found out that clones are created to donate organs) will be impacted by this health crisis.



Once again, Matt comes to a dramatic revelation about his fate as a clone not because he is presented with new information but because he chooses to reexamine the evidence, in this case Celia and Tam Lin's plotting, that has been in front of him all along. This shows his struggle to finally accept the horror of El Patrón's plans for him.



Matt worries that if El Patrón really does love him, then Matt will be abandoning him in his time of need. He also remembers how the ancient kings El Patrón admired used to kill their servants to fill their tombs. Matt still does not know what to do.

María finds Matt in the passage. She says all the bodyguards are looking for him. Matt realizes this means El Patrón truly does want Matt for his organs. María reports that Tam Lin wants Matt to hide for now. Matt asks how El Patrón is doing, because despite everything, he cannot help but love the old man. María tells Matt to wait until dark, so she can sneak him in her family's hovercraft and take him to the convent disguised as an eejit.

Matt sleeps in the passage and then wanders around, growing dehydrated and bored. Finally, María arrives with a bottle of water. She tells him El Patrón is doing better, but she wishes he wasn't. Matt says that El Patrón loves him. María tells him El Patrón only cares about how he can use Matt. María gives Matt an eejit uniform to change into and leads him through the passage. She takes out a special red flashlight and shines it on the wall, illuminating a drawing of a **scorpion**. She explains that the scorpion marks El Patrón's bedroom, where there are no cameras.

Tam Lin told María that El Patrón built the passage not only to spy on people but also to escape onto the hovercraft landing field. However, that part of the passage only opens when El Patrón touches the drawing of **the scorpion** on the wall. Because Matt has the same DNA and fingerprints as El Patrón, he may be able to open the passage. However, if Matt's DNA does not work, the whole passage will fill with poisonous gas. María promises him she will stay with him no matter what. Matt says he loves her, and María says she loves him too. Matt touches the scorpion and the passage opens up.

Matt and María move through the deserted tunnel. Matt finds another **scorpion** drawing and touches it. The door opens to the hovercraft landing field. María walks him into her family's hovercraft while Matt pretends to be an eejit. The pilot of the hovercraft asks María if she has a permit for her eejit, because he might be euthanized in Aztlán otherwise.

Matt's comparison of El Patrón to ancient kings who killed their servants shows how he finally accepts that El Patrón would rather murder someone than let them leave him. This realization reflects Matt's maturation, as he is now willing to look past his emotional biases to see the truth of his circumstances.



Matt finally accepting that El Patrón has always meant to kill him for his organs represents an important perspective shift in his character. Though he still loves El Patrón, Matt now recognizes how the old man plans to violate Matt's free will by forcing him to donate organs because he is a clone. In this sense, Matt's fate has been predetermined for him since he was created, and it is now entirely up to him to reject this destiny.



Matt continued defense of El Patrón shows how predetermined connections like that between clone and creator are very difficult to overcome, even in the face of extreme cruelty. Both Matt and María prove their ability to exercise their free will in their attempt to escape, as they are rebelling against the rules of society which demand Matt donate organs to El Patrón.



El Patrón's creation of an escape route suggests his paranoia and suspicion of his enemies. Matt's use of his DNA and fingerprints, two predetermined qualities, shows how he can use the circumstances of his birth, namely his genetic similarity to El Patrón, in order to exercise his free will by escaping. Matt and María show the strength of their bond by facing death together.



Scorpions represent Matt's predetermined connection to El Patrón, as shown by how the symbol of the scorpion here reacts with Matt's DNA. The threat of Matt being "euthanized" further emphasizes how eejits are treated as animals rather than humans.



Emilia comes to the hovercraft to say goodbye to María. She brings Steven and a pair of bodyguards. She warns María not to bring to the *eejit* to Aztlán. She mocks her sister for always having charity projects, like rescuing a clone. Steven rips Matt's hat off as Emilia accuses Matt of exploiting María her whole life. She says María is just like their mother. It turns out, Emilia has known all this time that their mother is alive. Steven interrupts, saying they need to get Matt to the hospital. Matt realizes Steven and Emilia are his enemies after all.

Steven orders the bodyguards to grab Matt. María begs them to stop. But Steven says that under the law, Matt is classified as livestock, since he was harvested from a cow. The pilot grabs María and drags her away. The bodyguards lead Matt outside. He sees the garden and the desert. He wants to remember everything he sees, because he knows he is going to die that night. He wonders if he will ever see Celia, Tam Lin, or María again.

CHAPTER 23: DEATH

Matt lies strapped to a hospital bed, surrounded by guards. He is terrified because he knows what happened to MacGregor's clone will soon happen to him. He wishes he had escaped to the mountains. Matt struggles against his straps as the doctor comes in and runs tests on him. Matt tries to run when they untie him to go to the bathroom, but the guards stop him. The doctors wonder over Matt's strange test results but decide to go ahead with the transplants anyway.

Matt wonders where María is. He assumes the family must have drugged her and will continue to drug her until she marries Tom. He knows he cannot help María now, but he hopes Esperanza, being the headstrong woman who wrote *A History of Opium*, might be able to save her daughter.

Bodyguards untie Matt and take him to the next room, which is lavishly decorated. Celia and a pack of bodyguards are gathered there. El Patrón lies in a hospital bed in the room. He calls Matt "*mi vida*" and offers him cookies. Matt refuses to speak to him. El Patrón says his clones always behave like this at the end of their lives, because they forget the years of good treatment he has given them. He says that he gave Matt the childhood he never had in his impoverished village. He recounts the entire story of his childhood again to Matt. Off in the distance, Matt hears a dove calling, sounding like "no hope."

Steven and Emilia's betrayal of Matt, when they previously seemed indifferent to him, suggests that growing up in an oppressive society has turned them into oppressors themselves. Emilia's cruelty is further highlighted by the fact that she mocks her own sister for having compassion for others. All of this makes Matt's situation more dire, as it seems like the entire world is against him.



Steven's comment about livestock shows how the law can be manipulated to deny an individual their inherent humanity. While walking to the hospital, Matt continues to take comfort in nature, as he has all his life, showing his humanity in his appreciation of beauty despite the limitations placed upon him. He also takes comfort in the love he has felt in contrast to his cruel, unfair society.



Matt's straps show how he has been completely robbed of his free will. The doctors, who ignore his suffering and speak about him as if he isn't present, represent an unethical scientific establishment which ignores the human suffering it causes. The strange test results hint at the possibility that there might be issues with the transplant.



Matt believes he helped María by telling her about her mother, showing that even in the most restrictive of societies, one can help someone else by exercising their free will and defying societal rules.



*El Patrón's use of the nickname, "*mi vida*" (meaning "my life" in Spanish) shows how he views Matt as a means to extend his own life. El Patrón's recollection about past clones show how Matt is not special, as he once thought, and how El Patrón is characteristically entitled and selfish, believing all his clones owe him their lives because he was kind to them. The call of the dove references Matt's hopelessness in the face of his destiny.*



El Patrón, deviating from his usual story, argues that since all his siblings died young, he is owed their lifetimes. Celia speaks up and says El Patrón has already taken thousands of lives, in the eejits out in the field. El Patrón says the eejits are the same as cattle, and he caught them running both toward and away from the United States. Celia says El Viejo was the only decent member of the family because he died at the natural time. El Patrón calls El Viejo a fool.

The doctor comes in and announces that the operation is ready to begin. El Patrón tells Matt that he made Matt just like God made Adam. According to El Patrón, Matt owes him because without the old man, Matt would have never enjoyed nature or music. Celia says that Matt doesn't owe him anything and he won't be donating his organs. Celia says she's been feeding Matt poison. She explains that she has been sneaking arsenic to Matt, just enough to make him unfit to donate organs without killing him.

El Patrón screams at Celia. He becomes so worked up the doctors rush him to the operating room. Bodyguards take Celia away, leaving Matt alone in the room with a guard outside the door. The day passes as he waits. He wonders how deadly the arsenic within him is, if he has the power to kill something with it. Instead, he decides to think about María and what she told him about getting in trouble for sunbathing naked on the roof of her convent.

Tam Lin and Mr. Alacrán enter the room. Matt thinks about the time he first entered the Big House and Mr. Alacrán threw him out onto the lawn. Now, Mr. Alacrán tells Matt the family no longer needs him. Matt knows this means El Patrón is dead. Despite himself, he starts to cry. Mr. Alacrán orders Tam Lin to euthanize Matt. Matt argues, saying El Patrón educated him so that he could help govern Opium. Tam Lin tells him El Patrón had seven other clones who were also educated.

Matt becomes enraged that his friend, Tam Lin, is betraying him. Tam Lin hits him and then says that he now works for Mr. Alacrán as a mercenary. He tells Matt that Celia has been turned into an eejit. Matt realizes Tam Lin has led both Matt and Celia into a trap. Mr. Alacrán tells Tam Lin to get rid of Matt and that he will see him later at the wake.

El Patrón justification for killing clones is seemingly based on his sense of entitlement, since he believes his siblings' lives are essentially owed to him like possessions. Celia shows she has a far stronger sense of justice than El Patrón, and that she is incredibly brave, because she is the only character to ever confront El Patrón for his crimes of killing eejits.



