

They Both Die at the End



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ADAM SILVERA

Silvera was born in South Bronx, New York. His family was extremely poor when he was a kid—until he was 13, his family slept in one bed. As a Harry Potter-loving teen, Silvera wrote lots of fanfiction, which introduced him to the world of writing. However, he grew up thinking he wanted to be a social worker like his mom. It wasn't until Silvera was 21 that he felt comfortable admitting he wasn't straight; though he most often identifies as gay, he sometimes identifies as bisexual. Silvera published his first novel, *More Happy Than Not*, in 2015. His literary agent is the same as author Becky Albertalli's, and both of their debut novels sold in the same week. This led to a close friendship between the two authors, and ultimately to their co-written novel, *What If It's Us*. Silvera's struggles with depression, OCD, and suicidal thoughts have influenced many of his novels, including *They Both Die at the End*. He lives in Los Angeles.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

They Both Die at the End is very tuned in to the social media landscape of 2017. Apps and platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter exist in the book, and the novel's fictional platforms draw from and expand upon them. Last Friend mimics apps like Bumble BFF and Tinder Social, which are offshoots of dating apps but with a focus on helping users meet platonic friends. The novel also alludes to the growing number of apps and sites that have become compatible with Facebook or have been acquired by Facebook as the network grows in power and popularity: in the novel, Dalma Young, the fictional creator of Last Friend, is in meetings with Mark Zuckerberg (the real-life founder of Facebook) to integrate Last Friend with Facebook's platform. The Make-A-Wish Foundation is another real-life presence that inspires a fictional counterpart: in the novel, the Make-A-Moment organization gives people once-in-a-lifetime virtual reality experiences on their last day of life, similar to how the Make-A-Wish Foundation provides experiences for terminally ill children. However, Make-A-Moment is a for-profit company rather than a charitable non-profit.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Silvera has been a vocal supporter of the Twitter hashtag #ourvoices, which was begun so that authors and readers could share children's books featuring diverse characters that are written by authors who share the same identity markers as the

characters. That is, while a novel like Becky Albertalli's *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda* is a diverse book and is touted by the organization We Need Diverse Books (and is one that Silvera himself recommends as an accompaniment to his novels), #ourvoices is intended to promote novels like *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe*, which centers on two gay Mexican American boys and is written by a gay Mexican American author, Benjamin Alire Sáenz. All of Silvera's novels (*They Both Die at the End*; *More Happy Than Not*; *History Is All You Left Me*) feature Puerto Rican or Latinx characters, characters with mental illness, or both. Other YA books written by Latinx authors include Elizabeth Acevedo's *The Poet X* and NoNieqa Ramos's *The Truth Is*. As young adult speculative fiction, and specifically a novel that tackles questions about death, *They Both Die at the End* also shares similarities with Neal Shusterman's novels like *Scythe* and *Unwind*, as well as Natalie Babbitt's classic *Tuck Everlasting*. The fictional Scorpius Hawthorne books and movies that many of the novel's characters love are a reference to the Harry Potter series, which was an influential series for Silvera—he wrote Harry Potter fanfiction as a teen.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** They Both Die at the End
- **When Written:** 2016
- **Where Written:** New York
- **When Published:** 2017
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Young Adult Fiction
- **Setting:** New York City, 2017
- **Climax:** Mateo dies in a fire that starts when he tries to make tea on his broken stove.
- **Antagonist:** Death; Regret; Peck and his gang
- **Point of View:** First Person; Third Person

EXTRA CREDIT

First Day, Last Day. *They Both Die at the End* was released on September 5, 2017—which is also Mateo and Rufus's "End Day" (the day they know they'll die) in the book.

Prove Them Wrong. When Silvera was trying to get his first novel, *More Happy Than Not*, published, he had several potential editors suggest that it would sell better if the main character weren't gay or Puerto Rican. Silvera refused to cave; in the years since, *More Happy Than Not* and his other novels have received numerous awards, have topped bestseller lists, and

have been touted as must-reads.



PLOT SUMMARY

Eighteen-year-old Mateo is scrolling through a blog called CountDowners at 12:22 a.m. when he gets a call from Death-Cast, an organization that gives people 24 hours' notice of their death. His herald, Andrea, carelessly mixes him up with the last Decker that she called, so Mateo hangs up. He panics—he's an anxious person and has few friends, and he already misses the Mateo of the future. Future Mateo would get out there and live. Mateo vows to leave his apartment so he can see Dad (who's in a coma in the hospital), his best friend Lidia, and Lidia's daughter Penny before he dies. A half hour later, 17-year-old Rufus is in the middle of beating up a boy named Peck for stealing his girlfriend when he gets his own call from Death-Cast letting him know he's going to die today. Rufus's herald, Victor, is kind, but this doesn't help—Rufus doesn't want beating someone to be his last act. He heads back to his foster home with his best friends and foster siblings, Malcolm and Tagoe, for his funeral. Rufus calls his ex-girlfriend (and former foster sister), Aimee, on the way home. She agrees to meet the boys at the foster home, but she brings Peck with her. Though Rufus's funeral starts out tearful and meaningful, the police arrive—Peck called them. Malcolm and Tagoe hold off the police while Rufus sneaks out the back and rides away on his bike.

Mateo decides that he wants his headstone to read, "He Lived for Everyone," and then he downloads the Last Friend, an app designed to help Deckers find friends on their End Day (their last day alive). He doesn't want to tell Lidia he's dying, so he needs someone to coach him through the day. He chooses a photo of him wearing a Luigi hat as his profile picture, since he wants to be the kind of person who wears silly hats and sings in front of people. The first few people he talks to are rude or callous. At the same time, Rufus sits down next to graffiti advertising Last Friend and decides that since he doesn't have his friends, he can make a new one. He and Mateo connect immediately, begin video chatting, and Rufus agrees to go to Mateo's apartment and pick him up. Both boys are nervous. Mateo grabs a photo of Dad and himself as a kid, leaves notes for the neighbors, and follows Rufus out of the building.

There's a dead bird in the street, and Mateo insists they bury it. Rufus, an active Instagrammer, takes a **photo** of Mateo burying the bird. He thinks Mateo is too good and follows Mateo to the subway. Rufus gets into a train car where people are partying; Mateo gets in a different car and insists they have no business celebrating. They get off at the hospital. Mateo already feels bad about not breaking out of his shell. In Dad's room, Mateo feels angry—Dad was there on the day that Mateo's mom died giving **birth** to him, and Dad should be awake now. He tells Dad's nurse, Elizabeth, about how his parents got engaged and then tries to tell Dad a secret. He can't voice it, but he leaves

Dad the photo of them and a note promising that he was brave. Rufus leads him out of the hospital. They pass a homeless man, and Mateo insists on giving the man money since they won't need their money anymore after today. At around the same time, a young reporter named Delilah tells herself that her ex-fiancé, the Death-Cast employee Victor, is messing with her—she's not actually going to die. She learns that the movie star Howie Maldonado is going to die today, and she vows to report on his death.

Since it's too early to visit Lidia, Mateo and Rufus decide to get breakfast at Rufus's favorite cafe. The waitress, Rae, is shocked that Rufus and Mateo are Deckers and tries to give them their meal for free, but Mateo insists on paying. He and Rufus discuss what they wanted to be when they grew up, and Rufus draws the world—he wanted to travel and take pictures. After their meal, Mateo refuses to ride on the back of Rufus's bike to Lidia's, so they walk to her apartment. Mateo explains why he doesn't want to tell Lidia he's dying: her boyfriend, Christian, died right before Penny was born. Lidia slept through Christian's attempts to reach her, and Mateo doesn't want to hurt her even more. Rufus stays downstairs as Mateo goes up and helps Lidia tidy up and feed Penny. He tells Lidia that she's amazing, and when Lidia leaves the room, Mateo drops an envelope of cash and sneaks away. He blocks Lidia's number. Outside, Rufus encourages Mateo to take comfort in the fact that he's getting to say goodbye. Mateo encourages Rufus to post colorful photos on Instagram from his final day so that Rufus's friends have something to remember him by.

Rufus calls Aimee, and Mateo hears that Malcolm and Tagoe are in jail. Terrified of Rufus, Mateo runs away—but Rufus hangs up on Aimee, who won't break up with Peck, and chases after Mateo. Rufus agrees to tell Mateo everything in Central Park. He shares that he's been in foster care for the last five months after he was in a car crash in which his parents and older sister, Olivia, drowned in the Hudson River. He beat up Peck last night because he felt like he'd never amount to anything. Mateo knows that Rufus isn't a monster, and he invites Rufus to go with him to a Make-A-Moment station. A humorless woman named Deirdre checks them in and gets them set up to do virtual skydiving. The experience costs \$240 each, and after the fact, the boys agree that it was a weird experience. Rufus leads Mateo to a payphone graveyard where they talk about Indiana Jones and about how Mateo gave his shoes to a kid who had none a year ago. The narrator introduces a boy named Kendrick, who isn't dying today—but a year ago, some kids jumped him and stole his shoes. A stranger (Mateo) gave Kendrick his shoes—but now, Kendrick just wants to punch people.

Delilah begs her boss, Sandy, to let her interview Howie. Sandy grudgingly agrees that Delilah can come along, and she sends Delilah to buy a copy of Howie's first book. Meanwhile, Mateo asks if they can visit his mom's grave. Rufus buys some Legos

for Mateo before they get on the subway, and when the train temporarily loses power, Mateo builds a sanctuary with the Legos. He falls asleep as Rufus keeps watch and takes a photo of Mateo sleeping. As the boys walk through the cemetery, they discuss what they think the afterlife is like. Mateo stops dead when he gets close to his mom's grave: someone is digging Mateo's grave next to it. Rufus yells at the man to go away. Mateo sits with his mom, thinks about his birth, and then sits in his unfinished grave with Rufus. As the boys talk, they realize that they both have strong memories associated with Althea Park. Next, Mateo leads Rufus to a pier so that Rufus can get closure from his parents' deaths. Surprisingly, this works. Mateo and Rufus stop in at a bookstore, where Mateo purchases postcards and a mystery book wrapped in paper. Outside, a Decker named Vin sets a suicide bomb off, killing other Deckers and hurting Rufus, Mateo, and Delilah. Rufus decides he has to ride his bike, and Mateo finally agrees to ride on the back.

As Rufus bikes, he unwittingly rides past the apartment building that Deirdre, the woman from Make-A-Moment, is standing on. She's prepared to kill herself because her job makes her feel like life is pointless—however, seeing Rufus and Mateo down below makes her decide to live. When the boys get to Althea Park, Mateo jumps off the bike, thrilled that he took a risk. They're both even more afraid of dying after seeing so many die from the bomb. They play a game on the monkey bars, and then Rufus gives his bike to a guy who recently wrecked his—he won't need it anyway. At the same time, Peck calls his friend Damien. They decide to get the gang back together and get justice for Peck by killing Rufus. Peck digs out his gun and stares at Rufus's Instagram, waiting for Rufus to reveal his location.

Rufus and Mateo decide to ride the subway. They play a game where they make up stories about fellow passengers, and then they pretend that they're living out their future together. In their hypothetical narrative, Rufus works in a building that Mateo built, and they've gotten tattoos together. Mateo decides to leave his wrapped book for someone else, and the boys hop off the train. Two girls get on and find the book. One, Zoe, is a Decker; the other, Gabriella, leaves graffiti for Last Friend around the city (which is what inspired Rufus to download the app). Mateo calls Lidia and invites her to join them at the Travel Arena, and Lidia arrives soon after. Her ticket costs \$100, but Mateo and Rufus's admission is free. They take the Around the World in 80 Minutes tour, and Rufus insists they get off the trolley in faux Puerto Rico. He leads them to an attraction called the Rainforest Jump, where Mateo convinces Rufus and Lidia to join him in leaping off a 20-foot cliff. Rufus feels as though he's been baptized and has left all his anger at the bottom of the pool. He and Mateo hold hands as they swim to the surface, and Rufus insists they need to go to a nightclub for Deckers.

Meanwhile, a cop named Officer Andrade lets Malcolm and Tagoe out of jail because he understands what it's like to lose a loved one. Malcolm and Tagoe call Rufus and agree to meet at Clint's Graveyard, the Decker club. When Rufus posts a picture of the sign on Instagram, Peck and his gang head there to enact their revenge. In the club, Mateo wishes he'd spent more time here. He and Rufus sing karaoke to "American Pie" and afterwards, Mateo kisses Rufus—he feels that Rufus brought him to life. Then, Malcolm, Tagoe, and Aimee arrive. Meanwhile, Sandy and Delilah interview Howie in a car—Howie is secretly on his way to visit his first love. He has lots of regrets about how he lived his life. Sandy's questions are boring, so Delilah takes over. Howie answers truthfully that he wishes he'd been able to connect more with his family, and he realizes that while he's never lonely thanks to all his fans online, he craves real intimacy. He dies when the car swerves and hits a wall to avoid Peck, Damien, and Kendrick. Delilah and Sandy survive.

Rufus hugs his friends and introduces them to Mateo and Lidia. Then, everyone gets on the dance floor. Mateo and Rufus slow dance and lament everything they'll never get to do. Mateo takes Lidia aside and apologizes for not coming out to her sooner. She asks what she's going to do without him, a question that Mateo can't answer. Mateo turns his attention back to Rufus when he sees that Peck and his gang have arrived with a gun. Mateo punches Peck, which gives Malcolm the chance to body-slam the rest of the gang. Rufus gets ahold of the gun, shoots it into the wall, and runs away with Mateo. Unbeknownst to them, they run past Dalma Young, the developer of the Last Friend app. Though Dalma hates how some people abuse the app, she believes that Last Friend does great things. Mateo asks Rufus if they can go to his apartment and then to visit Dad one last time, and Rufus agrees. In Mateo's room, Rufus takes pictures of Mateo jumping on his bed, and then Mateo sits down to sing and play Elton John's "Your Song" for Rufus. Rufus takes a video. The boys eat, lie down, and say they love each other. They promise to not get out of bed—but Mateo gets out of bed an hour later to make tea. The broken stove ignites and kills him.

Rufus is overcome by grief and anger. He rides with Mateo's body to the hospital and then visits Dad. He calls Lidia, who promises him that she'll fulfill Mateo's wish to tell Dad he was gay if Rufus doesn't get the chance. After this, Rufus is able to leave Dad a note introducing himself and letting him know that Mateo was brave on his End Day. He also leaves his Instagram username. Then, Rufus heads for Althea Park. Delilah is at a diner by Althea Park writing Howie's obituary when she decides she has to call Victor and know for sure if her call was a bad joke. It's not. Victor gets in his car and speeds for Delilah. Rufus watches the video of Mateo singing to him over and over, and then he crosses the street without looking.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Mateo Torrez – Mateo is one of the novel’s protagonists; he’s an 18-year-old Puerto Rican teen. Mateo suffers from anxiety and keeps to himself as much as possible. He only has two real friends: Dad (who has been in a coma for two weeks) and his best friend, Lidia. Mateo spends much of his time on the blog CountDowners. He feels that he can do good by being there virtually for people on their last days. However, when Mateo receives his own call from Death-Cast, he realizes that connecting with people online isn’t enough—he has to connect in person while he still has the chance. This leads him to join the app Last Friend and to connect with Rufus, as he doesn’t want to burden Lidia with the news that he’s dying. Mateo is initially suspicious of Rufus—he views Rufus simply as a way for him to break out of his shell and become the person he’s always wanted to be. Inside, Mateo wants to be a fun-loving and carefree person, and with Rufus’s help, Mateo begins to be that person in real life. He starts to take risks and trust others, and he learns that playing it safe isn’t always the best way to go. As the day wears on, Mateo becomes increasingly braver—he finally agrees to ride on the back of Rufus’s bike, and he even willingly leaps off a 20-foot cliff into a pool at the Travel Arena. Throughout the day, Mateo holds onto a secret about himself that he only reveals after he finally sings in front of a crowd: he’s gay, and over the course of the day, he’s fallen in love with Rufus. Mateo desperately wants to come out to Dad before he dies, but he never gets the chance. Ultimately, Mateo always thinks of others before he thinks of himself. This is why he insists on burying a dead bird he finds, and his generosity ends up killing him—he dies when his stove explodes while he’s trying to make tea for himself and Rufus. Rufus believes that Mateo died having become the person he wanted to be: he was open and carefree, and he fell in love.