El Patrón's comparison to God and Adam emphasizes how he sees himself as a deity who can do whatever he wants to others because they are all beneath him. His entitlement is shown in the assumption that Matt owes him just because he created him. Celia proves his assumption wrong by exercising her own free will to save Matt, finally revealing her plan of poisoning him in order to keep him safe.



Matt's thoughts about using poison to kill someone shows him relating to El Patrón's cruelty. But Matt proves he is different from El Patrón—choosing to think about something positive, his relationship with María, shows that he still maintains the free will to diverge from the bad side he supposedly inherited from El Patrón.



Matt's tears show how the bond between him and El Patrón still holds power over him, even after he wishes to separate himself. Mr. Alacrán's order for Matt to be killed shows how he believes that Matt must either fulfill his destiny of donating organs, or he must die, because he believes his life has no purpose beyond his predetermined function as a donor.



Tam Lin's betrayal here is especially devastating to Matt because he encouraged Matt to exercise his free will and constantly affirmed Matt's worth as a human. His betrayal, then, suggests the opposite of what he has taught Matt all along: that an immoral person will always be immoral, without hope of change.



CHAPTER 24: A FINAL GOOD-BYE

Daft Donald holds Matt down while Tam Lin ties him up. Tam Lin puts Matt on a horse and tells the army guards outside he is going to kill the clone by leaving it out by the eejit pens. Matt realizes he's not on a Safe Horse. He feels rage when he realizes Tam Lin plans to kill him by drowning him in the chemicals by the pens. Matt struggles to free himself from Tam Lin when they finally stop riding. Matt realizes Tam Lin has taken him to the oasis.

Tam Lin unties Matt and asks him to let him explain. Matt attempts to escape from him and says he will never trust a man who killed 20 children. Tam Lin appears remorseful and Matt feels a little bad for him. Tam Lin begins to walk up the mountain trail and Matt decides to follow him, hoping he can trust Tam Lin after all.

Tam Lin pauses at the pond and tells Matt about how if he had never found the oasis, he would have gone crazy a long time ago working for El Patrón. He only came to work for El Patrón because he accidentally killed the children in the bombing, which is how he got his scars and also why Daft Donald can't speak. Tam Lin says he was drawn to El Patrón's power and it wasn't until Tam Lin met Celia that he decided to change his violent ways.

Tam Lin tells Matt that he hid Celia in the stables with Rosa so she wouldn't be turned into an eejit. Matt apologizes for doubting Tam Lin before. Tam Lin explains that Matt must travel over the mountains into Aztlán. Tam Lin says he cannot come with Matt, because he must face the moral consequences of what he has done. He gives Matt a backpack full of supplies and tells him to say he is a refugee whose parents were arrested by Farm Patrol. Matt worries how the people of Aztlán will treat a clone. Tam Lin tells him no one will be able to tell he's a clone, because there is no actual difference between a clone and a human.

Tam Lin tells Matt to leave first thing in the morning, while all of the Farm Patrol agents are at the funeral. He tells Matt that El Patrón kept everything in Opium frozen in history, even the TV shows, so Matt will probably be confused by all the technology in Aztlán. Once Matt gets to Aztlán, he must travel to the city of San Luis and find María's convent.

Matt's continued struggling shows he has maintained his will to survive and his desire to escape. His struggle also shows his anger over Tam Lin's betrayal, heightened by the fact that Tam Lin appears to want to kill him in an especially awful way. His anger reveals how much he looked up to and depended upon the man who now betrays him.



Tam Lin's sadness shows he is still remorseful for his past actions, contrasting with the cruel coldness he displayed in order to trick Mr. Alacrán. His allowing Matt to choose whether or not to follow proves that he does, in fact, respect Matt's free will to decide his own fate.



Celia is a moral influence over Tam Lin, just as she is Matt, proving how personal relationships can influence one's decisions, for better or worse. This draws parallels between Tam Lin's moral journey and Matt's, and offers hope that even an adult who has gone down an immoral path can transform themselves morally.



Tam Lin insistence that Matt travel alone through the mountains implies that he has been preparing Matt for his escape ever since he first began teaching Matt outdoor survival skills. Tam Lin shows his strict moral philosophy by saying he must be punished for his past mistakes. Tam Lin reveals that the difference between humans and clones is completely made up by society, because no one would be able to tell the difference unless they were previously told.



El Patrón's desire to keep Opium in the past shows the intensity of his obsession with youth and his childhood tragedy. The warning of differences between Opium and Aztlán suggest Matt is going to enter an entirely new country and a new life.



Tam Lin tells Matt the painful truth that they will never see each other again. Matt is the only possession El Patrón will ever lose. He instructs Matt to go find María and her mother, because Esperanza is a strong person he wants on his side. Then Tam Lin leaves and doesn't look back at Matt.

Tam Lin's strict moral code will not allow him to lie, even when it would be convenient. This is a stark contrast from the rest of Matt's society, where people lie all the time. Tam Lin's decision not to look back shows his resolution to whatever fate lies ahead for him, suggesting that although he believes it is possible for Matt to carve out a moral path, Tam Lin does not hold the same belief for himself.



CHAPTER 25: THE FARM PATROL

Matt returns to the oasis and builds a fire, hoping Farm Patrol cannot see the flames. He eats dinner and studies the map Tam Lin gave him. He lays out under the stars, briefly worrying he could float off, unattached, into the sky. Matt falls asleep but wakes at dawn when he thinks he hears something vibrating. He sees nothing but the nature around him, so he prepares breakfast. He worries about Celia, alone in the stables, pretending to be an eejit. He double-checks his supplies before leaving.

Matt's happiness out in nature contrasts with the suffering that science and society brought upon him. His irrational fears of floating into the sky show how completely alien this experience of freedom in nature is to him. Matt shows his love and his compassion as a character by continuing to worry about Celia even as he faces his own challenges.



Matt has no problem going down the trail until he reaches a canyon covered in bushes that he has to cut away. He struggles to breathe and has to use his inhaler. He finds a machete in his backpack and uses that to cut through the rest of the brush. He arrives at a giant cliff. Tam Lin's map tells him he must climb it. He struggles to climb it and fears he is going to fall to his death. He sees a vulture flying overhead and is filled with a deep will to live.

Matt's struggle to survive heightens the tension of the story. The vultures represent the constant threat of death Matt faces as he escapes. Matt's will to live shows his independence and his belief in the value of his life, both of which have been oppressed by the society he now leaves.



Matt reaches the top and throws a rock at the vulture. He has five more miles to hike, but he feels confident he can make it. He looks out toward Aztlán but cannot see the country past the mountains. He gazes back at the poppy fields and the mansion. He cries for Celia and even for El Patrón. He knows that as long as he lives, a piece of El Patrón will remain in the world.

Though Matt would like to see himself as an independent, unique individual, his emotions shows that he cannot deny the link he will always share with El Patrón as his clone. In a sense, El Patrón achieves his goal of eternal life through Matt's survival, rather than by harvesting Matt's organs.



Matt camps on top of the cliff. He sees more animals than he has ever seen in his life, including deer, frogs, squirrels, and hawks. He listens to the sounds of nature, which give him the same joy as music. He feels as if he lives in a world only made up of beauty, instead of the evil he has previously known. He looks out at the lights of the country of Opium, which seems less real than the natural environment around him.

The narrative again contrasts Matt's happiness in nature to the suffering he experienced in society. This contrast shows how society and technology, as represented here by the lights of Opium, can oppress an individual's inherent humanity and separate them from nature.



Matt wakes up feeling courageous. He continues down the trail. Suddenly, he hears a popping noise, over and over again. He realizes the noise is two rams butting heads. Then, he hears a mechanical sound along with horns and music. He gazes out and sees a large group of factories and skyscrapers, more technology than he has ever seen. He realizes this is Aztlán. He is nervous but presses on.

Matt goes down the hill, getting poked by a cactus along the way. Through binoculars, he spots Farm Patrol agents nearby. Matt hides behind a rock until he feels safe enough to continue walking. The agents keep patrolling the boarder. Suddenly, a group of men run across the border and the agents pursue them. Matt sees his chance and runs for the border. He hears the sound of stun guns going off behind him. A Farm Patrol agent grabs Matt by the backpack but he slips away, just barely making it across the border in Aztlán, now with no possessions.

The noisy, chaotic technology of Aztlán, in contrast with the peacefulness of nature, suggests Matt will encounter further struggles in the new country. The dramatic change in environment represents a dramatic change in Matt's life as he leaves his home country for this new place, where he will be recognized simply as a human being.



The drama of the scene brings the novel to its climatic moment, where Matt just barely frees himself from the oppression of Opium. The Farm Patrol's pursuit of the immigrants and their use of stun guns highlight the violence and control of El Patrón's regime. Matt's loss of his possessions shows a dramatic transformation in his character from a boy who is wealthy but oppressed to a boy who is poor but now free. Wealth and power, then, are not the guarantors of freedom that El Patrón so adamantly held them to be.



CHAPTER 26: THE LOST BOYS

Matt looks up and sees two men standing over him. Matt tells them his family was lost to Farm Patrol. The men take Matt to a bathroom where he can clean himself up and give him a uniform to wear. Matt cannot believe how nice they are to him. When they give him food, he thanks them, causing one of the guards to remark that Matt must be an "aristocrat" because of his manners.

Matt tells the agent named Raúl that he needs to get to San Luis to see his friend. Raúl asks Matt what skills he has. Matt says he can play music, but Raúl says Matt needs skills that contribute to the good of society. Matt says he has studied water purification. The other guard suggests Matt go to the plankton factory in San Luis. Matt agrees because he thinks he will just leave San Luis for the convent as soon as possible.

In the morning, Raúl leads Matt to a large room where other guards are watching pictures play on the ceilings. Raúl tells him it's a videogame hologram, and Matt pretends he understands. Matt asks Raúl why all the doors in the building are locked and Raúl says its for "orderly production." Matt thinks this is an odd thing to say.

The kindness of these men contrasts with the violence of the Farm Patrol. However, the uniform signals a loss of individual identity. The man's reaction to Matt saying thank you, calling Matt an aristocrat, also signals that there is something unsettling about this society Matt has entered despite Tam Lin's insistence that he would be better off here.



Raúl does not care about any unique aspects of Matt's identity, such as his love of music. He only cares about how he can exploit Matt's labor. Matt is not troubled by these warning signs, however, because he still believes he has the free will to leave this place and continue on with his journey.



The prevalence of locked doors suggests some form of restriction and imprisonment surrounding Raúl and his organization. Raúl's illogical answer to Matt's questions also suggest a presence of dogma and evasion among the guards.



Raúl takes Matt to a room where many boys sit at tables working. Matt worries the boys will not like him, but instead they all gather around him excitedly asking questions, until Raúl tells them to leave Matt alone. Raúl inspects the boys' work as they make pieces of machinery and weave sandals. He chastises a boy named Chacho for carving a piece of wood, because according to Raúl hobbies do not contribute to the overall good of the nation. He says the phrase, "Work is freedom. Freedom is work. It's hard but it's fair," and all the boys repeat after him.

Raúl leaves and Matt wonders why the man locks the door and refers to himself as a "Keeper." A small, skinny boy invites Matt to sit by him. Matt attempts to look aloof and tough, like El Patrón taught him too. Chacho tells him to relax while he can, because tomorrow he will have to work like the rest of him on the way to San Luis. The little kid, whose name is Fidelito, tells Matt that one must meet their production quota in order to receive dinner. Because Fidelito is younger than all the other boys he does not have the same output, and therefore is starving.

Fidelito asks if Matt saw Farm Patrol take his parents. The other boys tell him to shut up, but Matt hushes them. He tells a fake story about his parents, but then he realizes all the boys around him actually lost their families to Farm Patrol and now live in this orphanage. Chacho says they are all now part of the system for producing resources.

CHAPTER 27: A FIVE-LEGGED HORSE

Matt listens to the boys talk and learns that the Keepers are in charge of taking care of orphans, who are known as the Lost Boys and Girls. He also discovers that the Lost Boys refer to the country of Opium as "Dreamland," and tell stories about how zombies and vampires live there. Many of the boys believe their parents actually made it through Opium to the United States and will soon send for them. Matt doubts that this is true.

Matt helps Fidelito with his work because he feels bad for the little boy who is unfairly denied food for not being able to produce as much as the older kids. The guards bring in lunch, and the boys can only eat after they recite their principles of citizenship. After lunch, Matt switches to a new job, but Chacho tells him that later the Keepers will force him to work only one job for the sake of efficiency.

The room full of children working contrasts with the previous room full of adults playing video games, hinting at inequality present in this society. Raúl oppresses Chacho's individual identity by forbidding him to have hobbies. Raúl's use of the Orwellian "work is freedom" phrase and the boys repetition suggests that the man uses dogma to indoctrinate all the children into forced labor.



Because Matt is an outsider, he is able to notice the inconsistencies and concerning aspects of the Keepers' system, such as the locked doors. Matt is still influenced by El Patrón even after he has left Opium, as shown by his attempts to act tough. Fidelito's situation of being starved for not meeting his large quota shows how, despite the Keepers' dogma of "it's hard but it's fair," their society is very unfair.



Matt resembles El Patrón in the automatic position of authority he takes over the rest of the boys. Meeting the orphans of those caught by the Farm Patrol further emphasizes for Matt the horror of the government from which he has just escaped.



The name "Lost Boys" deprives the boys of their individual identities because it defines them only by the loss of their parents. The use of the word "vampire" implies a monstrously cruel immortal who leeches off of others, much like El Patrón, MacGregor, and other powerful people in Opium. The term "zombie" represents another kind of monster, this one robbed of all independent thought and humanity, signifying the terrible life to which the eejits are doomed.



Matt demonstrates his ability to choose to be compassionate within an oppressive system by choosing to help Fidelito. Chacho's warning that the Keepers force them to only work one job suggests the Keepers only care about profit and not about the happiness of the Lost Boys.



Matt asks Chacho what he was carving wood for earlier. Chacho hesitates and then tells him he was making a guitar. Chacho says his father can play guitar and lives a wealthy life in the United States, where he will soon send for Chacho. Matt feels sad, knowing that in all likelihood, Chacho's father is probably an eejit working in the poppy fields of Opium.

In the evening, the boys eat dinner and then bring out their mattress to sleep. They use a communal shower and Matt has to hide the writing on the bottom of his foot. Afterward, Fidelito climbs to the top of a bunk bed and says he's going to show someone a world map, which Matt does not understand. Then Fidelito moons the Keepers.

Raúl comes in to tell the boys a bedtime story about a five-legged horse. The horse's fifth leg is individualism. The fifth leg does whatever it wants and keeps making the horse fall over, until a doctor cuts the extra leg off. Matt asks why one would not just make the horse an eejit, since that would accomplish the same goal as cutting off the leg. Raúl says it is different, but Matt says the boys are basically eejits who are expected to obey all orders. Raúl becomes angry and says Matt is an aristocrat who needs to be educated.

After Raúl leaves, all the boys congratulate Matt on his bravery in standing up to the Keepers. Matt does not understand why speaking his mind is considered brave. That night, Matt lies awake and thinks about how he should be more careful, because the people here are much different from the people he has known before. He worries someone will see the tattoo on his foot, realize he is a clone, and hate him for it.

Matt attempts to make sense of all the new information he has gathered that day. He knows that an "aristocrat" is the worst thing a person can be. A "crot," as the Lost Boys say as a swearword, is an eejit. One can also call an eejit a zombie. Matt misses Celia and Tam Lin greatly, but he forces himself to think about reuniting with María in order to cheer himself up. He also feels better knowing the Lost Boys like him and do not treat him like a clone.

Despite the oppression of the Keepers, Chacho maintains his individual identity by attempting to pursue his own interest of music. The fact that Chacho and the other Lost Boys construct fantasies about their parents in order to hold out hope shows the depth of their suffering under an oppressive regime.



Matt is still affected by the prejudices of Opium because he still fears being discovered as a clone. Fidelito's mooning of the Keepers is an act of rebellion which shows that he maintains his free will even in a system which attempts to rob him of it.



Raúl's condemnation of individualism is another way of discouraging the boys from making their own decisions. Matt comparison of the Keepers' oppression of the boys' free will to Opium's creation of eejits shows how both governments, although very different in philosophy, abuse their power by oppressing the most vulnerable members of society. Raúl uses the insult of "aristocrat" to disregard Matt's opinions.



Though Matt was oppressed in Opium, he enjoyed privileges that he no longer has underneath the Keepers, such as the protection El Patrón gave him. This shows that Matt benefitted as well as suffered from his connection to El Patrón, and now must learn to act without those privileges.



The Lost Boys' use of the word "crot" is an act of rebellion because it is a swear word, but also shows how they believe becoming an eejit is a horrible fate. Matt's appreciation of the Lost Boys shows his happiness at finally being accepted by his peers and being able to escape the segregation and isolation he has experienced all his life.



CHAPTER 28: THE PLANKTON FACTORY

The next morning, Raúl gives a speech to the Lost Boys about how aristocrats may seem attractive, but they are actually evil. Chacho and Fidelito still call Matt a hero afterward. Raúl assigns Matt a job measuring pills, and makes his quota twice as high as the other boys to teach him the importance of work. Matt is not concerned because he knows he will leave for the convent soon.

Raúl gathers Chacho, Fidelito, and Matt to go to San Luis. He tells them the work will be much harder there, but if they behave, they will receive full citizenship when they turn 18. Raúl takes them to a hovercraft, where they have to continue to make sandals while they travel. Fidelito vomits from motion sickness. Matt remembers the last time he was in a hovercraft, with Steven and Emilia. He wonders how they are doing now, as Steven will be crown prince of Opium and Emilia will be surrounded by her child eejits. He feels horror at the knowledge that those eejits were just children like Fidelito, running from the Farm Patrol.

The hovercraft lands, the boys exit, and Matt is overwhelmed by the smell of rotting fish in the heat. They run past white hills and red pools into the nearest building. Inside the building, boys their age are fishing in large tanks. Matt asks the boys who is in charge and they point out the Keepers. A Keeper immediately recognizes Matt as the aristocrat and tells him that if he causes any trouble, he will be sent to the “boneyard.”