Rufus Emeterio – Rufus is one of the novel’s protagonists; he’s a 17-year-old Cuban American boy in foster care. Rufus’s last six months have been almost unbearable: he watched his parents and sister, Olivia, drown after their car drove into the Hudson River. After this, Rufus ended up in foster care, and his girlfriend Aimee recently broke up with him and began dating Peck, whom Rufus hates. Despite these circumstances, Rufus tries to make the best of it—he turns to his foster siblings, Malcolm, Tago, and Aimee (whom he calls the “Plutos”) for support, and he loves riding his bike. However, everything changes when Rufus receives his call from Death-Cast while he’s in the process of beating up Peck. Rufus doesn’t see himself as a violent person, so the thought that beating Peck could be his last act is disturbing. He vows to die a good person, but his attempt to have a meaningful funeral fails when the police arrive to arrest him. Rufus ultimately turns to Last Friend and meets Mateo, who awes Rufus with both his kindness and

his fears. For the first few hours of their friendship, Rufus demonstrates that he can be a good friend by supporting Mateo in what he wants to do. As the day wears on, however, Rufus decides to come clean about his past. Sharing the story of his family’s deaths helps Rufus come to terms with those events, and it brings him closer to Mateo. After the boys leap into a pool at the Travel Arena, Rufus finally feels whole and like he’s left his anger behind. Rufus is open about his bisexuality and begins to suspect early on that Mateo is also non-heterosexual. They finally kiss and confess their feelings for each other at Clint’s Graveyard. Rufus is extremely angry that his and Mateo’s relationship won’t even last 24 hours, and he’s overtaken with grief when Mateo dies first. Rufus isn’t dead yet at the end of the novel, but it’s implied that he dies moments after he steps off a curb to cross the street. He vows to find Mateo and his own family in the afterlife.

Lidia – Lidia is Mateo’s best friend. About a year before the novel begins, Lidia had her daughter, Penny, which changed Lidia in a number of ways. Before, Lidia she got her hair done weekly and was a dedicated student—but having Penny meant that Lidia had to drop out of high school to care for her. Penny’s birth was also traumatic, since about a week before Penny was born, Lidia’s fiancé, Christian, received his Death-Cast alert and died—but because he was out of town and Lidia was so exhausted, she missed all his attempts to contact her and say goodbye. In the present, Lidia isn’t close with her parents, so she’s raising Penny alone with her grandmother, Abuelita. In Mateo’s opinion, Lidia is more beautiful than ever since having Penny, but Lidia feels like she looks tired all the time and so she never allows others to put pictures of her on social media. By the same token, Lidia thinks that Mateo’s Facebook page is a “wasteland,” but his social media presence is nevertheless something she finds comforting. Lidia and Mateo have been friends for years, and their relationship is extremely close—but they’re not the type of friends who constantly voice their affection for each other. Rather, both of them prefer to show the other that they care through their actions and their support. However, when Mateo chooses to not tell Lidia that he’s dying, it seriously hurts Lidia’s feelings. She’s simultaneously enraged and thrilled when Mateo contacts her and asks her to join them at the Travel Area. Lidia is also fully supportive when Mateo comes out as gay to her, and she offers to tell Mateo’s dad if neither Mateo nor Rufus have the chance to tell Dad themselves.

Delilah Gray – Delilah is a young media journalist who receives her alert from Death-Cast on the same day that Rufus and Mateo do. However, because Delilah just broke off her engagement with Vincent, a Death-Cast employee, she believes that Vincent orchestrated the call—and so she refuses to take it seriously or believe that she’s going to die. She tells no one that she received her alert in part so that Vincent doesn’t get the satisfaction of knowing he rattled her. Even before the call,

Delilah is going through a difficult time: she dyed her hair a number of bright colors a week before the novel begins in an attempt to ignore her unhappiness in her relationship, and she feels as though her boss, Sandy, gives her meaningless assignments. Things begin to change when Delilah learns that Howie Maldonado, a favorite actor of hers, also received his call. A self-professed “professional fangirl,” Delilah makes it her goal to cover Howie’s death and begs Sandy to let her come along to the interview with him. Delilah takes over the interview and proves herself to be a skilled interviewer. She asks Howie questions that get to the heart of what it means to make choices and live with the consequences, and she leaves the interview understanding that life is about balance. Over the course of her day, Delilah has three near-death experiences. Though she makes a show of insisting that this must mean that she’s not going to die, Delilah ultimately calls Vincent and asks if he’s messing with her. He isn’t, but believing that they’re still in love, Vincent rushes to her. Though Delilah doesn’t die by the end of the novel, it’s implied that she will soon, as the novel ends with about an hour left until midnight.

Andrea Donahue – Andrea is a middle-aged woman who works as a herald for Death-Cast. Andrea believes that she’s exceptional at her job because she’s discovered a useful hack to get her through her shifts: she doesn’t think of Deckers as people. To her, they’re already dead, so it’s easier to think of them as just a list of phone calls to get through. Though she thinks her record of 92 phone calls in one shift is something to celebrate, this wound up getting her investigated by HR for rushing. When readers meet her, she contents herself with around 60 phone calls in a three-hour shift. Her numbers, however, only tell part of the story—from the perspective of the people she calls, Andrea is callous, cold, and insensitive. When she calls Mateo, she calls him Timothy (the last person she called), which falsely raises Mateo’s hopes that he’s not going to die today. Her insensitivity even makes Mateo hang up on her, something that’s wildly out of character for him. Andrea desperately hopes to avoid more investigations, as she needs her job. She suffered an accident months before the novel begins, and so she’s temporarily disabled and undergoing intensive physical therapy—which Death-Cast’s generous benefits package covers. She also needs the paycheck to pay her daughter’s school tuition. Through Andrea, the novel paints a nuanced picture of how and why people take seemingly heartless jobs like hers. They, too, are human and need to survive, even if it means doing a job that, to others, looks like selling one’s soul or sacrificing one’s humanity.

Aimee Dubois – Aimee is one of the Plutos (a group of friends who are also foster siblings) along with Rufus, Malcolm, and Tagoe. She was also Rufus’s girlfriend until a few weeks before the novel begins. Aimee’s parents were put in prison for violently robbing a convenience store—and though this lands her in foster care at first, she lives with her aunt when the novel

begins. She broke up with Rufus when she moved out of the foster home so that she could have a “fresh start.” Aimee finds herself in a morally complex situation when she discovers not only that Rufus is dying, but that he beat up her current boyfriend, Peck, around the time he received the call from Death-Cast. She’s even angrier, however, when Peck calls the police on Rufus and ruins Rufus’s funeral (in the novel, a person’s funeral typically occurs before he or she dies). Though Aimee knows she has a choice to make—and to many, including Rufus and Peck, the choice is simple—she delays choosing between Peck and Rufus for as long as possible. She insists that she wants to spend more time with Rufus and is openly disgusted with Peck, but she leaves open the possibility that she might continue dating Peck after Rufus is dead. This only changes after Aimee and Rufus make up, when Peck pulls a gun on Rufus at Clint’s Graveyard. Aimee chooses to take Rufus’s side. Though the reader never gets a look at her individual perspective after Rufus leaves Clint’s Graveyard, the narrator suggests that all of the Plutos will struggle to put themselves back together again and will be forever marked by Rufus’s death.

Howie Maldonado – Howie Maldonado is a celebrity who receives notice of his impending death from Death-Cast on the same day as Rufus and Mateo. He’s best known for starring in the film adaptations of the Scorpius Hawthorne books (which a number of characters love, including Mateo, Delilah, and Wendy Mae), though he’s also written one book of his own. Delilah does everything she can to tag along on Sandy’s final interview with Howie, which they conduct in a car. When Sandy’s questions prove less interesting, Delilah, a longtime fan of Howie and of Scorpius Hawthorne, steps in. Through Delilah’s questioning, Howie reveals that while he never feels entirely lonely because of his fame, he is *alone*—online fans aren’t the same as in-person, genuine, human connection. He also believes that getting famous so young kept him from truly connecting to his parents, his roots, and the Spanish language, which keeps him from connecting to his aging grandmother. Howie begins to suggest that while he’s satisfied with what he’s done with his life, he also could’ve been happy not being famous and living a life connected to his family instead. Unbeknownst to Sandy and Delilah, the three of them are on the way to visit a woman whom Howie loves but never got to be in a relationship with due to his fame. It’s on this journey that the car crashes and Howie dies.

Malcolm Anthony – Malcolm is one of Rufus’s best friends and a member of the Plutos (a group of friends who are also foster siblings) along with Rufus, Aimee, and Tagoe. He was orphaned and put into the foster care system at 13 years old, when an arsonist set fire to his house and the blaze killed his parents. Malcolm is extremely loyal and believes firmly in justice and kindness. He’s a supportive friend to Rufus and is instrumental in helping Rufus see that life is worth living after Rufus loses his

parents and his sister, Olivia. However, his loyalty and sense of justice leads Malcolm to argue with the police when they come to arrest Rufus; he believes that Rufus doesn't deserve to spend his End Day in prison. For Malcolm, the possible consequences are worth it. However, in part because Malcolm is black, six feet tall, and close to 200 pounds, and in part because Tagoe steps in too aggressively, the police arrest both boys. Malcolm has never been in a fight before, so this feels particularly unjust—though he admits in jail that if he figures out who killed his parents, he might get into his first fight. Officer Andrade later releases the boys from jail so that they can grieve and spend time with Rufus; Malcolm and Tagoe meet Rufus, Mateo, Lidia, and Aimee at Clint's Graveyard. He's supportive of Rufus's new relationship with Mateo and doesn't chase the couple after they run from Peck; he's just thrilled that Rufus didn't die in a senseless act of violence.

Dad – Mateo's dad has been in a coma in the hospital for two weeks when Mateo receives his call from Death-Cast. Dad had many hopes for the future, but few came true. He lost his wife, Mateo's mom, when she gave birth to Mateo; Dad raised Mateo on his own. Dad also hoped that Mateo would go to a college that wasn't online and that Mateo would one day have kids and pass down the family name—but with Mateo's impending death, neither of these things will happen. Regardless, Dad and Mateo had a close and loving relationship. Dad loved making lists and thought they were extremely funny, though Mateo insists they weren't. In a game that Rufus and Mateo play in which they talk about their future as though it's the past, Mateo says he got a tattoo of a seahorse to honor Dad—Dad always thought of himself as akin to a male seahorse, which raises its babies alone. By the end of the novel, Dad still hasn't woken up. Mateo leaves Dad a **photo** of them in Dad's hospital room and writes a note on the back. After Mateo dies, Rufus returns to Dad's room and adds a note, introducing himself and leaving his Instagram username so that Dad can follow Mateo and Rufus's journey on their End Day—and so that he can learn that Mateo was gay.

Peck/Patrick Gavin – Peck is the novel's antagonist; he's a 19-year-old boy whom Aimee is dating after being friends with him for years. Peck was part of a gang for a while—that's where he got his nickname, as his punches are wildly ineffective—but he called off the gang when he started dating Aimee. Though it seems as though Peck has been nice and supportive toward Aimee, Peck is extremely aggressive and selfish when it comes to other guys. Just before the novel begins, Peck voices all of Rufus's fears that he's is unlovable and a failure, which is why Rufus is in the process of beating Peck up when he receives his Death-Cast alert. Peck takes a turn toward the morally reprehensible when he calls the police on Rufus and they arrive during Rufus's funeral. And because Peck *doesn't* receive a call from Death-Cast and is incensed that Aimee is possibly breaking up with him, Peck decides that he wants to be the one

to kill Rufus. This isn't a decision that Peck takes lightly—he understands that Aimee will hate him—but he also doesn't take the time to think seriously about it. He doesn't consider that shooting Rufus will land him in jail; he only thinks about getting revenge. Ultimately, Peck's attempt is unsuccessful, and the police arrest him.

Victor – Victor is Delilah's ex-fiancé and the Death-Cast herald who calls Rufus. Victor is a kind and compassionate person who still pours his all into his job: when Rufus asks Victor to be a person and talk to him straight, Victor shares that he's already spoken to a mother about her four-year-old daughter dying. He had to call the police, in case the mother is going to kill her daughter. Victor makes it clear that his job is emotionally-taxing, but he is still trying to do it to the best of his abilities. His ability to do so, however, is waning; he's speaking to the company counselors to manage his worsening mental health. Victor's life is turned upside-down the day before the novel begins, as Delilah breaks off their engagement. He still loves Delilah and wants to get married, so he rushes to her when she calls just before midnight, crying and terrified that she's going to die—she received her Death-Cast alert almost 24 hours ago. It's possible that Victor hits Rufus with his car in his hurry to reach Delilah.

Tagoe Hayes – Tagoe is one of Rufus's best friends and a member of the Plutos (a group of friends who are also foster siblings) along with Rufus, Aimee, and Malcolm. His parents seemingly abandoned him over the course of three years; it wasn't until Tagoe had been in foster care for a month that he learned his dad committed suicide. As far as Rufus knows, Tagoe hasn't cried for either parent. Despite this rough beginning, Tagoe throws himself into the Plutos' friendship and chosen family. He firmly believes that only the people who want to be in his life are the ones worth having around. This is part of the reason that he gets so aggressive when the cops try to arrest Rufus for beating up Peck—he wants to do everything he can to protect Rufus. Tagoe has a tic that causes his neck to jerk. He often suppresses it to make other people comfortable, but when he's in a stressful situation, he sometimes takes off his glasses and lets his neck twitch. It gives him a sense of relief to give in. Tagoe is planning to head to college soon after the novel ends.

Deirdre – Deirdre is a woman who works at the Make-A-Moment station. To Mateo and Rufus, she's simply the woman who checks them in and accepts payment, but the narrator reveals that there's far more to Deirdre than meets the eye. A lesbian who has suffered prejudice since coming out as a teen, Deirdre already struggled—but her job makes her feel suicidal, as she believes she's complicit in taking money from Deckers for experiences that aren't all that great, especially when she thinks those Deckers should be spending time with family. She's prepared to jump off the roof of her apartment building when she catches sight of Rufus and Mateo below. Though she

doesn't recognize them from so far away, seeing them together gives her hope and makes her decide to not kill herself. Deirdre also writes stories to deal with her depression and suicidal thoughts.

Vin Pearce – Vin is an angry and jaded wrestler who receives his alert from Death-Cast on the same day as Mateo and Rufus. He doesn't think it should be a surprise—he recently received a multiple sclerosis diagnosis—but he's angry about it anyway. Vin spends his morning trying to hook up with women on the Necro app and regretting his failures. Though Vin feels like he found himself in the wrestling ring, he also believes that he was destined for wrestling greatness and never got there. Because of this, he decides that he's going to carry out a suicide bombing at his gym and take as many people with him as possible. Mateo, Rufus, and Delilah are injured in the explosion, but none of them die.

Dalma Young – Dalma is the founder of the Last Friend app; she's a beautiful black woman with an Afro. Dalma vacillates between being extremely proud of what she's done through Last Friend and being horrified by it. She believes firmly that no one deserves to live or die alone, but she also finds the ways that people abuse the app horrifying—she almost sells her app when a serial killer begins using Last Friend to find victims. However, she focuses on the good it does, especially after meeting Gabriella and Zoe on the subway and learning how much Gabriella loves the app. She shares that she'd spend her End Day with her half-sister, Dahlia, and that her last social media status would be to tell people to find their community.

Mateo's Mom – Mateo's mom died giving **birth** to him. She enjoyed playing hard to get and so she turned down Dad's marriage proposals twice. She only accepted when she discovered she was pregnant. Though Mateo had a hard time thinking of his mom as a "beloved mother" when he was a kid, Dad tried to make Mateo understand that Mateo's mom chose to take care of Mateo instead of herself during her difficult birth, which resulted in her death. During Mateo's End Day, he often thinks of his mom's last day—his first day. He takes comfort in the fact that he's going to be buried next to her after he dies.