The Keepers force Matt and Chacho to clean Fidelito’s vomit out of the aircraft. Then the head Keeper, whose name is Carlos, teaches them how to fish plankton out of the tanks so that it can be made into food. Carlos speaks very highly of the potential of plankton. Matt looks at the security fences around the facility and asks where San Luis is. Carlos refuses to tell him. He points out the salt mountains, which the boys will also be harvesting to be sold.

Raúl shows his cruelty by specifically targeting Matt and trying to turn the Lost Boys against him, which would be especially upsetting for Matt because he finally feels like he belongs. Chacho and Fidelito show their characteristic loyalty and rebelliousness by remaining on Matt’s side.



Raúl’s promise of citizenship, and therefore human rights, to the boys if they obey shows how he weaponizes dehumanization in order to suppress dissent. The fact that Chacho, Fidelito, and Matt can never stop working also emphasizes their oppression. Matt’s empathy of the child eejits after forming a friendship with Fidelito highlights how personal relationships lead one to humanize otherwise dehumanized groups, like the eejits.



The description of the rotten, barren nature of the plankton factory highlights the harsh conditions under which Matt and the other Lost Boys must live. The continued classification of Matt as an aristocrat shows the erasure of his individual identity—though he is now discriminated against for being superior, rather than inferior, to others. The warning of the boneyard suggests the Keepers are willing to use physical harm to control him.



Carlos’s praise of the potential of the plankton factory suggests that this society values factory technology’s ability to promote production and profit even at the cost of human lives, similar to how Opium values scientific progress above the clones’ wellbeing. The presence of the security fence and Carlos’s refusal to tell Matt where San Luis is suggests a restrictive, oppressive environment surrounding the factory. His redirection to the mounds of salt shows his singular focus on profit.



Carlos calls all the boys to lunch in an area he has decorated with plastic flowers and a weathervane. The workers still seem miserable as they eat their meals of plankton. Carlos scolds them for being ungrateful for their food, which is supposed to be the best food because it is shared equally by all of them. Off in the distance, Matt can see the Gulf of California, which is now mostly dried up. Carlos says that Aztlán diverted the water from the Colorado River because it was so polluted, but once they started harvesting the gulf for plankton, the water ran out with nothing to replace it.

Carlos puts Matt, Chacho, and Fidelito to work caring for the plankton tanks. Matt enjoys caring for the plankton, but eventually his body begins to hurt from the hard labor. Matt notices the tanks run off to a distant channel. He asks Chacho and Fidelito if they can swim, but only Fidelito can. Fidelito, being perpetually friendly, tells Matt about how he and his grandmother used to live by the sea until a hurricane forced them into a refugee camp. His grandmother became sick in the camp and the Keepers there force-fed her. Matt wonders if all of Aztlán is so corrupt. Chacho says the country is fine, as long as one is not under the authority of the Keepers.

Carlos pulls up in an electric cart and chastises Matt, Chacho, and Fidelito for taking a break. Matt says Fidelito is overheating and Carlos tells him to eat some salt. He informs the boys they should begin walking back now before dark. Matt asks if Fidelito can ride in the cart, but Carlos insists they all walk so as to be equal. Matt points out that Carlos is riding in the cart, but Carlos argues he has earned the right not to walk. He declares that the boys will not have dinner and rides off. Together, the boys curse the Keepers.

CHAPTER 29: WASHING A DUSTY MIND

Matt asks Chacho why the Keepers call him an aristocrat, and Chacho says it is because Matt sounds educated when he speaks and has nice manners. Matt feels bad, because he's always just copied El Patrón. At dinner, Matt feels bad for Fidelito because out of all three of them who are denied food, he is the skinniest. Chacho bullies another kid into giving them some food and makes sure Fidelito eats the most.

Another Keeper, Jorge, tells all the workers a bedtime story about how minds need to be cleaned just like bodies. All the workers except for Matt, Chacho, and Fidelito repeat the phrase, "It's good to be clean." Jorge tells them a person must work constantly so their work does not become rusty. Jorge asks Matt how one is supposed to keep their mind clean. Matt says one must constantly use their mind, so it does not gather metaphorical dust. Jorge says this is the wrong answer.

The plastic flowers and weathervane represent a hollow attempt on Carlos' part to raise the moral of the boys, showing how he does not genuinely care about their quality of life. The pollution of the river and the drainage of the gulf suggests environmental devastation brought on by the society's focus on profit with an indifference toward other concerns such as resource use and human suffering.



Fidelito's story reveals that the Keepers do not just abuse orphans, but other vulnerable members of society such as refugees. The knowledge that the rest of Aztlán is unlike the Keepers offers hope Matt may escape from this oppressive system. Matt's observation of the runoff channel and his questions about the rest of Aztlán suggest he is already considering his escape from the Keepers. The hurricane suggests further environmental issues within Aztlán.



Matt explicitly states the hypocrisy of the Keepers' collectivist dogma when he points out that Carlos does not walk despite saying that everyone must walk. Carlos's comment that he has earned the right to walk references how one who suffers hardship may wish to force hardship on others. The boys' collective cursing of the Keepers hints at future rebellion.



The Keepers' discrimination against those who seem intelligent and polite shows the corruption of their system, as they clearly fear that these otherwise positive traits will lead to rebellion. Matt's worry about his difference shows his enduring fear of rejection and isolation from his peers.



The rest of the boys' repetition of Jorge's dogma suggests that the Keepers have successfully brainwashed all of them to obey. This categorizes Matt, Chacho, and Fidelito as outsiders because they do not conform. Jorge shows his illogical cruelty by calling Matt wrong, even though Matt's answer to his question makes perfect sense.



Jorge says one must cleanse themselves through self-criticism and asks the other workers to show an example. A boy with bad acne and a flat face, named Ton-Ton, volunteers. Ton-Ton stands up and confesses to thinking about (but not actually) stealing food. Jorge asks him how he thinks one should be punished for thinking improper thoughts. Ton-Ton says he should have to repeat their society's principals and philosophies.

The rest of the boys stand up and confess their crimes, and Jorge tells each of them to repeat the principles. Jorge then tells Matt to confess to his crimes. Matt says he has not done anything wrong, but Jorge accuses him of wanting to turn horses into eejits, of allowing Fidelito to throw up in a bag of production supplies, and of encouraging others to rest during the day. He tells all the other boys to punish Matt. All the boys, except Chacho and Fidelito, begin insulting Matt for his aristocratic habits. Their rejection hurts Matt deeply, because he thought he found someplace where he was no longer an outcast.

Matt feels horrible, until he remembers all the kind words Celia, Tam Lin, and even El Patrón have said to him. He is filled with a new determination to survive. He remembers how María said she loved him. All the boys and Jorge leave, but Chacho and Fidelito remain by Matt's side. Matt knows that as long as he has friends, he will survive and thrive, just as El Patrón survived a life of poverty and sickness.

Ton-Ton shows his complacency and desire to please by volunteering to confess, which suggests he has been completely brainwashed by the Keepers. Ton-Ton's guilt over his thoughts shows how controlling the Keepers' system is in that the system tries to dictate every aspect of an individual.



Jorge controls the boys by creating division between them and Matt, and making them attack one of their own. This is deeply painful for Matt because for his entire life, he has longed to belong among his peers. At this point in the story, it may seem like Matt will always be rejected for his inherent different, no matter where he goes. However, the fact that Chacho and Fidelito do not join in the persecution offers hope that Matt can maintain friends despite his oppression.



Matt's memory of all those who loved him, as well as the strength he finds in his new friendships with Chacho and Fidelito, continue to emphasize how personal relationships allow one to maintain their humanity even while living under oppressive systems that attempt to dehumanize them.



CHAPTER 30: WHEN THE WHALES LOST THEIR LEGS

As days pass, Matt begins to lose his senses of smell and taste due to his work in the factory. The plankton growing cycle ends, and Ton-Ton drives a big harvester machine to the tanks. The boys crane their necks to see the channel that had once been Gulf of California. Matt searches the fence for a weak spot where he could escape through.

Chacho spots something large and white off in the distance. He and Matt go to investigate and find a chasm full of bones. Most of the bones are huge, but one appears to be the size of a human skull. Matt and Chacho decide the chasm is too dangerous to enter and turn back. Fidelito, coming from a seaside town, knows the large bones belong to beached whales. Matt wonders what could have led the whales to die in the chasm.

Matt's search for a way to escape shows that despite the efforts of the Keepers to squash his disobedience, he maintains his desire to control his own life. This suggests that he possesses an inner determination the Keepers cannot defeat.



The chasm of bones is an ominous detail which hints at the deadly, sinister nature of the plankton factory. The image of beached whales represents a trapped, helpless creature Matt can relate to in his oppressed state but also hints at a more dangerous fate awaiting him in the future surrounding the boneyard.



Every night, Jorge makes the boys confess their crimes and then attack Matt with insults. Matt finds that the insults affect him less and less as time goes on, until the boys just sound like turkeys gobbling to him. Matt still refuses to confess himself, even though Chacho and Fidelito have learned to obey Jorge. One night, when Matt is more tired than usual, Jorge says he needs further punishment.