Kendrick O'Connell – Kendrick is a member of Peck's gang. His life has been tragic and full of misery, but one bright spot was when Mateo came across Kendrick about a year before the novel begins. People had just beaten Kendrick and stolen his brand-new Jordan sneakers, so Mateo gave Kendrick tissues and his own shoes. Kendrick never learned Mateo's name, but he doesn't care anyway—he met Damien Rivas not long after, and Damien turned Kendrick into a fighting machine and a member of his gang. In the present, Kendrick has just lost his job and is dying to hurt someone.

Elizabeth – Elizabeth is the nurse who cares for Dad in the hospital. She's kind and competent; Rufus can tell that in terms

of ensuring that Dad will have care after Mateo is gone, Mateo has nothing to worry about. Elizabeth also cares about getting to know Dad on a deeper level. When Mateo and Rufus visit Dad and share that it's Mateo's last day, she asks Mateo for stories about Dad. If Dad wakes up, she wants to know him as more than just a coma patient.

Officer Andrade – Officer Andrade is the police officer who releases Malcolm and Tagoe from jail. He chooses to let the boys go because of his experience surrounding the death of his partner, fellow police officer Graham. He believes the boys should be able to go home, grieve, and spend time with Rufus if possible—he's far more interested in shutting down apps that encourages Deckers to kill themselves in horrifying ways than he is in babysitting justifiably upset teens.

Gabriella – Gabriella is Zoe's Last Friend, though she's not a Decker. Gabriella feels so strongly about the good that Last Friend can do that she regularly connects with Deckers to be their Last Friend. She also spends her free time tagging buildings with Last Friend graffiti to encourage others to use the app. One of her tags is what inspires Rufus to download the app.

Penny – Penny is Lidia's one-year-old daughter. Lidia is raising her with the help of her Abuelita; Penny's dad, Christian, died weeks before Penny was born. Penny is a beacon of light for Lidia and for Mateo, who is Penny's godfather. She loves toys that light up and make noise, and she's a generally smiley and happy baby. However, Penny is also extremely demanding, and Lidia sometimes refers to her as a tiny dictator.

Rufus's Parents – Rufus's mom and dad and his older sister, Olivia, received their Death-Cast calls a few months before the novel begins. The entire family was in a car accident—their car went through a guardrail and into the Hudson River, where Rufus's parents and Olivia drowned. Rufus notes bitterly that his parents didn't try to fight once the car was in the water; he resents them somewhat for this.

Wendy Mae – Wendy Mae is a non-Decker user on Last Friend whom Mateo connects with. Mateo finds Wendy Mae's profile grating—she talks about the future a lot, which is offensive to some Deckers—and chatting with her is even worse. When Mateo shuts down their conversation, Wendy Mae makes a last-ditch attempt to convince him to have sex with her so that she can practice before she officially loses her virginity with her boyfriend.

Sandy Guerrero – Sandy is Delilah's boss. She generally gives Delilah the most boring assignments, but she grudgingly agrees to let Delilah come along to interview Howie Maldonado. Her dislike of Delilah shines through during the interview until Delilah's questions begin to get deeper, more interesting answers out of Howie. She survives the car crash that kills Howie and agrees to not fire Delilah for her impertinence.

Graham – Graham was Officer Andrade's partner, a fellow

police officer, who died prior to the events of *They Both Die at the End*. When Graham received the call from Death-Cast, he chose to go to work and die doing good in the world. His memory motivates Officer Andrade to release Malcolm and Tagoe from jail so they can grieve and spend time with Rufus.

Olivia – Olivia is Rufus’s older sister. After receiving a call from Death-Cast, she drowned in the Hudson River with her parents a few months before the novel begins. She and Rufus were very close; they’d planned to go to college together in California. Olivia even put off going to school for a year so they could go at the same time.

Zoe Landon – Zoe is a Decker who finds Mateo’s mystery book on the subway; she and Mateo also connect on the Last Friend app. She spends her final day with Gabriella. Unbeknownst to her, she runs into Dalma Young, the creator of Last Friend, on the subway—and seeing the relationship between Zoe and Gabriella is what makes Dalma feel better about what she’s created.

Jenn Lori – Jenn Lori is Rufus, Aimee, Malcolm, and Tagoe’s foster mom and Francis’s wife. Though she seems kind and as though she takes her role as a foster mom seriously, she’s a relatively small presence in Rufus’s life. Regardless, he still treasures the warm hug she gives him at his funeral.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Christian – Christian is Lidia’s boyfriend and Penny’s father; he died weeks before Penny was born. He received his Death-Cast alert while out of town in a remote place. Because of Lidia’s exhaustion during late pregnancy, Lidia slept through all of Christian’s attempts to contact her before he died.

Francis – Francis is Rufus, Aimee, Malcolm, and Tagoe’s foster dad and Jenn Lori’s husband. He’s somewhat distant and doesn’t show much emotion, but he seems to genuinely love and care for his foster children. He speaks kindly at Rufus’s funeral.

The Homeless Man – The homeless man is a stranger whom Mateo and Rufus give money to. Though the man scares the boys at first, he envelops Mateo in a huge hug of thanks that helps the boys understand that people like this man are human too.

Jared – Jared is the man working the front desk at the hospital where Mateo’s dad is in a coma. He initially doesn’t want to let Mateo see Dad, as Mateo and Rufus show up at the hospital well before visiting hours begin.

Lena – Lena is Howie Maldonado’s childhood best friend and his first love. She flies to New York to see him one more time, but Howie dies before they can see each other.

Philly – Philly is a non-Decker Last Friend user who seemingly tells everyone he connects with that he has “the cure to death in his pants.”

Sean – Sean is one of Mateo’s neighbors. He’s been checking in on Mateo since Dad was hospitalized, and he offered to fix the busted stove burner.

Elliot – Elliot is one of Mateo’s neighbors; he’s been checking in on Mateo since Dad was hospitalized. He also brought Mateo food.

Rae – Rae is a waitress at Rufus’s favorite breakfast place. She’s shocked that Rufus and Mateo are Deckers and she attempts to comp their meal.

Damien Rivas – Damien is a member of Peck’s gang; he went to school with Kendrick and taught Kendrick how to throw a punch.

Dahlia – Dahlia is Dalma’s half-sister. She’s an impatient 20-year-old with a tech internship, but she wants to work for Last Friend.

Leslie – Leslie is The Around the World in 80 Minutes tour guide at the Travel Arena.

Joel – Joel is an employee at Open Bookstore who assists Mateo.

Madeline – Madeline is the skydiving instructor at the Make-A-Moment station.

DJ LouOw – DJ LouOw is the DJ at Clint’s Graveyard.

Jasmine – Jasmine is a girl who sings karaoke at Clint’s Graveyard.

Abuelita – Abuelita is Lidia’s grandmother.

TERMS

CountDowners – CountDowners is a livestreaming blog that **Mateo** frequents. On it, Deckers livestream their End Day activities, and friends or family members of the deceased occasionally post eulogies.

Death-Cast – Death-Cast is the organization in charge of calling people and informing them that they’re going to die sometime in the next 24 hours. It’s somewhat mysterious, as no one—not even the heralds (employees)—know where Death-Cast gets its information on who’s going to die. Death-Cast does everything it can to create an upbeat and positive office culture; it utilizes an open office plan and strives for informality. It also offers a generous benefits package, including on-site counselors for heralds.

Decker – A Decker is someone who has received the call from Death-Cast informing them that they’re going to die in the next 24 hours.

End Day – An End Day is a person’s last day of life. Herald’s at the Death-Cast organization call people to give them 24 hours’ notice of their End Day.

Herald – Herald’s are Death-Cast employees who call people

between midnight and 3:00 a.m. to inform them that they're going to die in the next 24 hours. Both **Andrea** and **Victor** are heralds.

Last Friend – Last Friend is an app, developed by **Dalma Young**, that helps Deckers find a friend for their End Day. So-called “Last Friends” can be either befriend fellow Deckers or a person who isn't slated to die today. Some people are passionate about promoting Last Friend—for instance, **Gabriella** tags buildings with promotional graffiti because she feels so strongly about Last Friend's mission. Others, however, abuse the platform; there's a serial killer still at large that uses it to find victims.

Make-A-Moment – Make-A-Moment is an organization (similar to the real-life Make-A-Wish Foundation) that provides virtual reality simulations for Deckers. During their final day of life, people can use Make-A-Moment locations to simulate high-risk and otherwise unattainable activities like skydiving.

World Travel Arena – Similar to the Make-A-Moment organization, the World Travel Arena offers simulated vacations for Deckers. Unlike Make-A-Moment, the Travel Arena doesn't charge Deckers for their experiences—but it does charge exorbitant entry fees for non-Decker loved ones who want to come along for the trip.



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.



MORTALITY, LIFE, AND MEANING

They Both Die at the End plunges the reader into a world that, in a variety of ways, doesn't seem that much different from the reader's world—except when it comes to dying. In the novel, individuals who are going to die in the next 24 hours (Deckers) receive calls from an organization called Death-Cast between midnight and three in the morning, informing them of this fact so that they can make the most of their last day alive (their End Day). The novel centers on two teenage boys, Mateo and Rufus, who both receive calls on the same September day and who connect with each other on the social media app Last Friend. Through its very premise, *They Both Die at the End* questions how people can and should deal with their mortality—but the novel overwhelmingly suggests that focusing entirely on death isn't especially useful. Rather, it's healthier and more fulfilling to recognize the simple fact that all humans are mortal as a reason to make the most out of one's life, no matter how short it might be.

Mateo lives much of his life online, playing video games and watching livestream videos on a blog called *CountDowners*, where Deckers can livestream their End Day for viewers at home. Though Mateo finds *CountDowners* fulfilling in its own way and impossible not to watch, he begins to change his thinking when he receives his call from Death-Cast. Prior to the call, Mateo feels as though spending time watching *CountDowners* is normal and even beneficial. But receiving the call forces Mateo to reckon with the fact that, practically speaking, he's done nothing but hang out on *CountDowners* for much of his life—and this, he insists, isn't much of a life at all. Further, *CountDowners* forces Mateo to think constantly about death rather than encouraging him to focus on the act of living. Rufus is, in many ways, the exact opposite of Mateo: though Rufus tragically lost his parents and older sister a few months before the novel begins, he's made the best of his foster care situation. He and his fellow housemates and friends, Tagoe, Malcolm, and Aimee—the “Plutos”—spend every waking minute together, soaking up life and time with one another. Rufus has had several romantic relationships, including with Aimee. Though he's active on Instagram, he's dismissive of platforms like *CountDowners*; in his mind, it's not useful to focus so much on the act of dying.

As Mateo and Rufus meet, get to know each other, and go through their shared End Day together, they discover that this simple dichotomy between focusing on living and focusing on dying isn't as clear-cut as they'd like to think. Though the goal of their day is to get as much life experience as they can, the possibility of death lurks around every corner—it's a risk to so much as step out of the shower, as one might slip in a puddle and die. Even as they undergo the life-altering experiences of confronting their pasts, falling in love, and even surviving a suicide bombing, they can never escape the fear of dying that colors every experience.

Alongside this fear, however, arises a thought that the novel implies is far more important: the understanding that life, in all its forms, is beautiful. Mateo becomes acutely aware of this as he spends time with Penny, his best friend Lidia's one-year-old daughter. Penny, who's at the very beginning of her life, represents innocence and a hope for the future—and as a baby, she has no concept of death. Mateo recognizes that of all people, Penny is truly living: she demands the things she wants, she snuggles the people she loves, and she has her whole life ahead of her even if she can't yet conceptualize the future. Though Mateo doesn't have long to live when he plays with Penny, he nevertheless thinks that she has the right idea: it's important to live life to the fullest and do all the things he wants to do, even if—and especially if—things could end in an instant. As an aspiring photographer, Rufus comes to the same conclusions but through a slightly different avenue. He vows to document his last day on Instagram, and to do so in color; all his Instagram **photos** prior to his End Day have been in black and

white. The simple act of taking photos forces Rufus to look for beauty and tender moments throughout the day, whether that means taking a photo of someone riding away on his beloved bike (which he won't need anymore) or taking a picture of Mateo resting on the subway, holding a building he made out of Legos.

Taking these lessons to heart, Mateo and Rufus spend the day crisscrossing New York City, taking emotional (if not physical) risks by asking for forgiveness from their loved ones, falling in love with each other, and ultimately saying goodbye to everyone they can. By drawing on the lessons they learn from Penny and from Rufus's photography, they make the active choice to focus on creating meaningful memories for the people they love, and on giving each other the experience of being in love, if only for a short time. While *Death-Cast*, of course, doesn't exist in the reader's world, the novel nevertheless asks readers to take what Rufus and Mateo learn to heart. Ultimately, the story suggests that making connections and finding beauty in the world whenever possible are more important pursuits than fearing death.



HUMAN CONNECTION AND SOCIAL MEDIA

At the start of the novel, *Death-Cast* (a system that alerts people 24 hours before they're going to die) has been in operation for about six years. Two years before the novel begins, the app *Last Friend* debuted. *Last Friend* is one of many apps and social media platforms that developers created to serve the Deckers (people who know they're going to die) and others who are interested in and want to connect with Deckers on some level. In addition to this platform, there are also hookup apps, livestreaming sites, and more sinister endeavors that cater to Deckers—including an app that monetarily rewards the families of Deckers who commit suicide in "creative" ways. Through these apps and platforms, people are able to connect in new and unique ways—and in some cases, move their connections offline. Mateo and Rufus, who share the same *End Day* (the day they know they'll die), connect with each other on *Last Friend*. They also connect with strangers on social media platforms like Instagram and with people in person over the course of their day's activities, all of which forces them to engage with questions about the role of social media in fostering human connection. While both boys do, to varying degrees, take issue with the prevalence of social media in their lives and in the lives of Deckers more generally, they nevertheless come to the same conclusion: that social media is a tool which enables people to connect to others in meaningful ways, but it's not a substitute for human connection.

Mateo is a shy and anxiety-ridden teen, which means that he has few meaningful in-person relationships. He has his best friend, Lidia, and her one-year-old daughter, Penny, as well as

his father—but Dad is in a coma in the hospital. The only other living people whom Mateo mentions by name are his neighbors, who have been checking in on him since Dad's hospitalization two weeks before the novel begins. Mateo connects with other people most often through social media, specifically through the *CountDowners* platform. The fictional *CountDowners*, unlike social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram that also appear in the novel, is unique in that it allows Deckers to livestream their *End Days*. It maybe a way to connect, but those streaming are exclusively people who are going to die. In this sense, Mateo may be connecting to others by bearing witness to people's final days, but none of these connections are lasting ones—the connections end when the Decker dies. Importantly, Mateo recognizes the limits of only connecting to people this way; this is why he downloads *Last Friend* in the first place. Though he frames downloading *Last Friend* as a way for him to break out of his shell and do things he wouldn't normally do, it also suggests that he understands the power of forming intimate, in-person connections with people.

Lidia complicates Mateo's understanding of how he uses social media. Lidia thinks that while Mateo's Facebook profile may not be the best record of Mateo's life since he doesn't post much, it nevertheless tells an important story about the kind of person Mateo is: most of his activity entails posting kind messages on other people's **photos** and status updates. In other words, though Mateo isn't the sort of social media user who consistently keeps followers updated on his every move, he nevertheless uses social media to make people he cares about feel loved, heard, and seen. Among Rufus and his friend group, the *Plutos*, it's also impossible to ignore the role that social media plays in their relationships. They text one another constantly in addition to posting on one another's Instagram accounts. Connecting online is one of the many ways the *Plutos* demonstrate that they're there for one another, that they're listening, and that they love one another. But as with Mateo's Facebook presence, the *Plutos'* social media relationships are an extension of their in-person relationships, not a substitute for them. Even among established friend groups, then, the novel shows that social media is still only one aspect of a healthy friendship.