Jorge accuses Ton-Ton of stealing a videogame from the Keepers. He asks the boys how one who has more possessions than the others should be punished. He tells a parable about how worker bees kill another bee who steals. Ton-Ton trembles with fear and Matt feels pity for him even though he hates Ton-Ton for being a suck-up. When Jorge takes out a large cane, Matt realizes Jorge wants to use Ton-Ton's punishment to frighten Matt, just like El Patrón used to punish one person as an example for others. Jorge beats Ton-Ton so badly, he has to go to the infirmary.

Jorge asks Matt if he has any sins to confess to. Matt says no, because he has learned that not even an obedient person like Ton-Ton is safe from punishment. Jorge tells the boys that some individuals must learn their lessons by being broken. Matt accuses him of trying to turn them into zombies. Jorge raises his cane. Fidelito, panicked, confesses Matt's crimes for him. Jorge suggests that Fidelito take the punishment for Matt, and finally, Matt knows he must confess. Matt silently endures a beating from Jorge.

When Jorge leaves, the boys gather around Matt and tell him the Keeper went too far this time. A boy named Flaco calls Jorge a loser and says he will report Jorge once he is old enough to leave. Flaco says Matt is truly like the rest of the boys now, because he offered to take a beating for Fidelito. All the other boys agree and help Matt to the infirmary, where another boy gives him laudanum. Matt worries the drug will kill him like it killed Furball.

CHAPTER 31: TON-TON

Ton-Ton complains about his pain to the boy in charge of the infirmary, whose name is Luna. Luna is a Keeper-in-training who was once a Lost Boy. Luna tells Matt that all Lost Boys become Keepers eventually, but Matt says there are too many Lost Boys and not enough Keepers for that to be true. Luna and Ton-Ton do not agree with his logic. Ton-Ton tells Matt all about the videogames, television, and pool in the Keepers' compound. The Keepers also have parties and better food. Matt realizes Ton-Ton may seem dumb, but he is actually very observant and very knowledgeable about the factory's machinery.

Matt shows his mental resilience, given to him by years of surviving in Opium, by enduring the constant abuse from Jorge and the rest of the boys. Jorge shows his vindictive nature by increasing his punishment of Matt in order to break his will, further emphasizing the senseless brutality of this society.



Jorge's beating of Ton-Ton shows how corrupt and illogical the Keepers are because Ton-Ton is the most obedient of the Lost Boys. Ton-Ton is also the easiest to exploit, however, because he is the most eager to please the Keepers, thus showing how the Keepers do not care about turning the Lost Boys into moral citizens, but instead only care about exploiting the most vulnerable.



The ineffectiveness of Jorge's cruelty toward Ton-Ton suggests that the Keepers' own corruption will be their downfall. Matt's accusation of Jorge wanting to create zombies draws comparisons between the Keepers' system and Opium's creation of eejits. Matt's act of self-sacrifice for Fidelito shows his moral development as an individual, as this gesture is the exact opposite of how El Patrón sacrifices his clones for the sake of himself.



The rest of the Lost Boys aligning with Matt after he takes a beating for Fidelito shows how compassion for others can lead to resistance against an abusive system. Matt finally receives the acceptance he has always desired—not through his accomplishments, as he always expected, but through his moral trait of compassion.



Luna shows how one can become so brainwashed by oppression that they cannot see the reality in front of them, as Matt fails to reason with him. Luna also represents how individuals living under an oppressive system will cope by dreaming of the day when they can become the oppressors. Ton-Ton exposes the Keepers' hypocrisy by detailing how they unfairly live in luxury while the Lost Boys suffer in harsh conditions.



Ton-Ton is distressed by the amount of punishment he receives even though he follows all the Keepers' rules. Luna says Ton-Ton must have done something to receive a beating from Jorge. Matt encourages Ton-Ton to describe in detail the fancy food and dessert the Keepers eat. Matt asks Luna and Ton-Ton if it is fair that the Keepers receive such luxury when the Lost Boys live in scarcity. Luna and Ton-Ton argue that the Keepers have earned their blessings, and one day the Lost Boys will, too.

Luna offers Matt some more laudanum, but he refuses. Luna says he takes the drug often, but Ton-Ton says one is not supposed to get high until they become a Keeper. Matt realizes the Keepers are all abusing drugs every single night, which offers an opportunity for escape. He asks the boys where San Luis is. Ton-Ton is actually from San Luis, but has never thought of returning there. Matt realizes his face is covered in zits and Luna says it is a side effect of working with plankton. Matt realizes the Keepers do not have zits, meaning that the acne comes from eating plankton rather than working with it.

The next day, Jorge makes Matt and Ton-Ton return to work, even though Ton-Ton is still injured. Matt is eager to plan his escape. Matt knows he must somehow shut off the electric fence during the night and then travel the 20 miles to San Luis. He commits to taking Chacho and Fidelito with him but worries about how Fidelito will make the long journey. He realizes friendship is a burden, but he is still grateful to have friends for the first time in his life. He considers blowing up the Keepers, but realizes that would be morally wrong.

Chacho and Matt wait for Ton-Ton to arrive with the shrimp harvester. Chacho hates Ton-Ton for sucking up to the Keepers, but Matt says they need Ton-Ton for their escape plan. Fidelito says his grandma taught him to be kind to the meanest people, because they are the ones who need the most love. Ton-Ton arrives and suspects that the three boys are waiting to beat him up. Matt tells him they just want to be friends. He asks Ton-Ton about San Luis. Ton-Ton says his family used to live there, but everyone, except his grandma, disappeared going over the border.

Ton-Ton tells Matt about how Jorge saved him from the Farm Patrol, so therefore Ton-Ton owes him his life. He will become a Keeper and never go to San Luis to look for his grandmother. Matt then encourages Ton-Ton to describe San Luis in detail. Ton-Ton talks about his large family who lived happily together despite their poverty. Ton-Ton offers to lie and tell the Keepers the harvester broke so the boys will not get in trouble for being late.

Ton-Ton and Luna's insistence of the justice of a clearly unjust system demonstrates how oppressed individuals can deny logic and accept the language of the oppressor in order to survive the treatment they face. The Keepers show how a corrupt power can prevent rebellion by continuously promising a better life in the future for the oppressed.



The Keepers' abuse of drugs and the opportunity it gives Matt to potentially escape shows how a government's corruption can lead to its own downfall. Ton-Ton never thinking about returning to his home shows how the Keepers have abused him to the point where he suffers from psychological as well as physical imprisonment, not dissimilar to how the eejits are brainwashed in opium. The acne is a seemingly trivial yet tangible example of how the Keepers' society, despite its dogma, is deeply unequal.



Matt's refusal to abandon his friends even though this would be convenient, and his refusal to act on his darker impulses of hurting the Keepers shows how he is choosing to be moral just like Tam Lin encouraged him to be. Matt's freedom is restricted by personal relations, as it was back in Opium, but now Matt has come to realize that love and loyalty toward others is worth the sacrifice one must make.



Chacho and Matt gravitate toward the immoral decision of exploiting Ton-Ton for his knowledge of the Keepers. However, Fidelito encourages them to make the moral choice of compassion, similar to how Tam Lin, Celia, and María have always encouraged Matt to be kind and fair. This further emphasizes how personal relationships can have a positive effect on one's moral character.



Jorge's cruelty is further emphasized by his exploitation of the debt that Ton-Ton feels like he owes to him. Ton-Ton's offer to lie for the sake of the other boys suggests his relationship to them is beginning to encourage rebellion. Ton-Ton's family's happiness in poverty contrasts with the Alacrán family's misery in wealth, suggesting that power and affluence do not guarantee a fulfilling life.



Matt tells Chacho that Celia is his mother, because that's how he thinks of her. He considers Tam Lin to be his father. Suddenly, Matt is overcome with longing for the loved ones of his past life. Chacho empathizes with Matt's sadness over his lost family because all the Lost Boys are orphaned.

Matt acknowledges the parental influence Tam Lin and Celia had on his moral development. This acknowledgement shows that Matt is not the unloved orphan he always thought he was, and the struggles of the Lost Boys allow him to feel gratitude for his upbringing despite the discrimination he faced as a clone. Chacho's reaction suggests that, despite his tough exterior, he is also capable of great empathy.



CHAPTER 32: FOUND OUT

Jorge continues to antagonize Matt into confessing his supposed crimes. Matt imagines he is faraway in Celia's apartment with her and Tam Lin. Jorge becomes frustrated and turns to Fidelito. He says he must punish Fidelito because just punishing Matt does not seem to be correcting his behavior. Matt realizes Jorge will not allow him to take Fidelito's punishment this time, so Matt attacks Jorge himself. Chacho jumps in, punching Jorge as the rest of the boys cheer. Matt stops Chacho before he kills Jorge.

The past kindness of Celia and Tam Lin have given Matt the strength to cope with abuse, demonstrating the power of love and human connection to imbue people with morality and strength. Jorge's extreme cruelty, as shown by his attempt to beat the innocent, weak Fidelito, becomes his downfall, as this is what causes Matt to finally physically fight back. This suggests that the cruelty of abusive regimes will ultimately be the regimes' own downfall. Matt makes the moral choice to stop Chacho from killing Jorge, further showcasing his deviation from the moral corruption of El Patrón.



Twenty keepers with stun guns come into the room. They tie Matt and Chacho up as Carlos threatens to punish them tomorrow. Flaco defends Matt and Chacho by saying Jorge was planning on killing Fidelito. Jorge denies this, but Flaco says all two hundred Lost Boys witnessed incident. Both Matt and Carlos realize Flaco is threatening the Keepers with the mob of boys. Carlos attempts to leave, but Flaco stops him. Jorge accuses Matt of corrupting all the boys. Jorge reveals that Luna saw the writing on Matt's foot, which means he must be an escaped eejit.

The initial success of Flaco's threats suggests that if the oppressed unite against the oppressors, they may succeed in overthrowing abusive regimes. However, Jorge shows how the oppressed can be prevented from rising up if the authority figures create division among the masses, as he does by accusing Matt of being an escaped eejit, something against which the Lost Boys discriminate despite their own low standing in society.



When the boys see the writing on Matt's foot, they stop defending him. Suddenly, Ton-Ton speaks up, saying it is not Matt's fault he was enslaved by the Dreamland, not anymore than it is all the Lost Boys' parents' fault that they were turned into eejits. Flaco denies that his parents are eejits, but Ton-Ton insists upon the truth, saying that being an eejit does not make someone immoral. Jorge calls Ton-Ton stupid and the rest of the boys turn away from him and Matt. The Keepers lock up Matt and Chacho.

The Keepers succeed in using internal division to squash rebellion among the oppressed. However, Ton-Ton, although he is an outsider hated by others, shows he is the most moral, because he sees the injustice of hating against eejits for their oppression. This echoes Matt's own empathy for eejits as a child when he realized that his Teacher was one of them. Still, this revelation is not enough to overcome the Keepers' abusive power.



CHAPTER 33: THE BONEYARD

In the morning, the Keepers place the still tied-up Matt and Chacho in a cart. Jorge drives the cart out past the plankton factory to the fence. The Keepers plan to dump Matt and Chacho in the desolate chasm of the boneyard. They begin to untie them, but Jorge orders them to leave the boys tied up. Despite the other Keepers' objections, Matt and Chacho are thrown into the chasm still immobilized, and the Keepers drive off.

Matt and Chacho discuss ways to escape. Matt finds a jagged bone, but when he attempts to cut himself free, he sinks down into the pit of bones. Chacho attempts to move and sinks, too. Chacho realizes the pit is full of bats and begins to scream in terror, fearing they will suck his blood. Matt tells him one should not be afraid of bats, but Chacho continues to scream that they are going to die down here. Matt remembers Tam Lin and Celia waiting for him back in Opium and knows he must survive.

Matt and Chacho suffer from intense dehydration. They manage to saw themselves free on the bones. Chacho asks Matt if he is actually an eejit and then asks him what eejits are really like. Matt tells him about all the eejits who slaved in the fields and on the estate. He says his parents, Celia and Tam Lin, were slaves but not eejits.

Chacho hears a breeze and fears it is the monster, La Llorona. A storm brews overhead. The sky hails and rains and Matt drinks the water. The storm ends as suddenly as it began, but Matt is still thirsty. Matt calls out to Chacho. The bats begin to climb up the boys' bodies to get away from the water. Chacho fears the bats will suck his blood, but Matt attempts to remain calm so he does not shift the pile of bones again. He slowly begins climbing through the bones until he reaches the edge of the pit.

Matt calls out to Chacho, but he does not respond. Matt tells stories of his childhood so that Chacho may follow the sound of his voice. Matt pulls himself over the edge of the pit. He hears Chacho snoring, still down in the pit but alive.

The Keepers show that they are not only physically abusive, but murderous, because they do not even value Matt and Chacho's lives enough to untie them before throwing them into a pit of bones. At this point, Matt and Chacho appear helpless to overcome their circumstances and escape from their oppressors.



The macabre elements of the bones and the bats highlight the danger of the boys' situation and the odds stacked against them. However, Matt's recollection of Tam Lin and Celia shows how personal relationships continue to give him the affirmation he needs to believe in the inherent worth of his life and fight for his and others' survival.



Chacho still trusts Matt, even though he suspects he might be an eejit. In fact, he wants to educate himself further on a subject he used to fear. This shows the power of friendship to humanize a dehumanized group like the eejits, much like María gradually changed her opinion of clones once she got to know Matt.



The constant threats of dehydration, animals, supernatural beings, and being crushed by bones all heighten the tension of the passage, as Matt and Chacho struggle to survive. Matt once again proves his will to live even when others wish death upon him by attempting to remain calm and by eventually climbing out of the pit.



Matt shows his ability to be selfless by remaining with Chacho and talking to him even after he himself has escaped from the boneyard. Matt's escape from the pit offers hope he may survive the rest of the ordeal.



CHAPTER 34: THE SHRIMP HARVESTER

Matt wakes up at dawn freezing. He calls for Chacho to follow his voice out of the pit, but Chacho does not answer. Matt shouts and begs, but Chacho still does not say anything and Matt can't locate him among the bones. Helpless, Matt cries. He knows he cannot stay by the pit because Jorge will come back for him, but he also cannot abandon his friend. He decides to stay with Chacho, telling him more stories from his childhood because that is all he can do.

When the sun rises, Matt is able to see a bit of Chacho's uniform. He hears a machine rumbling toward him and turns to see Ton-Ton's shrimp harvester—Ton-Ton and Fidelito have arrived to help Matt and Chacho. Matt cries because he worries Chacho has already died. Ton-Ton uses the harvester to move the bones away from where Chacho is buried. They find Chacho still breathing, but his eyes are closed, and he is not moving.

Ton-Ton carefully moves the rest of the bones away and uses the harvester to gently lift Chacho from the pit. He says Chacho is in shock and gives him some of the Keepers' special electrolyte soda to drink. Chacho regains consciousness. Ton-Ton gives Matt some soda, too, and Matt feels like it is the best thing he has ever tasted. Ton-Ton announces they are going to San Luis to find his grandmother. Fidelito says it was his idea to go. Ton-Ton says they will travel to the city in the shrimp harvester.

The boys all climb into the shrimp harvester, which moves very slowly across the rough terrain. Ton-Ton orders them to exit the harvester when they arrive at the fence. Chacho still cannot stand, so Matt and Fidelito help him out. Matt worries about the Keepers but Fidelito tells him all the Lost Boys helped lock the Keepers in the living quarters. Ton-Ton uses the shrimp harvester to break apart the fence.

Matt asks if Chacho is alright, and Chacho says he cannot breathe properly because the bones crushed his chest. Matt promises him they will find a doctor immediately once they get to San Luis. Ton-Ton drives the shrimp harvester through the new hole in the fence and they all climb back into the machine. The harvester moves faster now. Ton-Ton gives them more soda to drink and lots of the Keepers' fancy food.

Matt is faced with yet another moral dilemma, where he must choose between protecting himself and saving another. Matt chooses to stay with Chacho, even though the situation appears hopeless, showing how much Matt has developed as a moral character despite his relationship to the immoral El Patrón.



Both Ton-Ton and Fidelito prove their loyalty as friends and their bravery in the face of injustice by coming to rescue Matt and Chacho. They prove that, like Matt, they can choose to exercise their free will to do what is right even though their circumstances are unjust and oppressive.



Ton-Ton's decision to go see his grandmother shows how friendship, as shown by Fidelito's convincing of him to go, has reaffirmed his humanity and identity after both were stolen by the oppressive society of the Keepers. Ton-Ton has chosen to use the tools the Keepers gave him, namely the shrimp harvester, to help others, reinforcing his ability to take control of the circumstances that others have forced upon him.



The Keepers brought about their own downfall by excessively punishing Matt and Chacho to the point where the Lost Boys were outraged enough to rebel. This shows how oppressive regimes are unsustainable and will ultimately be brought down by their own corrupt actions.



Matt selflessly promises to find Chacho a doctor before going to find María, showing the power of friendship on his moral character. Ton-Ton uses the Keepers' machinery and supplies in order to help the other's escape, further emphasizing how the Keepers' cruelty ultimately brought on their own downfall.



Matt worries about the Keepers coming after them, but Ton-Ton says he drugged all the Keepers with their own laudanum. Flaco plans on waiting till the supply hovercraft comes to the plankton factory and then he will fly to the Keepers' Headquarters for help. Ton-Ton does not trust the Headquarters, though. Night falls and the boys must stop because the harvester runs on solar energy.

Matt worries Chacho will not survive until morning. Ton-Ton reminisces about how, after Jorge saved him from Farm Patrol, Ton-Ton let Jorge treat him like he was stupid. Matt empathizes with him by saying that he too used to trust someone who hurt him. Ton-Ton suggests Matt and Fidelito walk to San Luis now, and send a doctor back to save Chacho. Ton-Ton gives them supplies and warns them about the dangers of crossing the Colorado River.

CHAPTER 35: EL DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS

Matt and Fidelito hurry toward San Luis, even though Matt's injuries from the boneyard still hurt greatly. Matt tells Fidelito about the convent and how each morning the girls raise a flag with a picture of **the Virgin of Guadalupe**.

Matt and Fidelito approach the Colorado River, which smells horrible from the pollution. A monstrous tentacle rises out of the water. Matt and Fidelito hurry along before they pass out from the smell. They sniff lemons to remain conscious. Matt fears he will have an asthma attack. Matt collapses and Fidelito runs to find help. When Matt regains consciousness, there is an old man and woman standing beside him and giving him an inhaler. They tell him Fidelito found them, and they have sent an ambulance for Chacho.