Despite this, the novel does imply that once a friend is gone, social media takes on a slightly different role: that of a photo album or memory book of sorts. Rufus documents his *End Day* on Instagram in part so that his friends will be able to see how he lived it, but he also understands that he's giving his friends more ways to remember him. His photos—some staged, some candid—are going to be some of the only things his friends have left of him after he's gone. Lidia, too, focuses on the idea that she'll be able to remember Mateo through the social media presence he did have, even if it might not have been particularly robust.

Though Mateo and Rufus come to *Last Friend* for different

reasons—Mateo to break out of his shell; Rufus because the Plutos end up in jail and can't take his calls—they both discover the same thing: that connecting intimately with another person in real life is fulfilling in a way that just connecting online isn't. For Mateo, meeting Rufus is especially meaningful: Mateo spends nearly all of the novel hiding his sexuality, even from the reader—but he eventually comes out as gay, kisses Rufus, and spends his last hours with the person he loves. As the new couple discusses the way they met, Rufus admits that he wishes they could've connected earlier, without the help of a "stupid app." Mateo, however, puts his finger on the thing that social media apps like Last Friend, Facebook, and Instagram do really well: he suggests that "the app puts you out there more than anything else. For me, it meant admitting I was lonely and wanted to connect with someone." That is, while human connection may be something that all people desire, it takes acknowledging that desire to be able to follow through and reach out. Social media, for all its faults, forces people to do this and adds meaning to people's lives—even if their lives, as within the world of the novel, will soon be cut short.



CHOICES AND CONSEQUENCES

The existence of Death-Cast, a business that calls people and informs them that they'll die sometime in the next 24 hours, poses a simple question to the novel's characters and to readers: if someone knew it was their last day alive, what would they choose to do with it?

Overwhelmingly, the novel proposes that while confronting one's mortality may make a person's choices seem more important than they ever were, this mode of thinking is actually a bit of a fallacy. People's choices about who they want to be, how they want to live, and how they want to be remembered matter every day—not just on their final day.

When readers meet Rufus, he's in the middle of violently beating up a teen named Peck, who recently "stole" Rufus's ex-girlfriend Aimee. Rufus explains that while he fully believes that Peck deserves this, this violent, out-of-control person isn't who Rufus really is—but Rufus is only able to give voice to this *after* he receives the call from Death-Cast. Death, Rufus believes, makes his choice to beat up Peck uniquely consequential. Receiving the call makes it clear that beating someone could be Rufus's last act, something he emphatically doesn't want. Rufus would much rather be remembered as a friend, a photographer, and a cyclist. Mateo, too, feels as though his choices matter more once he receives his call. Suddenly, his short life largely spent on CountDowners, a platform that allows Deckers to livestream their End Day, feels like a waste of time—time that Mateo actively chose to waste based on the assumption that he'd have time later to become the version of himself he'd rather be. Taken together, Mateo and Rufus's pre-call experiences and thought processes make it clear that when faced with the possibility that any choice could be one's last, it's

easier to make judgments about the relative morality or quality of one's decisions.

However, the novel goes to great lengths to show that the reverse is also true: when people don't fear dying at any second, their choices might seem to carry no weight—when in fact, this may be an illusion. Though at times the novel leaves room for this to be a good thing, on the whole it suggests that this mindset is something to treat with caution; no one is invincible, and even if the consequence of a given choice might not be death, it might still be undesirable. In the world of the novel, funerals take place before a Decker dies so that they can connect with family and friends one last time. But before Rufus's funeral, Peck calls the police to report Rufus for assault; the police arrive during the funeral itself. Unspeakably angry about the fact that Peck would ruin Rufus's End Day and possibly land him in jail, Rufus's friends Tagoe and Malcolm get physical with the cops and end up in jail. They are, however, successful in creating a diversion so that Rufus can escape. Part of Tagoe and Malcolm's boldness is due to the fact that they *didn't* receive a call from Death-Cast; they can rest assured that they're not supposed to die. They know they're not going to die in jail, that the cops aren't going to shoot them, and that the cop car isn't going to crash on the way to jail. Though there are certainly consequences to their actions—an arrest and possible criminal record, which could complicate the rest of their lives—in their mind, this price is well worth it to give Rufus his End Day in the city rather than in a smelly jail cell.

Peck's gang, however, takes this several steps further: rather than decide that dying today is enough of a comeuppance for Rufus, Peck digs out his gun and decides to seek Rufus out and kill Rufus himself. As the gang gleefully runs through the streets, the narrator shares that "Death-Cast did not call this gang of boys today, and they're living as if this means their lives can't be over while they're alive." In other words, there are other ways that a person's life can end, even if he or she doesn't physically die. Knowing that one isn't supposed to die today isn't a free pass to make cruel, violent, or dangerous decisions—and choosing to act in such a way has dire consequences for everyone, not just the person making the decision.

By showcasing a variety of decisions of varying degrees of good and bad, *They Both Die at the End* drives home the idea that every decision a person makes matters. It shouldn't matter whether a person knows they're going to die today or not; that's no excuse for making objectively bad decisions, and it shouldn't be a person's only excuse for making good ones either. However, people have the power to make these choices regardless—and each individual will have to live, or force others to live, with the consequences.



FRIENDSHIP AND CHOSEN FAMILY

None of the families in *They Both Die at the End* are conventional, whole, or uncomplicated. Mateo's mother died in childbirth with him, while Mateo's dad is in a coma; Rufus lost his parents and older sister months before the novel begins and is now in foster care; and Lidia is raising Penny with the help of her Abuelita, as her boyfriend Christian died weeks before Penny was born. However, all of these characters make a point to reach out to their friends and to chosen family for companionship and support: Mateo watches Penny so Lidia can have time to herself, while Rufus becomes a beloved member of the Plutos, the group comprised of Rufus and three other kids in foster care. *They Both Die at the End* shows that despite difficult family situations, people can still find community and companionship—but they must turn to friendship and to chosen family, rather than focusing on blood family.

The most poignant example of chosen family within the novel is the Plutos, the group that Rufus, Tagoe, Malcolm, and Aimee form in their foster home. They call themselves the Plutos because in the same way that the dwarf planet Pluto was demoted from being a real planet, they've all been “demoted” from their blood families in some way. This, however, doesn't mean that the boys don't still need love, care, and connection—but it does mean that they have to look for it elsewhere. This is especially true since their foster parents, Francis and Jenn Lori, are caring but somewhat distant. They provide food, shelter, and serve the Plutos' basic needs in terms of emotional support, but there are also limits on what they can do to support four grieving, abandoned, and distrustful older teens. The most important thing that Francis and Jenn Lori do is give the Plutos space to form close, intimate bonds with one another; this allows the Plutos themselves to support one another in ways that Francis and Jenn Lori cannot. Even though Francis and Jenn Lori fall short in some ways, Rufus's emotional stability and happiness that he ended up in their home is a testament to the idea that families don't have to look a certain way or be created in any particular way to be sufficiently supportive. What matters instead is that the members of a family care about one another and show that, to the greatest extent that they can.

The novel also goes to great lengths to show that in addition to support like the Plutos provide Rufus, friends—especially new ones—have the power to help people become who they want to be. Mateo has always wanted to be an open, carefree person who sings in front of people and wears silly clothes. But due to his anxiety and the self-isolation he uses to cope with it, Mateo seldom gets to be that person except for in his head. As an entirely new person to Mateo, Rufus is able to enter Mateo's life and turn it upside-down. While Lidia, for instance, provides Mateo with a stable, dependable friendship that doesn't stray outside of his comfort zone, Rufus recognizes that there's more

to Mateo than his shy, quiet appearance might suggest. Through Rufus is still a good friend by many standards—he's respectful of Mateo's limits, he's kind, and he keeps his promises to Mateo when he makes them—he also doesn't have years of history with Mateo, and so he's better able than anyone else to convince Mateo that he can indeed change who he is—even on the last day of his life. Because of this, it's possible to argue that Rufus is the only person who gets to see Mateo exactly as he wants to be seen. Because Rufus is able to convince Mateo to sing, be silly, and admit his sexual orientation (Mateo comes out as gay), he sees Mateo like no one else. Thus, Mateo gets to die as the person he wants to be—all because of Rufus's affirming, supportive friendship.

Dalma Young, the creator of the Last Friend app, understands the intense need for friendship in people's lives—she did, after all, create an app designed to give lonely people a friend in their final hours. And indeed, her app helps Mateo and Rufus, who are going to die on the same day, find each other. In terms of beginning a friendship, Last Friend removes many barriers that people face to becoming friends on any other day of their lives. Because Mateo and Rufus are well aware that they're going to die at the end of the day, they're more willing than they might normally be to open themselves up to a complete stranger and share their deepest secrets with each other. And ultimately, this leads to the beginning of Mateo and Rufus's chosen family when they kiss and vocalize that they love each other. However tender their romantic relationship might be, both boys purposefully focus on their *friendship*, not necessarily on their romantic relationship, when they talk about their relationship to each other. Over the course of the boys' End Day, thanks to Last Friend, they find the friend that neither of them had been able to find up to this point: the one capable of growing into a life partner, even if that life together only lasts a single day. Friendship, the novel shows, is an essential element of being human—it's important enough to spend one's last day cultivating.



BUSINESS, ETHICS, AND DEHUMANIZATION

While *They Both Die at the End* doesn't engage outright with the question of whether or not the Death-Cast system (a business that gives people 24 hours' notice of their death) is good or moral, it does ask a number of questions about the morality of the way that businesses and individuals with something to gain respond to Death-Cast. Though the novel never comes down explicitly on whether these responses are wholly good or bad, it does show that businesses will almost always take an opportunity to make money when it's available—at times, with little regard for the ethics of doing so. However, the novel also goes to great lengths to show that while corporations may approach situations like this with a profit-first mindset (and, at times, with

little genuine regard for the people their businesses ostensibly serve), the individuals who work for these companies are still human—and they overwhelmingly suffer from the dehumanizing nature of many of these businesses, at times even more than the people they’re exploiting to do so.

Responses to the Death-Cast system range from restaurants offering discounts or free meals to Deckers (people dying that day) to the rise of entirely new industries. These industries include the virtual travel industry, which creates interactive experiences so that Deckers can “travel the world” before dying; the virtual reality experience industry, which allows Deckers to swim with sharks, skydive, and engage in other dangerous activities in a virtual setting that won’t kill them; and the new sub-industry of apps and social media platforms to serve Deckers. In theory, all of these businesses and industries exist to do a good thing by giving dying people the opportunity to connect, make memories, and generally live up their final day alive. However, throughout the novel, Mateo (who’s just been informed of his death) is acutely aware that these companies nevertheless exist to make money. For these companies, Deckers are a fantastic consumer group: according to Mateo, their money is going to be useless as soon as they die, so many Deckers use their last day to spend money with wild abandon. At times, though, Mateo questions whether it’s ethical for companies to take advantage of this reality. Though Last Friend, the friend-connecting app that Mateo and Rufus use to meet, is free, several others—including a hookup app that connects people with Deckers for no-strings-attached one-night stands—charges a per-day fee. Is it really ethical, Mateo wonders, to put a price on a final sexual experience, or on a sexual experience with a Decker? For that matter, is it ethical for the local virtual travel plaza to ask for donations from Deckers but to charge accompanying friends and family members \$100 for the privilege of spending their last day with their loved in a faux foreign country? Though neither Mateo nor the novel fully answer this question, the novel does suggest that despite the fact that these apps and industries serve important needs, there are nevertheless serious ethical questions surrounding the businesses’ models and their very existence.

While Mateo and Rufus mostly engage with these companies as just another pair of consumers in impersonal customer service situations, the novel’s occasional shift to a third-person narrator provides insight into some of these customer service personnel and the emotional toll of working in these industries. Overwhelmingly, the novel shows that while Deckers and their loved ones might be the financial victims of business practices that are arguably predatory, the employees of these businesses also suffer day in and day out on an emotional level. In some cases, they even numb themselves to the realities of their job and, in some ways, become less human. Andrea, a Death-Cast herald (a person tasked with notifying Deckers of their death),

is one of those who has checked out emotionally. She believes that Deckers are no longer people; they’re just a list of phone calls to get through in order to break her record of 90 calls in one three-hour shift. This mindset allows her to focus on the fantastic pay and benefits she receives as a herald, but it also means that her manner during the calls leaves a lot to be desired. She calls Mateo and continuously mixes up his name with that of her last call, something that unfairly raises Mateo’s hope that his ending up on the Death-Cast list was a mistake. Because she doesn’t care about the implications of her job, she is objectively bad at it—but she is able to live with herself.

Other employees, such as the VR center attendant Deirdre and the herald Victor, take an entirely different tack. Deirdre considers suicide because she can’t stand how impersonal and consumerist her job is. She feels complicit in helping Deckers waste their last day spending money on experiences that she believes are no substitute for the real thing—or for spending time with loved ones. Victor, too, pours all he can into comforting Deckers whom he calls—and because of this, he finds himself needing to use the free counseling that Death-Cast offers its employees, as the emotional toll of his job starts to severely impact his mental health. Deirdre and Victor’s experiences make the case that compassionate employees of these companies are possibly the ones who suffer the most from this consumerist response to Death-Cast, as well as the ones best positioned to recognize the potentially unethical aspects of their employers and their line of work as a whole. Though *They Both Die at the End* offers no real remedies for the consequences of this capitalist response to Death-Cast, it nevertheless makes it clear that there are major ethical and moral issues that arise when companies commodify death. Doing so dehumanizes both those who are dying and those who serve the dying.



SYMBOLS

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



NAMETAGS

The nametags that all the service personnel in the novel wear broadly represent the human desire for connection. As Mateo and Rufus move through the city on their last day, they both take care to read the nametags of every service person who helps them. As they do this, they get to know more people in their city and connect with them more intimately, simply by learning these individuals’ names. As such, these nametags represent the idea that strangers aren’t just random and nondescript—they’re unique, complex individuals worthy of respect and attention.



PHOTOS

Photographs, both print and digital, symbolize life. Rufus thinks of his End Day Instagram photos as a way to shout it to the world that he lived, in color and on his terms, even as he stared down his death. Mateo, meanwhile, returns again and again to a printed photo of himself and Dad on one of Mateo's early birthdays. He leaves it for Dad in the hospital with a note on the back for when Dad wakes up from his coma; after Mateo dies, Rufus adds to the note and includes his Instagram handle so that Dad can also follow his son's final day with Rufus. In this way, photos begin to shift in their symbol meaning—rather than just representing life, photos also become a way for others to keep their lost loved ones alive in their memories.



MATEO'S BIRTH

Mateo's birth symbolizes the connectedness of life and death, as Mateo's mother died giving birth to him. When confronted with his own End Day, Mateo thinks a lot about his birth—both the tender, happy parts of it and the tragedy of his mother's death. He thinks of the stories he's heard about the shower his parents took together while his mom was in labor, and he thinks about the nurse who was the first to hold him—though he also thinks about how his mom bled to death, causing Dad to lose his beloved wife, as that nurse was holding him. Mateo realizes that his birth is proof that life and death are intimately connected—it's impossible to think of one without acknowledging the other.

Page Number: 7

Explanation and Analysis

Mateo thinks about how funerals have changed since the Death-Cast organization (which gives people 24 hours' notice of their deaths) came on the scene, allowing people to be alive for their funeral ceremonies. Though Mateo allows that getting to say goodbye to everyone is an amazing chance to say everything one has ever wanted to say, his own situation colors how he feels about things. First, Mateo doesn't feel like he has any friends—the only person at this point who would show up to his funeral, he believes, is Lidia. Maybe his neighbors would come, but Dad wouldn't be able to because he's in a coma. Because of Mateo's fractured relationships, he doesn't see the point in spending his final day doing something that makes him confront the fact that he only has one friend.

Further, Mateo also dreams of truly living. In Mateo's mind, sitting around reminiscing with Lidia doesn't count as living—not when he dreams of singing in front of others and maybe falling in love. This sets up the implication that Mateo will try to do these things over the course of the novel and say goodbye in his own way, without the contrived format of a funeral.

☞ The number one person I'll miss the most is Future Mateo, who maybe loosened up and lived.

Related Characters: Mateo Torrez (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

As Mateo thinks through everything that he's going to miss after he's dead, the top person he comes up with is himself—but specifically the Mateo of the future, who stopped being so self-conscious and made an effort to live. Mateo has spent his life so afraid of stepping outside of his own mind that he's spent most of his time on the internet rather than forming genuine, in-person connections with people. Staying disconnected like that allowed Mateo to feel safe and comfortable—but as he admits, it also kept him from experiencing all that life has to offer. At this point, it's simply important that Mateo recognizes he's missing out. This sets him up to identify what, exactly, he's missing out on—and then, over the course of the rest of his day, to go out and experience it. But first, he has to legitimately believe



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the HarperCollins edition of *They Both Die at the End* published in 2017.

September 5, 2017: Mateo Torrez, 12:22 a.m.

Quotes

☞ Fast-forward five years when Death-Cast came into the picture and suddenly everyone was awake at their own funerals. Having the chance to say goodbye before you die is an incredible opportunity, but isn't that time better spent actually living? Maybe I would feel differently if I could count on people showing up to my funeral. If I had more friends than I do fingers.

Related Characters: Mateo Torrez (speaker), Dad, Lidia

Related Themes:  

that he's missed something—and understand that he still has valuable time to live even though he knows he'll be dead within 24 hours.

Rufus Emeterio, 1:05 a.m. Quotes

☝ I'm trying to stay shut 'cause I don't wanna take my problems out on some guy doing his job, even though I have no idea why the hell anyone applies for this position in the first place. Let's pretend I got a future for a second, entertain me—in no universe am I ever waking up and saying, "I think I'll get a twelve-to-three shift where I do nothing but tell people their lives are over." But Victor and others did.

Related Characters: Rufus Emeterio (speaker), Victor

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 17

Explanation and Analysis

Rufus is understandably upset when he receives his Death-Cast alert from Victor—Rufus believes that everyone who works for Death-Cast is soulless and has no emotions. Though Rufus is correct that the job of informing people of their deaths is difficult and in many ways, undesirable, thinking of all Death-Cast employees as soulless flattens them into a monolithic group—when really, all the employees are individuals with their own reasons for taking this job. Judging them like this keeps Rufus from being able to connect with them on any level, which makes Rufus feel even more alone and unmoored than he already does.

On some level, Rufus misses the fact that these people who work for Death-Cast need jobs—and this one, the novel reveals later, pays well and has fantastic benefits. For many people, good compensation is enough to make them stay at a job that they don't like or that feels wrong to them on some level. This doesn't mean there aren't consequences for staying in a job with questionable morals—the money isn't always worth it—but Rufus refuses to see that there are all kinds of reasons why someone might take a job, regardless of what it is or how undesirable it might seem.

☝ "You want me to get off my throne and get real with you? Okay. An hour ago I got off the phone with a woman who cried over how she won't be a mother anymore after her four-year-old daughter dies today. [...] And then I had to put in a request to the Youth Department to dispatch a cop just in case the mother is responsible, which believe it or not, is not the most disgusting thing I've done for this job."

Related Characters: Victor (speaker), Rufus Emeterio

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 20

Explanation and Analysis

When Rufus angrily asks Victor to act like a human, Victor complies and completely shocks Rufus in the process. In sharing what his day as a Death-Cast herald is really like, Victor paints a picture of a job that's draining and crushing every single minute. Whether he's informing a parent that their young child is going to die or informing someone who's just 17, like Rufus, that they have less than 24 hours to live, Victor is the bearer of bad news and has to ruin someone's day—and ultimately, someone's life. Because Victor seems like he still cares deeply about the people he talks to (at least as much as he can, given the constraints of his job), he's willing to be the person that Rufus asked for. It's important to Victor to make Rufus understand that he's not some soulless automaton who enjoys ending people's lives—he's a person who has to do horrible things, and he just so happens to get paid for it. What Victor does may affect Rufus's life for the next 24 hours, but it will affect Victor emotionally for significantly longer.

Rufus, 1:18 a.m. Quotes

☝ I don't wanna think about any of that, I just wanna get to Aimee and say goodbye to the Plutos as the friend they know I am, not the monster I was tonight.

Related Characters: Rufus Emeterio (speaker), Peck/Patrick Gavin, Tagoe Hayes, Malcolm Anthony, Aimee Dubois

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 32

Explanation and Analysis

As Rufus, Malcolm, and Tagoe head home for Rufus's funeral, Rufus decides not to think about the fact that he could die on the way home. Instead, he wants to make sure that first, Aimee gets his version of events surrounding his fight with Peck. This, he believes, will allow him to paint himself as the friend and former boyfriend that Aimee knows he is, not the cruel, monstrous individual he was when he was beating up Peck minutes ago. The fact that Rufus delineates between the two different people he could be suggests that he understands he has a choice to make

here. He's already deciding that he doesn't want to go out as a violent, unlikeable person—rather, he wants to be kind, dependable friend. However, because Rufus beat Peck so badly, it's questionable whether or not he's actually going to be able to make this happen. While Rufus may have had years to atone for what he did and make things right if he wasn't going to die today, the fact that he is dying makes it all the more pressing that he fix this. Death puts things in perspective in a way that nothing else can, though the novel also suggests that Rufus should've been thinking about this long before he decided to beat up Peck. Thus, the book implies that people shouldn't act cruelly or violently just because death doesn't seem imminent.

Mateo, 1:52 a.m. Quotes

☝ But I was wrong, go figure. This is exactly the person I always wanted to be—loose, fun, carefree. No one will look at this photo and think it was out of character, because none of these people know me, and their only expectations of me are to be the person I'm presenting myself as in my profile.

Related Characters: Mateo Torrez (speaker), Rufus Emeterio

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 46

Explanation and Analysis

Mateo selects a picture of himself wearing a Luigi hat to use as his Last Friend profile picture. The photo, he believes, presents him as he wants to be seen: as a fun, carefree person who's willing to be silly and take risks. By putting up this photo, Mateo is mentally practicing to actually *be* this person. The fact that he has a photo of himself acting like this indicates that he has it in him to be like this all the time—but it takes the knowledge that he'll be dead within 24 hours to decide that it's time to tap into that side of himself.

Mateo also shows that he understands the power of new friends. Because they don't have years of history with a person, new friends are, in some cases, able to come in and help a person become who they want to be (in this case, a carefree, lighthearted person). They don't know how afraid Mateo is and how self-conscious he is about acting like this on a regular basis. This gives Mateo the freedom to practice being this person without feeling weird or like he's changing

too much. He is changing, but he's changing in front of someone who doesn't necessarily know it.

Mateo, 3:14 a.m. Quotes

☝☝ Rufus E. (3:19 a.m.): Hey, Mateo. Nice hat.

He not only responded, but he likes my Luigi hat from my profile picture. He's already connecting to the person I want to become.

Related Characters: Mateo Torrez, Rufus Emeterio (speaker), Lidia

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 74

Explanation and Analysis

In Rufus's initial Last Friend message to Mateo, he compliments Mateo on the Luigi hat. Mateo is thrilled—as far as he's concerned, Rufus can't tell that he's actually afraid and anxious about everything. This speaks to the power and the special abilities of new friends: new friends can give a person the freedom to experiment with a new identity and not feel weird about it. Whereas old friends can provide all sorts of valuable support and love, the history shared between an individual and such a friend means that the old friend may expect a certain persona from the other person. Because of this, any personal changes can be uncomfortable and threatening to the relationship. This, in turn, can make attempting those changes even scarier for the person in question—and this is why Mateo turns to the Last Friend app instead of his best friend, Lidia, on his End Day. He understands that while Lidia would probably support his transformation, he needs someone entirely new to push him out of his shell. Rufus, being a new friend, is safe in a way that Lidia isn't.

Mateo, 4:26 a.m. Quotes

☝☝ But I wasn't honest with Rufus because, on a deep level, I do believe partying on the train is my kind of scene. It's just that the fear of disappointing others or making a fool of myself always wins.

Related Characters: Mateo Torrez (speaker), Lidia, Rufus Emeterio

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 109

Explanation and Analysis

Though Mateo tells Rufus he didn't get into a subway car with a party raging inside because he doesn't think they should celebrate today, he admits to the reader that this isn't the truth—he's just too afraid to experiment with being the kind of carefree, uninhibited person who parties on the subway. Importantly, Mateo mentions disappointing others as one of his major reasons for not breaking out of his shell and trying new things. Though he makes a point throughout the novel to do everything he can to care for others and make them comfortable, this is the point where that sort of behavior becomes a problem. Mateo shouldn't have to fear disappointing others when he thinks about the sort of things he wants to do before dying. Indeed, Lidia would probably be horrified if she knew that Mateo felt this way—she's a good friend and doesn't want him to waste his last day, or indeed, any day of his short life. Though this may be an irrational fear, it doesn't make it any less real for Mateo. His desire to please others, while admirable at times, is making life difficult for him.

Mateo, 4:58 a.m. Quotes

☝ “I think we made his day by not pretending he's invisible.”

Related Characters: Mateo Torrez (speaker), The Homeless Man, Rufus Emeterio

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 126

Explanation and Analysis

After giving money to a homeless man, Mateo suggests that they made the man's day by treating him like a person. This experience of giving the man money begins to teach Mateo the importance of connecting with others in person, even if it's only for a fleeting moment. Though he never gets this man's name, Mateo still takes the time to recognize that this man is a human being deserving of love, care, and respect—and though the money will certainly help this man get by for a short time, Mateo understands that the money is the less important element of their interaction. More important is that Mateo took the time out of his day to connect with someone he didn't have to reach out to, simply to brighten the man's day and let him know that other see him as a valuable human being who's worthy of kindness

and respect. While Mateo has been afraid of this kind of connection for his entire life, he's beginning to learn that it doesn't have to be scary. Breaking out of his shell and seeing others how they want to be seen can, in turn, help others see Mateo as the person he wants to be.

Mateo, 6:14 a.m. Quotes

☝ This is Penny's beginning. And one day she'll find herself on the terrible end of a Death-Cast call and it sucks how we're all being raised to die. Yes, we live, or we're given the chance to, at least, but sometimes living is hard and complicated because of fear.

Related Characters: Mateo Torrez (speaker), Lidia, Penny

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 150

Explanation and Analysis

When Mateo plays with Penny, his best friend Lidia's one-year-old daughter, he sadly begins to realize that everyone is being raised to die, whether they know it or not. While this is always true—whether one lives in Mateo's fictional world or the real world—Mateo is only really able to grasp this because he knows for certain that he has less than 24 hours to live. Death, in other words, puts things in perspective in a way that nothing else can. Mateo has no choice but to acknowledge that everyone else is also going to die—and that he he won't be there when they do.

Importantly, Mateo also identifies that his fear is holding him back from truly living. Mateo has gone through life afraid of everything—but now that he's staring down his own death, he realizes that the only thing he should fear is not getting to be the person he wants to be before he dies. Recognizing this gives Mateo the courage and the power to begin making changes to his life while it lasts.

Mateo, 7:22 a.m. Quotes

☝ I believe him. He's not monstrous. Monsters don't come to your home to help you live; they trap you in your bed and eat you alive. “People make mistakes,” I say.

“And my friends are the ones being punished,” Rufus says. “Their last memory of me will be running out the back door from my own funeral because the cops were coming for me. I left them behind... I've spent the last four months feeling abandoned by my family dying, and in a split second I did the same damn thing to my new family.”

Related Characters: Rufus Emeterio, Mateo Torrez (speaker), Aimee Dubois, Olivia, Rufus's Parents, Vin Pearce, Peck/Patrick Gavin, Tagoe Hayes, Malcolm Anthony

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 173

Explanation and Analysis

As Rufus explains what happened at his funeral, Mateo makes the important distinction that Rufus isn't a monster—he just made a mistake. Per the novel, monsters are people more like Peck, who later tries to kill Rufus, or Vin Pearce, who later blows up a gym in a suicide bombing. These individuals make a point to hurt purposefully hurt others out of spite and resentment. However, it's also possible to argue that even Peck and Vin are more like Rufus than Mateo might acknowledge—all of these people have made choices, good and bad, that brought them to where they are. In other words, becoming a monster is a choice; people aren't born that way. Even people who do horrible things have the opportunity to make other choices.

Then, Rufus explains why exactly he feels so alone: he's struggling from survivor's guilt after his parents and his sister, Olivia, died. Now, he wants to do everything in his power to prevent Malcolm and Tagoe from having to go through something similar. Though the situations are very different—Malcolm and Tagoe aren't dying today, after all—Rufus understands that his actions still have the ability to ruin his friends' lives and make his death even more difficult for them to cope with after he's gone.

Rufus, 7:53 a.m. Quotes

☝☝ I don't know if he's playing it off like he doesn't know this from my Last Friend profile or if he's impacted by this piece of history between me and my sister or if he overlooked this on my profile and is some ass who cares about who other people kiss. I hope not. We're friends now, hands down, and it's not forced. I met this kid a few years ago because some creative designer somewhere developed an app to forge connections. I'd hate to disconnect.

Related Characters: Rufus Emeterio (speaker), Dalma Young, Olivia, Mateo Torrez

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 176

Explanation and Analysis

Rufus mentions that his sister, Olivia, was the first person he came out to, and Mateo responds nonchalantly. This leads Rufus to wonder about why Mateo responds this way. Though Rufus's questions are valid—he doesn't want to spend his final day hanging out with someone who doesn't accept him for who he is, no matter who Rufus loves—it's important to note that Rufus settles on the fact that he and Mateo are friends. Their friendship, Rufus decides, is important and strong enough that it doesn't really matter what Mateo's thoughts on Rufus's sexuality are. Whatever they are, they're not going to be enough to make Rufus abandon Mateo after spending nearly half of their final day together. Rufus also reminds himself that he and Mateo chose to come together and be friends on this day. That choice, he suggests, makes their friendship even more valid. Though they don't have years of history together, they both came into this relationship with their eyes open and are accepting each other for who they are for the short time they have left.

Mateo, 11:32 a.m. Quotes

☝☝ “I think we're already dead, dude. Not everyone, just Deckers. The whole Death-Cast thing seems too fantasy to be true. Knowing when our last day is going down so we can live it right: Straight-up fantasy. The first afterlife kicks off when Death-Cast tells us to live out our day knowing it's our last; that way we'll take full advantage of it, thinking we're still alive. Then we enter the next and final afterlife without any regrets.”

Related Characters: Rufus Emeterio (speaker), Andrea Donahue, Mateo Torrez

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 214

Explanation and Analysis

In the cemetery, Rufus shares his thoughts on the afterlife: Deckers go through one kind of metaphorical death and transition to the afterlife after getting their call from Death-Cast, and then they proceed to a second afterlife after they literally die. In some ways, Rufus isn't wrong about the fact that many people think of Deckers as already dead—Andrea said as much when the narrator explained how she gets through her work days as a Death-Cast herald. Essentially, Andrea thinks of Deckers as just a list of numbers and as already dead, which enables her to live with herself as she spends her days notifying people that they will die within 24 hours.

However, what concerns Rufus more is the fact that

although he's already dead in this sense, he also has the opportunity to live and make a final mark on the world. In this way, Rufus is living on his End Day in the way that the novel overwhelmingly implies people should live every day. While Rufus and all Deckers take the knowledge that they're going to die to the extreme—they know they only have 24 hours at most, after all—they nevertheless have this opportunity to be the people they want to be and have the last experiences they want to have before they die. While Death-Cast doesn't exist in the reader's world, the novel suggests that it's worth treating every day like it might be the last—since it's impossible to tell when someone's last day might be.

Mateo, 12:22 p.m. Quotes

☝☝ Twelve hours ago I received the phone call telling me I'm going to die today. In my own Mateo way, I've said tons of goodbyes already [...] but the most important goodbye is the one I said to Past Mateo, who I left behind at home when my Last Friend accompanied me into a world that has it out for us. Rufus has done so much for me and I'm here to help him confront any demons following him [...]