The man and the woman, named Guapo and Consuela, help Matt along the road. They arrive at a big wall that Consuela opens. Inside, Matt is surrounded by flowers, statues, and lots of candles. He sees many graves with food placed around them. Consuela tells him they are in a cemetery. Matt has only ever seen the dead by buried in a mausoleum back in Opium, or the eejits be buried in mass graves in the desert.

Ton-Ton's use of the Keepers own laudanum to overthrow them shows how a regime can be brought down by its own corruption, since the Keepers abused laudanum in the first place. However, the Keepers' entire regime may be difficult to overthrow, as shown by Ton-Ton's distrust of the Headquarters.



Matt's empathy with Ton-Ton having a connection to his abuser suggests that Matt is beginning to forgive himself for feeling connected to El Patrón. This represents an important shift in Matt's character as he begins to accept the circumstances which are beyond his control.



The Virgin of Guadalupe represents the safety Matt feels around his loved ones, such as Celia, and also the morality he associates with his friends, such as María. The virtues of El Virgin, embodied by his loved ones, inspire him to make moral choices in spite of the difficult circumstances with which he has been faced.



The description of the high amount of pollution in the river further suggests the environmental devastation brought on by careless technological advancement. The arrival of the old man and woman suggests there are still decent, kind people in the country even though Matt has only encountered the cruelty of the Keepers thus far.



The differences in how the countries of Aztlán and Opium bury the dead suggests that Aztlán is a more equal society, without such great divides like that between the Alacrás and the eejits, and also how the people of Aztlán do not fear death as El Patrón does, as shown by their decoration of the graves. Although both societies are oppressive, there are clear cultural differences, which is likely why Tam Lin believed Matt would be safer here.



Fidelito appears and tells Matt that today is El Día de los Muertos, or the Day of the Dead. Matt has never heard of this holiday before. He sees statues of skeletons all around the cemetery. Consuela tells Matt that this is a joyful celebration where people welcome back the dead with their favorite foods. Matt thinks sadly about how no one will be putting out any food for El Patrón. He asks Consuela why they would celebrate death. Consuela says they celebrate because death is a part of everyone.

Matt's sadness over no one mourning for El Patrón stems from the enduring connection he feels to the man, but also suggests Matt's pity of a life lived so cruelly that no one remembers El Patrón fondly. Consuela's comments about celebrating death show that death is a natural part of life, and therefore El Patrón was particularly unnatural and heinous for killing so many clones in order to delay his own death.



Guapo offers to drop Matt and Fidelito off at the convent hospital where Chacho is staying. Consuela says the Keepers should be avoiding the festival, but just in case she gives the boys skeleton masks. Matt is horrified by the skeletons, but Consuela encourages him to wear the costume for his own safety, calling Matt “mi vida.” Matt agrees to wear the mask and thanks Consuela before they leave.

Matt hesitation to wear the skeleton mask shows he has internalized El Patrón's fear of death. However, he overcomes his connection to this man once again in order to survive. Consuela's use of the term “mi vida” compares her to Celia, therefore portraying her as a kind, protective person.



CHAPTER 36: THE CASTLE ON THE HILL

Matt and Fidelito follow Guapo past the golden flowers left to guide the dead home. Guapo flies them in his hovercraft and Matt can see many beautiful houses beneath them. Matt hears music and fireworks and suddenly the hovercraft is caught up in a parade. Matt has never seen so many people and everyone is dressed up in costumes. He sees one person dressed up as “the Vampire of Dreamland” and Matt realizes the costume is supposed to be El Patrón.

Matt's observation of the beautiful houses and the festive parade suggest that Aztlán is a vibrant, happy country in contrast to the sterile, controlling Opium. The comparison of El Patrón to a vampire further highlights how his separation from death and exploitation of others turned him into a monstrous being.



Fidelito sees Keepers in the crowd, but Guapo drops him and Matt safely at the base of the hill where the convent is. Matt is sorry to say goodbye to a kind stranger like Guapo. As Matt and Fidelito walk up the hill, Matt worries María will not care for him anymore because he is covered in acne and wounds.

Matt's worry about María no longer carrying for him because of his ugly appearance reflects the internalized oppression he feels, and as well as the natural insecurities of being a teenager.



The convent is large and looks like a shimmering medieval castle. Matt cannot find a door inside, so he attempts to enter through a window. Suddenly, the wall appears to open to a courtyard. Matt realizes the wall is a hologram. Now inside, he and Fidelito pass by a statue of Saint Francis and enter a hospital corridor. They tell a nearby nurse they are looking for Chacho and María.

The convent's use of futuristic technology signals that this is a very different place from the oppressive Opium, with its use of primitive technology. The mention of Saint Francis reminds the reader that, despite Matt's doubts, María will still love and value him for who he is, as the Saint would.



The nurse tells them to be careful, because there are Keepers in the hospital. She leads them to Chacho's room, telling them she was once an orphan who lived under the oppression of the Keepers. She leaves them outside the hospital room. Inside, two nuns are shouting with Carlos and Jorge in front of a hospital bed. Ton-Ton is covering on the floor. The nuns, one of whom is named Sister Inéz, forbid the Keepers from taking Chacho because he might die if moved.

Jorge sees Matt and attempts to grab him but stumbles and runs into Ton-Ton. Ton-Ton headbutts Jorge. Matt tries to kick Carlos, but he is still weak from the boneyard. A voice yells for them to stop fighting. Everyone in the room freezes. A woman, who is physically little but appears very fierce, enters the room. Sister Inéz addresses her as Esperanza.

Esperanza demands an explanation for the fighting. Everyone begins talking at once, but she calls on Ton-Ton to explain. Ton-Ton, for the first time not stuttering, tells her the entire story about how Matt and Chacho were thrown in the boneyard after saving Fidelito, before the Lost Boys revolted and Ton-Ton drove the harvester toward San Luis. Jorge says that Ton-Ton is stupid, and that Esperanza should not believe anything he says. Esperanza asks Jorge if the canings and boneyard actually exist and Jorge denies it.

Esperanza asks Jorge if the Keepers truly abuse laudanum, because the Aztlán authorities have recently discovered the Keepers' drug supply. Carlos objects, saying the Keepers are honorable men who only want to turn orphans into good citizens. Police enter the room and arrest Jorge and Carlos. Esperanza tells the boys she has been trying to take down the corrupt Keepers for a long time and Ton-Ton gave her the evidence she needed. María bursts into the room and hugs Matt.

CHAPTER 37: HOMECOMING

Sister Inéz treats Matt's injuries at the hospital along with Chacho, who struggles to recover from being crushed in the boneyard. María visits Matt every day and talks to him excitedly about every detail in her life. Her spirit fills Matt with hope. One day, both María and Esperanza come to visit him. Despite María's protests, Esperanza tells Matt there is something important he must do. She says no one has heard from anyone in Opium since El Patrón's death.

The kindness of the nurse and the nuns in their help of the Lost Boys suggests that religion can motivate one towards compassion and morality, as it does for María and Celia. Their opposition to the Keepers shows how compassion can stand up to oppression to protect the vulnerable.



Matt and Ton-Ton demonstrate their loyalty and friendship by putting themselves in harms way in order to defend Chacho. Esperanza shows her characteristic authority and fierceness by the power she immediately holds over the room, suggesting that she a powerful figure within the convent and may be able to help them, as Tam Lin suggested to Matt before he left Opium.



Ton-Ton proves that, despite the Keepers' attempts to dehumanize and oppress him, he maintains the independence needed to speak out against their injustices. Ton-Ton's characteristic attention to detail is vital for bringing down the Keepers' regime. Jorge shows his corruption as an authority figure by insulting Ton-Ton and lying about what the boy says, showing that straightforward acts of resistance are not always enough when one is up against a corrupt, dishonest system.



Esperanza shows how, unlike the corrupt regimes of the Keepers and El Patrón, an authority figure can use their power to foster justice, as she does by having the Keepers arrested. Her actions also show that authority figures can be fair and just when they listen to and defend the lowest members of society, such as the Lost Boys.



Despite the oppression and dehumanization Matt has endured from both the Keepers and the people of Opium, he is still able to find hope and joy in personal relationships like his friendship with María. Esperanza's intrusion, however, suggests that, despite his happiness, Matt still cannot avoid his links to Opium, just as he can never escape his biological connection to El Patrón.



Esperanza tells Matt that Opium has been on lockdown for over three months, with no drugs or people going in or out. The country's security system blocks all hovercrafts and only El Patrón's DNA and fingerprint can override the system. Matt wonders if either the eejits or the Farm Patrol have revolted, or if the remaining Alacrás have turned on each other. He says there is nothing he can do to help Opium, because he is just a clone with no power.

Matt says that since he can no longer be used for organ transplants, Esperanza must just be intending to waste him on attempting to end Opium's lockdown. Esperanza tells Matt that under international law, he is no longer a clone. The law says that two versions of one individual cannot exist, so the clone must be legally "unpersoned." But because El Patrón has died, Matt is now the only Matteo Alacrán, and therefore the rightful leader of Opium.