Related Characters: Mateo Torrez (speaker), Mateo's Mom, Lidia, Dad, Rufus Emeterio

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 227

Explanation and Analysis

After Mateo says goodbye to Dad, Lidia, and Mom at Mom's grave, Mateo feels much freer and can now focus on helping Rufus achieve some of that same freedom. This speaks to the power of both friendship and of connection in general. It took connecting with Rufus to get Mateo out of his shell and give him the confidence to step into the world, tell the people he loves that he loves them, and then turn his attention to others. Though Mateo isn't the sort of person who intentionally ignores other people, his awkwardness and his self-consciousness is, in a way, a form of selfishness. Now that he's starting to feel more confident in who he is, he's better able to apply himself to being a good friend to Rufus. The person that Mateo is now isn't wildly different from the Mateo of a few hours ago, but he does have another person by his side—and this, the novel shows, makes all the difference.

Mateo, 12:58 p.m. Quotes

☝☝ I buy the mystery book and the postcards, thank Joel for his help, and we leave. Rufus said the key to his relationships was speaking up. I can do this with the postcards, but I have to use my voice, too.

Related Characters: Mateo Torrez (speaker), Joel, Rufus Emeterio

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 239

Explanation and Analysis

On Rufus's suggestion, Mateo buys postcards to send to his former crushes. For Mateo, this seems to be the opportunity of a lifetime: he can use his voice to and tell people the truth about how he feels—something he's been terrified to do for his entire life. It's telling that Mateo attributes this to Rufus, given that according to Lidia, Mateo has made a habit of telling other people how great they are via social media platforms like Facebook. However, doing so on postcards offers Mateo an additional level of intimacy, as only the intended recipients (as opposed to the public) will be able to read his message. This, in essence, allows him to practice speaking up and telling real people that he loves them—something he'll need to learn to do later as his relationship with Rufus progresses.

On another note, mentioning Joel, the bookstore clerk, by name humanizes him despite his very minor role in the novel. It shows that Mateo recognizes Joel's humanity and wants others to recognize that as well. As in his previous encounter with the homeless man, Mateo understands that learning a stranger's name and affording them attention and respect can be a fundamentally life-changing experience, as it's a simple way to show the person that others care.

Deirdre Clayton, 1:50 p.m. Quotes

☝☝ Deirdre reaches deep within herself, far past the place where lies and hopelessness come easily, and even beneath the very honest truth where she's okay with the impacting the relief that comes with flying off this roof. She sees two boys living and this makes her feel less dead inside.

Intent may not be enough to cause her to actually die, she knows this from the countless other mornings when she's woken up to ugliness, but when faced with the chance to prove Death-Cast wrong, Deirdre makes the right decision and lives.

Related Characters: Rufus Emeterio, Mateo Torrez,

Deirdre

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 248

Explanation and Analysis

Deirdre, the Make-A-Moment employee who helped Rufus and Mateo earlier, is unfulfilled with her life (and particularly her job) and is ready to jump off of the roof of her apartment building and kill herself. However, seeing Mateo and Rufus riding their bike down below gives her the will and the desire to live another day. Like many other people in the world of the novel, Deirdre is acutely aware of death's presence—but unlike most people, she believes it's something that she'd welcome if it were to come to her. For Deirdre, life doesn't seem like it's worth living. She sees people wasting money at her workplace daily—and the consequence of spending so much time around people who are going to die is that she sacrifices her mental health. Though Deckers have to live with the idea of their death on the day that they die, Deirdre is forced to acknowledge every day that many people die. However, note that she doesn't even have to know whether or not Mateo and Rufus down below (whom she doesn't recognize) are Deckers or not for them to reinvigorate her will to live. She simply has to see that they're alive. That connection, the novel makes clear, is important and can even save a person's life.

Mateo, 3:26 p.m. Quotes

☝☝ “Welcome to the World Travel Arena. Sorry to lose you three.”

“I'm not dying,” Lidia corrects.

“Oh. Cost for guests is going to be one hundred dollars,” the teller says. He looks at me and Rufus. “Suggested donation is one dollar for Deckers.”

I pay for all our tickets, donating an extra couple hundred dollars in the hope that the arena remains open for many, many years.

Related Characters: Mateo Torrez, Lidia (speaker), Deirdre, Victor, Rufus Emeterio

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 281

Explanation and Analysis

When Mateo and Rufus are at the World Travel Arena with

Lidia, the teller explains that while Deckers get in for free, their guests must pay to join their dying loved ones. Though Mateo pays the price willingly and adds on the donation, it's worth questioning the morality of charging people like Lidia. While it's hard to take issue with what the Travel Arena offers—the chance to take a simulated trip around the country or the world in an hour or so, something that a majority of Deckers will never have the opportunity to do—it does read as opportunistic to charge friends and family for the privilege of spending a couple hours with their soon-to-be-dead love one. However, because of the role that death plays in Mateo's society, he doesn't see any issue with the way this works out. For him, this is to be expected—which speaks to the way that this kind of commodification becomes normalized very quickly. But though it's normal in Mateo's world, that doesn't necessarily make it right. The tragic reactions of individuals like Victor and Deirdre, who work at Death-Cast and Make-A-Moment, respectively, make it clear that the economic aspect of businesses like these leave a lot to be desired and prey on everyone—Deckers, non-Deckers, and employees alike.

Officer Andrade, 4:32 p.m. Quotes

☝☝ Graham is always on Andrade's mind, and today is no exception, with these foster kids in the holding cell who are acting out because their brother is a Decker. You don't need matching DNA for someone to be your brother, Andrade knows this. And you definitely don't need the same blood to lose a part of yourself when someone dies.

Related Characters: Tagoe Hayes, Malcolm Anthony, Rufus Emeterio, Graham, Officer Andrade

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 291

Explanation and Analysis

Officer Andrade, who recently lost his partner, Graham, to a violent and suicidal Decker, understands the importance of honoring chosen family. It's not difficult for him to recognize that even though Malcolm, Tagoe, and Rufus don't share blood, their bond is nevertheless strong enough to propel Malcolm and Tagoe to jail in order to save Rufus. What Andrade sees, in other words, is boys who are hurting and who need some slack so that they can have the space to grieve. They didn't put themselves at risk and get in trouble with the police because they're bad kids; rather, it's because

they love Rufus and were willing to sacrifice themselves to keep him out of jail.

Even if Malcolm and Tagoe never learn Officer Andrade's name, this kind of compassion nevertheless creates a link between the boys and the police officer. Andrade will likely exist forever in the boys' minds as the person who allowed them to go out and see Rufus one last time—and as the person who allowed them to leave jail with their lives and criminal records intact. In this way, Andrade demonstrates how even strangers are intimately connected and can have meaningful impacts on one another. His kindness can, hopefully, encourage Malcolm and Tagoe to pay it forward in the future if they're ever given the opportunity.

☝ Andrade is doing his damn best to get that snuff channel terminated by the end of the year. No way in hell he can share a beer with Graham in heaven without getting this job done. Andrade wants to focus on his real work, not babysitting. That's why he has their foster parents signing release forms this very second. Let them go home with firm warnings so they can sleep.

And grieve.

Maybe even find their friend if he's still alive.

Related Characters: Francis, Jenn Lori, Tagoe Hayes, Malcolm Anthony, Rufus Emeterio, Graham, Officer Andrade

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 292

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator explains that while Andrade did his job in arresting Malcolm and Tagoe, he's not interested in picking on grieving boys—his goal is to shut down Bangers, a social media platform that encourages Deckers to kill themselves in “unique” ways and rewards the families of those Deckers who die in the most popular way. Andrade understands that if he were to focus on punishing Malcolm and Tagoe, he'd have less bandwidth and fewer resources to deal with the more pressing matters at hand. The existence of Bangers makes it clear that while there may be good, compassionate people like Andrade in the world, there are others—like the Decker who killed Andrade's partner, Graham—who have no interest in connecting with others and trying to make the world a better place. Officer Andrade is living in the way the novel suggests is ideal: he recognizes that he could die, and he knows what he should prioritize with that knowledge in

mind. Death is a motivator for him, but it's not something that rules his life. It just reminds him to make the most of what he has.

Mateo, 5:14 p.m. Quotes

☝ “I know there's no time to waste, but I had to be sure you are who I thought you were. The best thing about dying is your friendship.” I never thought I would find someone I could say words like this to.

Related Characters: Mateo Torrez (speaker), Mateo's Mom, Dad, Rufus Emeterio

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 308

Explanation and Analysis

After Mateo and Rufus kiss, Mateo explains why he waited so long to confess his love for Rufus. However, though Mateo is clearly talking about romance here as they take their relationship to the next level, it's important to note that Mateo focus on their friendship. For Mateo, even though he didn't expect to fall in love in his lifetime—and even though the fact that he's done so is a wonderful thing—he understands that even more important than romantic love is friendship and chosen family. While Dad (who's in a coma) and Mom (who died in childbirth) cannot be here for Mateo, Mateo can still choose to fill his life with people who *are* there for him—not necessarily because they love him more, but because they're capable and they choose to be there.

As Mateo and Rufus move forward with their relationship over the next several hours, they begin to create their own chosen family. Especially since the boys spend their final hours without their friends and with just each other, this becomes even more meaningful—they each get to die having fallen in love and having made a friend and chosen family member.

Howie Maldonado, 5:23 p.m. Quotes

☝ “What would’ve made you happy?” Delilah asks.

Love comes to mind, immediately, and it surprises him like a lightning bolt on a day with clear forecasts. Howie never felt lonely, because he could go online at any moment and find himself flooded with messages. But affection from millions and intimacy from that one special person are completely different beasts.

Related Characters: Delilah Gray (speaker), Sandy Guerrero, Mateo Torrez, Howie Maldonado

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 313

Explanation and Analysis

During Howie Maldonado, a film star’s, final interview on his End Day, Delilah asks Howie what would’ve made him happy. What Howie reveals in his answer is the difference between living one’s life through social media and connecting intimately with friends, family, and partners. While it’s possible to find people to pass the time with online, the novel makes it clear that friends who exist only online—especially when they’re fans, as in Howie’s case, or when they’re the Deckers that Mateo watches on CountDowners—they’re not able to provide any intimacy. And genuine intimacy, Howie understands, is far more important than having a bunch of people who are interested in what he’s done with his life. While his fans might care about his career, “that one special person” would actually care about the particulars of Howie’s life—and he or she might even be here with Howie as he dies. It’s possible to read Delilah as that person, given her line of questioning that leads the interview down this far more intimate path.

The Gang With No Name; 5:36 p.m. Quotes

☝ Death-Cast did not call this gang of boys today, and they’re living as if this means their lives can’t be over while they’re alive. They run through the streets, not caring about traffic, as if they’re invincible against speeding cars and completely untouchable by the law.

Related Characters: Rufus Emeterio, Howie Maldonado, Damien Rivas, Kendrick O’Connell, Peck/Patrick Gavin

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 315

Explanation and Analysis

As gang members Peck, Kendrick, and Damien race through the streets of New York with the goal of killing Rufus, they run as though nothing bad can happen to them. In their minds, because they haven’t receive calls from Death-Cast informing them that they’re going to die within 24 hours, nothing bad can happen to them. They’re not dying, and no other consequences come close to dying. However, the narrator makes it clear that this is shortsighted. The boys haven’t thought about the fact that they could hurt themselves or others—indeed, their reckless behavior causes the car carrying Howie Maldonado to crash, killing him—or the possibility that killing Rufus might land them in prison for a long time. Ending up in prison could put a stop to any other hopes, dreams, or goals that these boys had and make it impossible for them to ever be anything but convicts. While they wouldn’t be dead, their lives would be much more difficult. Thus, the novel implies that it’s important for people to accept that they’re not invincible—and that there’s a consequence for every action, even if that consequence might not be death.

Mateo, 5:48 p.m. Quotes

☝ “What am I going to do without you?”

This loaded question is the reason I didn’t want anyone to know I was dying. There are questions I can’t answer. I cannot tell you how you will survive without me. I cannot tell you how to mourn me. I cannot convince you to not feel guilty if you forget the anniversary of my death, or if you realize days or weeks or months have gone by without thinking about me.

I just want you to live.

Related Characters: Mateo Torrez, Lidia (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 322-23

Explanation and Analysis

After Mateo comes out as gay to Lidia, Lidia asks what Mateo suggests is an impossible question when she asks what she’ll do without him. Mateo’s answer reveals that as he’s gone through his day and faced down his own impending death, he’s come to the conclusion that the only thing people can do—whether they’re dying today or not—is live. It doesn’t matter, he suggests, whether those who are still alive spend every second of every day honoring their dead loved ones. In fact, doing so may even take people away from the business of living.

Rather, what Mateo suggests Lidia and others should do is come to a middle ground. While he of course wants Lidia to remember him, he doesn't want her to focus on his death or her own to the detriment of living her life to the fullest. It's far more important to focus on what it means to be alive, as well as what she can do to help other people live better lives.

The Plutos, 6:33 p.m. Quotes

☛ You may be born into a family, but you walk into friendships. Some you'll discover you should put behind you. Others are worth every risk.

Related Characters: Rufus Emeterio, Peck/Patrick Gavin, Tagoe Hayes, Malcolm Anthony, Aimee Dubois

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 334

Explanation and Analysis

Following Peck's attempt on Rufus's life and Rufus's choice to flee the scene with Mateo, the remaining Plutos hug, knowing that Rufus was the kind of friend that they'll never have again. Though the novel as a whole suggests that family can be a positive and supportive force, in practice, none of the characters' blood family is able to be there for them. This means that every person in the novel must turn to their friends to fill in the gaps—and the narrator makes it clear that in situations like this, friendships can be far stronger and even more fulfilling than blood relationships. Further, as a person takes stock of their friendships, they have choices that they don't always have when it comes to family. They can, as Aimee did with Peck, choose to drop friends who are a negative influence. They can also choose to stand up for the friends who are good and kind, as all the Plutos and Mateo did when Peck tried to shoot Rufus.

Though friendship offers the choice to walk away, it also has the power to offer far more support than families do in certain situations.

Mateo, 7:34 p.m. Quotes

☛ “I always wanted to stumble into someone like you and it sucks that I had to find you through a stupid app.”

“I like the Last Friend app. [...] I think the app puts you out there more than anything else. For me, it meant admitting I was lonely and wanted to connect with someone.”

Related Characters: Mateo Torrez, Rufus Emeterio (speaker)

Related Themes:     

Page Number: 340

Explanation and Analysis

During their conversation in Mateo's room, Mateo and Rufus discuss the merits of the Last Friend app. While Rufus suggests that they shouldn't have to rely on an app to meet new people, Mateo makes an important point: apps give people a way to genuinely connect with others by forcing everyone on the app to admit that they want to form a relationship with someone. Plenty of people secretly do want to meet more people, find more friends, and even find a romantic partner—and apps like Last Friend bring people together who are serious about voicing that desire and making something happen. Having spent his day getting to know Rufus thanks to the app, Mateo can now see that admitting that he was lonely and needed a friend was one of the bravest things he did today. He did what the novel suggests is one of the most important things a person can do: he spent his final day alive cultivating a friendship that has the ability to carry him through to his death.



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.

SEPTEMBER 5, 2017: MATEO TORREZ, 12:22 A.M.

Death-Cast is calling Mateo. His phone rings with the distinctive alert, and Mateo feels like a skydiver. A minute ago he was reading a CountDowners entry about a college kid trying to find a home for his dog, but now, Mateo knows he's dying today at 18 years old. Mateo wants to hide or get angry—Dad chose the wrong time to end up in intensive care, and Mateo's mom marked him for an early death by dying during his **birth**—but he can't avoid it. Mateo answers the phone and a woman named Andrea asks for Timothy. Mateo sighs, relieved, but Andrea apologizes—Timothy was her last call; Mateo is *also* dying. She briskly asks Mateo to confirm his identity.