Esperanza says they can use the law to have Matt take over Opium and then destroy the empire from within. Matt realizes all Esperanza cares about is destroying Opium. He knows Esperanza would sacrifice him to achieve her goal. But he also knows El Patrón created an evil empire that hurts drug addicts around the world, turns immigrants into eejits, and orphans the Lost Boys. If Matt becomes the leader of Opium, he can undo El Patrón's crimes, so he agrees to help Esperanza.

Matt flies toward Opium in a hovercraft. As he approaches the border, the hovercraft's touch screen asks for him to confirm his identity. Matt presses his hand to the screen and the security system gives the hovercraft approval to land. Matt looks down and sees the estate he grew up on from a new perspective. He sees servants and eejits outside, but no one comes to greet the hovercraft as it lands. Matt enters the mansion, uncertain of what he will find there.

Esperanza told Matt to find the Alacrás and use his DNA signature to override the lockdown. Then, the U.S. and Aztlán will invade the country in order to make Matt the new leader. Matt is still afraid of the Alacrás' cruelty toward him, but there is no one inside the big salon of the house. He hears piano playing in the music room. He finds Mr. Ortega at the piano, but when he touches the old teacher, the man runs away.

Matt wonders if, like the Keepers, the regime of Opium has been brought down by its own corruption, either through its cruelty toward eejits or the internal conflict of the ruling family. The mention of El Patrón's DNA and fingerprints suggest that Matt genetic link to El Patrón, which has plagued him throughout the story, could actually be the solution to the problems here.



Because of the discrimination he has lived with all his life, Matt still believes others will only want to exploit him for being a clone. Esperanza's comments about international law classifying Matt an "unperson" shows how Opium is not the only society which uses the law to dehumanize individuals like clones.



Esperanza's single-minded ambitions shows that she is also a corrupt authority figure because she does not respect the lives of individuals like Matt. Matt's realization that he can use his predetermined link to El Patrón to choose to right the wrongs of the man's empire shows how a mixture of both destiny and free will affect his life.



Matt views the estate with a new perspective because he now knows he has the free will to influence what happens there. The presence of only servants and eejits suggests a dramatic change and possible catastrophe within Opium, a country which used to be dictated solely by the ruling upper class.



Matt, despite his exercising of his free will, must still use his DNA to bring about change in Opium, showing the power the circumstances of his birth still hold over his life. His continued fear of the Alacrás shows the lasting trauma of the discrimination he faced as a child. Mr. Ortega's fear suggests a great change of circumstances with the household.



Matt sits down at the piano and begins to play. He is absorbed in the music when he turns and sees Celia standing before him. She cries and hugs him. She marvels at how much he has changed since he left. Matt mentions Tam Lin and asks her why Mr. Alacrán or Steven have not tried to end the lockdown. Celia takes him to the kitchen, where Mr. Ortega and Daft Donald are sitting in front of computers. Celia reminds Matt that El Patrón never let anything or anyone get away from him. Everyone on the estate belonged to him, including Matt.

The presence of computers in the kitchen shows how drastically Opium has changed, since no modern technology was allowed in the house before El Patrón's death. Celia's mention of how El Patrón would never let anyone go, as well as the unexplained absence of the family from the mansion, ominously hints at a horrible fate for those left behind in Opium.



CHAPTER 38: THE HOUSE OF ETERNITY

Celia tells Matt what happened the night he fled Opium, with Daft Donald assisting by typing out his recollections on his computer. The night Matt left, everyone on the estate attended El Patrón's wake, except for Celia, because she was pretending to be an eejit, and Mr. Ortega, because he could not hear the call to attend and no one remembered to fetch him. With the Farm Patrol watching, bodyguards carried in El Patrón's giant gold coffin. The ground opened up, revealing El Patrón's secret burial chambers.

Mr. Ortega and Celia's current presence on the estate suggests that, because of their lower status in society, they were ironically spared from whatever happened to the rest of the family. Even in death, El Patrón continues to show his materialism and his comparison of himself to ancient kings through his giant gold coffin.



Daft Donald recounts how the chambers were full of gold. The eejits and the Farm Patrol agents present were sent away and the guests began to have a party. All the guests talked about how much they hated El Patrón. Tam Lin brings out a special bottle of wine, marked with the sign of the **scorpion**. El Patrón planned for this wine to be served either at his 150th birthday party or at his funeral.

The Alacrás' affirm their superficiality by expressing their hatred of El Patrón after pretending to love him during his life. The image of the scorpion on the wine bottle hints at something sinister and venomous surrounding El Patrón's intentions for the wine.



Tam Lin suggested they all toast with the special wine. All of the family raises a glass, but Tam Lin warned Daft Donald not to drink. Mr. Alacrán gave a toast to greed, and everyone but Donald drank. Immediately after, they all fell down and died, including Tam Lin. Matt chillingly recalls El Patrón's reverence for the ancient kings who killed their servants when they themselves died. Matt realizes El Patrón planned to kill everyone all along, and Tam Lin knew it.

Mr. Alacrán's toast to greed before all the family dies from consumption is ironic, as the Alacrás are ultimately brought down by the characteristics that corrupted them in the first place. Tam Lin exercises his free will by choosing to execute El Patrón's plan to murder the family and by choosing to drink the poisoned wine himself, seemingly as a way to atone for his past mistakes.



After everyone died, Daft Donald left the chamber and blew up the entrance. Celia says Tam Lin went along with the poisoning plan because it was his only chance to free the eejits. Matt imagines all the dead bodies in the burial chamber and realizes even wicked people like Tom had no more control over their fate than eejits. Celia says Tam Lin died to make up for the crime of blowing up the schoolchildren. Matt becomes angry at Tam Lin and runs out of the kitchen.

The fate of the Alacrás shows that under a corrupt authoritarian regime like El Patrón's, no one possesses the free will to control their own lives. Tam Lin shows the consequences of the strict moral code he has chosen, as it led to his death and his separation for Matt. Together, these two extremes advocate for a middle ground between total control and total free will.



Matt orders a Safe Horse from Rosa and rides through the poppy fields. He sees the eejits still working and wonders what he will do with them now. He curses Tam Lin for leaving him. He wonders if one can reverse the operation that makes people eejits. He knows he will have to disband the Farm Patrol and hire a less corrupt law enforcement. He is overwhelmed by all the problems he must resolve as Opium's new leader.

Matt stops at the mountains and walks to the oasis. He finds the letter Tam Lin wrote back when he first left with El Patrón. Matt makes a fire and sits by the oasis. He decides to replace the poppy fields with other crops. He will try to convince scientists to reverse the process which made immigrant into eejits, and then he will reunite them with their lost children. He will invite Chacho, Fidelito, and Ton-Ton to come live with him on the estate. María could come, too, and help the eejits.

Off in the distance, Matt sees something sparkle. He runs toward it and finds another red drawing of a **scorpion**. He touches it and a door opens in the cliff. He looks into the chamber and sees that the floor is made of gold. He knows if he enters, he will find El Patrón's coffin surrounded by dead bodyguards, doctors, and family members. He will see Tam Lin. He remembers how in Tam Lin's note, he said he had no choice but to go with El Patrón, but Matt believes that Tam Lin could have chosen to say no. He steps away from the chamber.

Matt sits by his campfire late into the night. He thinks about how in the morning, he will begin the difficult job of undoing El Patrón's empire. He takes comfort in the knowledge he will not be alone, because he will have Chacho, Fidelito, and Ton-Ton to support him. Celia and Daft Donald will guide him. María will help him do what is just and moral. Matt even has Esperanza to help him. In his mind, Matt hears Tam Lin tell him that he can do it. He smiles and agrees.

The presence of Rosa and the eejits reminds Matt and the reader that despite the dramatic events which have taken place, Matt still has a moral obligation to use his new position to help those who have been unjustly dehumanized by county he may now rule.



Matt's plans to end the drug empire and help the eejits of Opium shows how one can wield authority justly, as long as one remembers to care for the vulnerable and suffering. The hope that eejit procedure can be reversed shows how scientific advancements can be used to help, rather than hurt, when one considers the exploited.



The scorpion here represents El Patrón's evil, venomous nature. Thus, Matt's decision to step away from it symbolizes his choice to be kind and just as a ruler, unlike El Patrón. Matt's thoughts on Tam Lin's choice to stay with El Patrón suggest that Matt still believes in the enduring power of free will, offering hope that Matt will be able to use his own free will to undo the crimes of Opium's last ruler, rather than following in his footsteps.



Matt may feel overwhelmed by the destiny he has inherited, but he takes comfort in the goodness of the people with whom he has chosen to surround himself. Thus, novel ends on a hopeful thought, that Matt will be able to wield power justly because he seeks to help the most vulnerable, and because he finds moral strength in his personal relationships.





HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Schmidtke, Emma. "*The House of the Scorpion*." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 20 Aug 2019. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Schmidtke, Emma. "*The House of the Scorpion*." LitCharts LLC, August 20, 2019. Retrieved April 21, 2020.
<https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-house-of-the-scorpion>.

To cite any of the quotes from *The House of the Scorpion* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Farmer, Nancy. *The House of the Scorpion*. Atheneum Books for Young Readers. 2004.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Farmer, Nancy. *The House of the Scorpion*. New York: Atheneum Books for Young Readers. 2004.