Mateo thinks that he always expected his herald would be more sympathetic. Andrea sounds bored as she goes through her spiel, asking Mateo to go to death-cast.com to make special funeral requests and enter what he wants on his headstone. Mateo thinks that with Death-Cast, people are awake at their funerals—but isn't the time better spent living? Andrea thanks Timothy for his time and offers her condolences. Mateo corrects her on his name. Andrea says she's having a busy and stressful day, so Mateo hangs up. He sinks to the floor. There are only a few people Mateo will miss, including Dad and Mateo's best friend, Lidia. Mateo is a "paranoid mess," so no one wanted to be friends—and now, he regrets wasting opportunities. Most of all, he misses Future Mateo, who would do things like date, smoke pot, and go to Puerto Rico to learn about his roots.

Mateo takes a shower to clear his head of confusing "Mateo Thoughts." He decides to tell no one but Dad, but Dad isn't awake anyway. He knows he has to go out and at least see Dad, Lidia, and Lidia's one-year-old baby, Penny. Mateo is Penny's godfather, which he admits is silly since he's only 18 and can't care for a baby, but he was supposed to be there for her anyway. Now, he's just going to be a picture in a **photo** album. This isn't an excuse, however, to not go cuddle her one last time. Mateo steps carefully out of the shower; he doesn't want to slip, die, and end up on the *DumbDeaths* blog. He writes thank-you notes for his neighbors, who have been checking in. Sean was even going to try to fix the busted stove burner.

The idea that Mateo feels like a skydiver suggests that he doesn't feel like he has control over his own situation. He's going to die, but he can't control anything about how or when that happens. Andrea's gaffe could be chalked up to excusable human error, but her manner leaves a lot to be desired—one would hope that a person informing others of their impending death might be more compassionate. However, it's significant that readers are only getting Mateo's side of the story here; Andrea may have her reasons for behaving like this.



Already, Mateo is starting to understand that he has some choice in regards to how he spends his last day. He can choose to have a funeral—but he could also choose to go out and live. Though it's important to have compassion for Andrea and people like her who perform difficult jobs like this, the fact remains that she's making the difficult news even worse and is making him feel awful—she's making him feel even lonelier than he already is. Mateo's insistence that Future Mateo would do more things suggests that he's gone through life thinking he has lots of time. Knowing he's going to die today makes him feel like he doesn't have to make choices now.



Mateo's passing mention of the DumbDeaths blog, as well as the fact that he was just on the CountDowners platform, indicates that he spends a lot of time online. Though this is one way for him to connect to others, the kinds of social media he uses don't let him connect with people long-term, since the nature of these platforms means that most of the people he follows will soon die. When he insists he has to go cuddle Penny and leaves notes for his neighbors, it shows that Mateo does understand the necessity of connecting in person.



It's almost one a.m. Normally, Mateo would be playing video games and going to school exhausted. Now, he wishes he'd taken art or played piano in band instead of taking free periods. He vows to leave the house at exactly one a.m. to enjoy the world instead of just moving through it. He starts to leave but decides not to. It's silly to walk out into a world that's going to kill him too soon.

Mateo's life is ruled by fear and at this point, regret. He now understands the consequences of his choice to not take chances or try new things. However, if Mateo never leaves his apartment, he's only going to bring about further regrets.



RUFUS EMETERIO, 1:05 A.M.

Rufus is in the middle of beating Peck, who stole his girlfriend, when Death-Cast calls. Mateo's friends, Tagoe and Malcolm, stare with terrified looks. Rufus thinks of his parents and sister, who died in the Hudson River. He vows not to vomit. Rufus doesn't pick up and Death-Cast calls again. Peck also looks terrified—He might get a call too. Malcolm tosses out the possibility that Peck might have a weapon and kill Rufus. He rifles through Peck's backpack, dumping out some comic books, but there's no gun. Tagoe rushes forward, answers the phone, and hands it to Rufus. A man named Victor tells Rufus that he's is going to die in the next 24 hours.

The fear that all four of these boys feel speaks to the way that Death-Cast has changed how people think about death. Though sudden death is always a possibility for anyone, Death-Cast gives people a way to try and make meaningful choices during the short time they have left, as when Malcolm searches for a gun to make sure that Rufus isn't going to get shot. Rufus thinking about his family's deaths indicates that while he has friends, he's alone in the world when it comes to family.



When Rufus corrects him that he only has 23 hours, Victor apologizes. Rufus tries to control his temper; he knows Victor is just doing his job, though he can't fathom why anyone would work for Death-Cast. Victor runs through the forecast, classes and festivals, and restaurants with Decker discounts. Rufus interrupts and asks how heralds know who's going to die. Victor insists he doesn't know, but Rufus thinks this is silly. Rufus snaps that he's 17 and will never get married or have kids. He asks if this makes Victor mad and asks Victor to be a person. Victor clears his throat and says that an hour ago, he informed a woman that her four-year-old daughter is going to die. She cried, but Victor still had to dispatch a cop in case the woman kills her daughter—which, he says, isn't the most disgusting thing he's done as a herald.

Victor delivers on Rufus's request to be human. He makes it clear that while people like Rufus might resent him for doing his job and think that he's heartless, people like Victor still suffer emotionally for doing this work. The very fact that Victor runs through classes and discounted restaurants suggests that industries have sprung up to cater to Deckers eager to live it up on their last day. Just as Victor and Rufus raise questions about the ethics of Death-Cast's employment practices, this suggests that there may be predatory business preying on Deckers too.



When the call is over, Rufus prays that he doesn't drown like his parents and Olivia. He walks back to Peck, slams him against the wall, and informs Peck that he *didn't* win—Aimee didn't break up with Rufus because of Peck. He destroys Peck's phone for good measure and tells him to leave. Malcolm asks Rufus about Peck's gang connections, but Rufus insists that Peck is the "gang reject" and can't contact anyone anyway. Tagoe points out that Death-Cast can't call Peck either. Rufus can't stop shaking. He knows he could've killed Peck and he knows that he'd never be able to live with himself if he had—he already feels bad enough for surviving when his family didn't. Rufus heads for his bike and tells Malcolm and Tagoe they can't come with him, but they follow him home anyway. They're Plutos—they stick together.

Just like Mateo, Rufus is already feeling regret for how he's lived his life. He regrets living when his family died, and he regrets his choice to spend his last night beating someone up. However, Rufus does recognize that he had a choice to kill Peck that he didn't take, something that gives him a degree of comfort. If Rufus can hang onto this thought, he could discover that he has choices about all sorts of things on his last day. Malcolm and Tagoe's insistence that they stay with Rufus speaks to the strength of their friendship. They know that Rufus probably doesn't mean what he says—he'd likely regret it if they left.



MATEO, 1:06 A.M.

Mateo leaps into bed and feels immediate relief. He returns to reading the Countdowner's post. The Decker's name is Keith; he preferred running with his dog to spending time with people. He was trying to find his dog a new home but went on a run. The feed stopped somewhere in Central Park. Mateo doesn't know how Keith died or if the dog died too. He opens up Space Sounds, a collection of songs that NASA created—they were able to record the sounds of planets. He plays the Earth track and reads more *CountDowners*.

At this point, it's far more comfortable for Mateo to stay at home where he feels safe and connect with people online. Wondering what happened to someone like Keith is easier and less stressful than trying to make decisions about what he's going to do with his own last day alive. For now, social media is a crutch that Mateo uses, but it's not a substitute for real human connection.

**RUFUS, 1:18 A.M.**

Rufus explains that he and his "boys" call themselves the Plutos. They're all in a foster home they call Pluto because their families either died or checked out—they're just like Pluto, which got demoted from a planet to a dwarf planet. Rufus has been at Pluto for four months. Malcolm's parents died when he was 13, while Tagoe's parents ran off. Rufus knew that Pluto wouldn't be home for long; he was going to college with Tagoe soon. He feels better with Malcolm and Tagoe around. Rufus stops in front of a church where he and Aimee first hung out. She'd played classical music for him, like Olivia used to play. Rufus wants to take a picture of the stained glass windows, but figures that it won't matter since all his Instagram **photos** are black and white.

Even though Rufus's description of his foster home is cursory, it's telling that he, Malcolm, and Tagoe all banded together and have formed such a strong bond in this short time. They're friends, but in many ways, they're also family members. None of them have blood family around to offer support anymore, but the support they get from one another isn't any less meaningful just because they're not related. The desire to post to Instagram, meanwhile, suggests that Rufus also has a robust social media community.



Rufus calls Aimee, even though she said she needed space. He watches a priest escorting a crying woman into the church; she reminds Rufus of his mom. Aimee doesn't pick up, but she calls Rufus when he texts her about his Death-Cast call. She's curious why Rufus is out so late on a Monday night, but Rufus doesn't want to answer. Aimee cries and tries to convince Rufus to stay put—lots of Deckers die walking home—but he says he's going to Pluto and hangs up. He vows to tell Aimee his side of things before Peck can. Hopefully, Peck won't call the police, or Rufus might spend his End Day in jail or be killed by a cop. He tells the Plutos that he wants them to throw him a funeral—he wants them to remember him as their friend, not the monster he was earlier.

Rufus already seems ashamed of his actions, given that he doesn't fess up to what he did to Peck. He still wants to impress Aimee and keep her as part of his community—and her emotional reaction suggests that Rufus isn't misreading their relationship. The idea that Rufus wants people to remember him as a friend and not a monster again shows that Rufus understands he has choices regarding how people see him. Beating Peck up didn't help—but now, he has the opportunity to make the case that he's more than that "monster."



MATEO, 1:32 A.M.

CountDowners is depressing, but Mateo thinks that he has to pay attention. It's his responsibility to be here for others, even if he's not going to leave the house. He browses through local streams and randomly selects a Decker who's already out at a bar. Another Decker isn't sure his daughter is going to get to him in time. Mateo knows he has to visit Dad. He sits on Dad's bed and grabs the framed **photo** of him and Dad blowing out the candles on his sixth birthday cake; Mateo thinks that Dad is one of his best friends. He pulls the photo out of the frame, puts it in his pocket, and gets ready to go. When Mateo sees the dirty dishes in the sink, though, he washes them. He swears it's not an excuse to stay in.

Though social media may be a crutch for Mateo, it's still extremely meaningful—it's how he shows others that he's there and that he cares. Again, it might not be a substitute for in-person connections, but it's not entirely useless either. Grabbing the photo not only allows Mateo to relive this memory; it also allows him to think about how he wants Dad to see him. He can make the choice to behave in a way that causes Dad to see him like this, as a happy kid, instead of the anxiety-ridden teen he's grown up to be.



RUFUS, 1:41 A.M.

Rufus, Malcolm, and Tagoe bike carefully past a Decker-friendly club called Clint's Graveyard. They reach their foster home, a battered duplex that manages to feel like home despite the health posters on the bulletin board. They go to their room on the second floor. Tagoe tells Rufus that he's come a long way, and when Rufus asks, he goes to wake up Jenn Lori and Francis. Malcolm suggests that they could hide Rufus, but Rufus reminds him that no one can escape. Malcolm and Tagoe leave Rufus alone. Rufus looks around, notices the blanket that Aimee left behind, and thinks that this feels like home. It's nothing like the bedroom he had growing up, but he knows now that people matter more than things. He looks at his printed Instagram **photos**. Most are of his friends.

Again, when Rufus describes his bedroom, it's clear that his friends are the most important things in his life—he doesn't place much focus on the room itself or the things in it. Instead, he focuses Malcolm, Tagoe, and Aimee themselves—and the objects (like the blanket and the photos) that remind Rufus of his friends. By looking at all the pictures of happier times, Rufus can remind himself of how lucky he is to have friends like this; the very fact that he chose to print these photos speaks to the depth of their relationships.



MATEO, 1:52 A.M.

Mateo is done cleaning, and he tries to come up with the inscription for his headstone. He only has eight words. One option is "What a Waste of Life." He decides that he has to do better, so he decides on "Here Lies Mateo: He Lived for Everyone." Mateo thinks that that's a promise to the world to do better. He vows not to drag Lidia into his End Day; he'll visit her, but he won't tell her the truth. He decides he needs a coach or a friend, so he decides to download the Last Friend app, which gives any Decker a friend in their last hours. He specifies that it's not the same as Necro, a disturbing hookup app that charges \$7.99 a day. Sometimes Last Friends are great; some post beautiful eulogies. However, one Decker recently befriended a serial killer on Last Friend.

Even though Mateo is still hanging out on the internet, he's doing something extremely important: he's promising himself (and the world) that he's going to make the most of his last day. Downloading an app like Last Friend forces Mateo to admit that he's lonely and needs more people in his life, especially on his final day. However, the mention of the serial killer who's using the app makes it clear that befriending people in this way isn't without risks. It may not financially exploit Deckers like the Necro app does, but there are still issues with how people use it.



Mateo decides the app would be good for him, though he can't decide how sad it would be to die with someone who doesn't care much about him. He checks his bank account: he has about \$2,000. Then, he downloads Last Friend. He fills out his profile and notes that Dad is in a coma, that he loves the Scorpius Hawthorne book series, and that he wants to find a new version of himself on his End Day. Mateo selects a **photo** of himself in a Luigi hat, which he won for entering an online Mario Kart contest. The Mateo in the photo looks like exactly who Mateo wants to be: happy, fun, and carefree. No one on the app will know that Mateo isn't really like that.

The profile picture that Mateo chooses allows him to give himself a tangible goal: be the kind of person who looks happy and wears silly hats. At this point, putting up this photo on a social media platform gives Mateo the opportunity to practice being that kind of person in a small way, even if he's not that way in real life. His concerns about meeting someone who doesn't care about him are legitimate, and again speak to the issues surrounding sinister people who use (and abuse) social media.



RUFUS, 1:59 A.M.

Rufus changes into his cycling gear, grabs his helmet, and leaves the light on when he leaves the room—he doesn't want Malcolm and Tagoe to feel weird about entering. Malcolm, Tagoe, Francis, and Jenn-Lori are there; Rufus also hopes that Aimee is going to come. Jenn-Lori dries her eyes, pulls Rufus into a hug, and cries some more. Rufus doesn't want her to let go. He tries to make jokes and engage everyone in a group game of Rock, Paper, Scissors. Aimee arrives and asks if Rufus is kidding. Rufus thinks she's asking about his End Day, but she steps aside to reveal Peck, bruised and bleeding.

Leaving the light on for his friends makes it clear that Rufus is a thoughtful and generous person. Even as he faces down his own death, his only thought is to make this situation better for his friends. Jenn-Lori's display of affection shows again that people don't need to be blood family to love each other deeply and provide support. As a foster mom, she's still losing a child she cared for, even if Rufus isn't her biological son.



MATEO, 2:02 A.M.

There are 42 local Last Friend users online. Mateo receives a message from Wendy Mae, a girl who just wants to console Deckers. He figures she probably reached out because she also loves Scorpius Hawthorne. Aspects of her profile are grating—she talks like she has lots of time left to live, which Mateo finds tone-deaf—and her message also makes a bad joke about stopping death. Not wanting to be rude, Mateo messages her back. They chat until Wendy Mae says that Mateo's dad must be losing it. Mateo says he's done talking, but Wendy Mae asks if they can have sex—she wants to practice before she officially loses her virginity to her boyfriend. Other users message because they're looking for a couch or trying to selling pot. A user named Philly tells Mateo he "has the cure to death in [his] pants."

Mateo's politeness would, in many cases, make it easier for him to make friends—but with someone like Wendy Mae, who isn't all that polite herself and clearly doesn't care about who Mateo really is, being so polite just makes it harder for Mateo to move on and find someone who does care. The users looking to buy or sell things, as well as Philly's sexual message, also drive home that even businesses with good intentions (like the one behind the Last Friends app) don't—and can't—get things right all the time. These slip-ups are dehumanizing and disheartening for users like Mateo, who come to the app trying to form genuine connections with others.



RUFUS, 2:21 A.M.

Aimee shoves Rufus against the fridge and asks what he was thinking. Jenn Lori presses ice to Peck's face and can't hide her disappointment in Rufus. Aimee drags Rufus to the living room, where Rufus admits that he only went for Peck because he didn't feel like he had a future anyway, and Peck had voiced these fears. Aimee replies that Rufus isn't a nobody. They sit on the couch like they did back when Aimee told Rufus that she was leaving Pluto and broke up with him. Rufus holds Aimee and leans in to kiss her, but Tagoe walks in and interrupts. Everyone else comes in for the funeral—even Peck. This is Rufus's first Decker funeral; his family didn't throw one after they received their calls. Jenn Lori speaks directly to Rufus and about how he transformed as he found friends.

Francis speaks, and then Malcolm steps up. He says that Rufus matters more than most people. Tagoe cries and says that Rufus was supposed to be a lifelong friend, which makes everyone else cry. Aimee steps up and says that this feels like a nightmare—then, she squints and asks if someone called the cops. Peck is the only one who doesn't look surprised. He shouts that Rufus assaulted him; Aimee shrieks that Rufus is a human, not expired meat. Tagoe and Malcolm tell Rufus to leave out the back while they slow down the cops. Rufus takes a long look at his friends, sneaks through the backyard, and grabs his bike when he sees that the officers are inside. He rides away, wishing he was already dead.

MATEO, 2:52 A.M.

Mateo feels vindicated for living his life alone; everyone on the Last Friend app is horrible. He ignores the Last Friend notifications and immerses himself in his Xbox game. His hero, a sorcerer, accidentally steps on a landmine and gets blown to pieces. Mateo's heart pounds as he watches his character come to life again. Mateo won't be able to do that. He walks to his bookcases: one that contains his favorite books and one holds books he hasn't read. Mateo pulls out an armful of books he wants to read and hurls them across the room. He stops himself from throwing his speakers—they might light a fire—and tears down his world map. Mateo looks at the mess, knowing he can't try to clean up. He'd be here all day. He knows he has to try, so he opens the Last Friend app again.

Jenn Lori makes it clear that Rufus is the person he is at this point because of his relationships with Malcolm, Tagoe, and Aimee. His friendships have helped him grieve for his family, and now, they're helping him feel loved as he stares down his own death. For Rufus, his choice to beat up Peck looks even more meaningful now that it might be the last significant thing he does. There's no telling what anyone's last big act might be—but that's no excuse to hurt others.



For all of Rufus's friends and chosen family members, it's clear that Peck is taking a low blow by calling the police. This is part of the reason they decide to possibly get themselves in trouble with the cops to help Rufus get away—in comparison to what Peck did, getting in a bit of trouble might not seem so meaningful, especially if it helps Rufus live his last day as a free person rather than in jail.



Allowing people like Philly and Wendy Mae to use Last Friend means that users like Mateo, who desperately want to connect with someone in a meaningful way, don't get the meaningful experience they want. Social media companies can only do so much, though—and a situation like this calls into question why developers haven't done more to vet users like Wendy Mae, who isn't dying and just hangs out on the app trying to solicit sex. These kinds of failures have emotional consequences for others, like Mateo's outburst in this passage, as such interactions make it seem like there aren't genuine people in the world to connect with.



RUFUS, 2:59 A.M.

Rufus wishes Death-Cast had called him before he ruined his life earlier—he thinks through all the things he wouldn't have done had he gotten the call earlier. Because Death-Cast called when it did, Rufus is alone. Now, he pedals hard. At a gas station, Rufus stops and notices graffiti advertising the Last Friend app. He thinks that he never gets to say proper goodbyes to anyone—he didn't get to hug his family or the Plutos. He won't get to thank anyone for anything. However, Rufus thinks that he doesn't need to be alone—he studies the graffiti and decides that a Last Friend might be able to discover the good version of Rufus. Apps aren't really Rufus's thing, but neither is beating people up. He registers as a Decker and receives seven messages. One is from a guy claiming to have the cure to death in his pants.

Getting a message from a user who's clearly the same Philly that messaged Mateo indicates that such misuse is widespread on the app—this again makes it clear that there are major issues with apps and social media platforms like this. Meanwhile, now that Rufus has received his Death-Cast alert, everything he's done seems to carry more weight. This is because Rufus now knows he has little time to atone for what he's done. His current desire to connect speaks to the power of new friends in particular—without baggage or prior knowledge, they can bring out new or previously-hidden qualities in a person.

**MATEO, 3:14 A.M.**

Mateo adjusts his settings so only 16 to 18-year-olds can contact him. He gets a message from a girl named Zoe, but he ignores her when he sees a profile for a kid named Rufus pop up. Mateo has always liked the name. Rufus is Cuban American, bisexual, and wants to “do it up” and go out right. Rufus seems like he might be suicidal, but his **photo** is warm and inviting, so Mateo messages him. Rufus compliments Mateo's hat, which thrills Mateo because Rufus is already connecting to who Mateo wants to be. They discuss the fact that Mateo hasn't left the house since receiving his Death-Cast call. Mateo explains that it seems stupid to leave when someone or something will kill him, and some Last Friends supposedly have the cure to death in their pants. Rufus says that he reported Philly, and he suggests that they video chat. Mateo is scared and confused, but he answers the call.

Connecting over their respective profile photos helps Mateo and Rufus see each other in a different light; Mateo has no idea that Rufus beat someone, while Rufus can't tell that Mateo only dreams of being carefree. They can live different lives in photos and convey those lives to others. Reporting Philly is a way for Rufus to make Last Friend better for everyone. However, this also shows that it falls to users to police the environment. Again, the app is failing in important ways, since Deckers clearly have more important things to worry about.



Mateo feels exposed and a bit threatened. Rufus apologizes for the video chat; he just wants to know that he can trust Mateo. He explains why he wants a Last Friend instead of his real friends: he watched his parents and sister die, and he doesn't want his friends to feel the guilt he now feels. Mateo says he understands. Rufus says that if they're going to be Last Friends, Mateo has to leave his apartment. He says that he didn't want to live for a while, but his family showed him that it's better to live wishing for death than to die wishing to live. Mateo agrees, but he says that Rufus has to pick him up. Rufus agrees, and they hang up. Mateo is worried about what kind of a person Rufus might be, but he reasons that it doesn't matter too much—they both die at the end, anyway.

Now that Mateo knows he's going to die, his choices seem far less meaningful. This shows that at least in this moment, he's giving up control of what happens in his life. While it's possible to argue that this isn't a bad thing—Mateo's choices have value, whether he makes them now or whether he made them years ago—giving up in this moment suggests that Mateo doesn't feel like his life means that much anymore. Devaluing himself like this is a way to protect himself from what could end up being a disappointing encounter.



ANDREA DONAHUE, 3:30 A.M.

Andrea isn't dying today. She's one of Death-Cast's top reps. Tonight, she made 67 calls between midnight and 3:00 a.m.—it's been hard to beat her record of 92 calls since they put her under inspection for rushing. She hopes that HR won't review her log; she mixed up several names. It'd be an awful time to lose her job: she needs lots of physical therapy after an accident, and she has to pay her daughter's school tuition. This is also the only job she's ever been good at. Her hack is to believe that Deckers aren't people—this mindset means she doesn't waste hours with company counselors. She knows there's nothing she can do for the Deckers; she doesn't pray for them or comfort them. She tells herself that the Deckers she calls are lucky because she gives them the opportunity to really live.

Though Andrea reads as callous in a variety of ways, her mindset is designed to help her—and she has every reason to want to be able to do her job well, since she depends on the insurance and her paycheck. In short, Andrea is a complex person, even if she's gone to extreme and arguably offensive lengths to get through the day. When she suggests that she's the one who gives them the opportunity to live, it shows that she's well aware that people take things more seriously when they know they're dying. Whether this is a good thing or not, Andrea is able to frame it so that she can get through her work days and live with herself.



RUFUS, 3:31 A.M.

As Rufus bikes to Mateo's apartment, he hopes that Mateo isn't a serial killer. He thinks that this thought is silly—it's obvious that Mateo is too caught up in his own head and spends too much time alone. The fact that Rufus has to pick him up is proof of this. Once the awkwardness is out of the way, Rufus thinks they'll be friends. At the very least, Rufus having a Last Friend should make his real friends feel better about him running around. It makes Rufus feel better.

Rufus essentially implies that on his last day, he doesn't want to be alone. This speaks to the necessity of human connection, and not just over the internet. What Rufus craves is someone to actually be there with him, no matter what kind of a person that is.



MALCOLM ANTHONY, 3:34 A.M.

Malcolm knows he isn't dying today because he didn't receive a call from Death-Cast, but his future is still at risk. Malcolm and Tagoe informed the police that Rufus is a Decker and not worth chasing, but the police insisted they had to find him. To save Rufus, Malcolm decided to get himself arrested. Tagoe, however, took things too far—and now, both boys are in the car on the way to the police station. Malcolm feels good about making the police work to find Rufus and about giving Rufus extra time. He also knows that he's not innocent—he was complicit in beating up Peck—but now, Malcolm will be marked as a delinquent. He'll be alive, though. Malcolm cries. He thinks the biggest crime was not being able to hug Rufus goodbye.

Here, the novel introduces the idea that death and loss aren't the only ways in which a person's life can change for the worse. A person's choices—such as Malcom's choice to get himself arrested—matter a lot, whether they're slated for death soon or not. Despite understanding that he may have ruined his life, the most important thing for Malcolm right now is still Rufus. Their friendship, however, can't help them now; Rufus's choice to beat up Peck made sure of that.



MATEO, 3:42 A.M.

Mateo stops pacing when he hears a knock at the door—he hopes that it’s actually Rufus and that Rufus is alone. He squints through the peephole and then opens the door. Rufus seems friendly and reminds Mateo that he’s on Mateo’s turf; he should be the one who’s worried, not Mateo. Rufus stands outside while Mateo grabs the notes for his neighbors and his keys. He drops a note off in front of Elliot’s apartment, explaining to Rufus that Elliot brought over food for him. He also drops one in front of Sean’s door—Sean was going to fix the broken stove. Rufus insists they take the stairs down because two Deckers have no business getting into an elevator. They carefully make their way down the stairs, and Rufus pushes the door open. Mateo is ready to go back upstairs, but he allows Rufus to pressure him to step out.

Mateo looks around, thinking that everything looks different now. Rufus grabs his bike and says they need a game plan—and bucket lists are pointless. Mateo says that Rufus sounds like a pro at dying and then, mortified, starts to feel a panic attack coming on. He nervously says that hanging out together doubles their chances of dying sooner, and he begins listing what-if scenarios. Rufus patiently humors Mateo for a few of them, but then insists that they could either talk about this or live. Mateo knows Rufus is right, but he reminds Rufus that knowing he’s dying isn’t going to make him suddenly fearless. Mateo says that he has to say goodbye to Dad and Lidia, and he heads for the subway. Rufus says he’s game and mentions his botched funeral, but he doesn’t elaborate.

Mateo spots a dead bird. He says they have to get it out of the street—he doesn’t think they should leave dead things. Rufus snappily says that he feels the same way. Mateo apologizes and explains that as a kid, he tried to shelter a baby bird that fell out of its nest—but Mateo had to give up because he got too cold, and he never figured out what happened to the bird. Rufus finds a newspaper to pick up the bird. He follows Mateo to the community garden to bury it. Mateo likes the idea of the bird resting here. Birds aren’t people, but they also fall in love and have families. Thoughts like these make people think Mateo is weird, so he keeps them inside. He sees a flash and notices Rufus taking a **photo**. Mateo says he hopes that someone is this kind to them when they’re dead.

Both boys understand that a killer could be lurking around any corner and kill them at any second—though the novel also implies that this could happen to anyone. The only difference is that these two know they’re going to die, so the possibility is at the forefront of their minds. Leaving the notes for Elliot and Sean allows Mateo to thank two of the only four living people he names for their efforts to help and connect with him. Choosing to do this, and choosing to trust Rufus and step outside, makes it clear that Mateo craves human connection and understands its worth.



Already, Rufus is behaving like a good friend—he doesn’t make Mateo feel worse about having a panic attack, and he helps Mateo see that worrying won’t help the situation. Additionally, he has no problem going along with Mateo’s wishes to see Dad and Lidia. All of this shows Mateo that Rufus, a perfect stranger, already respects and cares about him. Because of this, Rufus shows Mateo that it is worth it to trust others and try to connect—and furthermore, that connecting with someone like Rufus is important enough to spend his last day doing.



Mateo’s compassion shines through here—as does Rufus’s, given that Rufus does what he can to help Mateo follow through and bury the bird. The story of trying to protect the baby bird as a kid helps Rufus see that Mateo has spent his life trying to connect to others, including animals, without success. This may explain why Mateo spends so much time on social media—his previous attempts at meeting people haven’t gone well, and so it’s easier to stay online where the fallout might be less painful.



RUFUS, 4:09 A.M.

Rufus thinks that Mateo is too good, and he vows to take what he did to Peck to the grave. Mateo explains that they have to see his dad. Rufus considers biking instead of taking the subway, but then he decides to follow Mateo into the station. He assures Mateo that they're fine, since Mateo seems afraid. Out loud, Mateo wonders how many Deckers are with strangers, how many are already dead, and how many tried to say goodbye to loved ones but died alone anyway. Rufus says it's not fair, but being with someone doesn't keep people alive. Both boys buy regular subway passes—they don't want to wait in line for the free Decker passes—and they step onto the platform. The train comes immediately as Mateo notes that soon, robots will take over all the tellers' jobs.

Rufus is relieved the train came because this means they won't die on the tracks. He notices a party of college kids celebrating that they didn't get the Death-Cast call. Rufus tries to drag Mateo onto the car, but Mateo darts into the empty car ahead. Rufus decides to not let Mateo ruin his vibe, since this isn't dangerous like skydiving. Rufus steps over a sleeping man so he can peek into Mateo's car, and he gestures for Mateo to come over. A girl taps Rufus on the shoulder, offers him a beer, and asks him to go home with her. Rufus refuses; he can't abandon Mateo. The next guy the girl talks to follows her off the train, and Rufus takes a **photo** of the party car. Then, he moves to Mateo's car. Rufus is ready to guilt trip Mateo, but seeing how guilty Mateo already looks, he asks about the robots instead.

Once Mateo understands that Rufus is genuinely curious, he talks quickly and excitedly about robots that can do household chores and answer phones—and robots are cheaper to employ than people. Rufus points out that people will never be fired for a robot, and he asks why Mateo didn't get in the party car. Mateo insists they have no business celebrating on that car, especially when it's possible that they won't live long enough for Mateo to say goodbye to Dad and Lidia. Rufus insists it's just a party and thinks that Mateo might keep them alive longer, but that today will be boring.

For Rufus and Mateo, life seems both more meaningful than ever and less meaningful than ever. They could die at any moment, so either their choices matter a lot, or they don't matter at all—after all, they're going to die anyway. Though this reality is something people live with every day, to some degree, the knowledge that Mateo and Rufus are definitely going to die today makes it seem more pressing. The novel makes the case that while anxiety like the boys experience might be unhelpful, it's still important to remember that people are mortal and to act accordingly.



Choosing not to guilt-trip Mateo shows again that Rufus is a good friend; he doesn't feel the need to make Mateo's day even worse. That these kids are partying because they didn't get the call suggests that in the world of the novel, people do think about death differently. They celebrate the fact that they're not going to die today, possibly on a daily basis—something that may be extreme, but that the novel suggests is nevertheless a positive, life-affirming thing.



Rufus underestimates Mateo's ability to change when he insists to the reader that today is going to be boring. He also implies that if he didn't already feel invested in hanging out with Mateo, he'd be making different choices about how to spend his last day. Friendship—even relationships that somewhat contrived, like this one—can fundamentally change people's behavior.



AIMEE DUBOIS, 4:17 A.M.

Aimee didn't receive a call from Death-Cast and isn't dying, but she feels as though she already lost Rufus. She storms home and tells Peck, who's following her, that he's a monster for trying to get Rufus arrested at his funeral. Peck insists that it's not his fault that Malcolm and Tagoe are in jail. Aimee spits for Peck to leave her alone; Rufus has always been important to her, and because of Peck, she has less time with him. Peck asks if they're breaking up, and Aimee thinks that she's not sure. She knows that Rufus messed up by attacking Peck, but Peck was morally wrong to call the police on Rufus. Peck insists that Aimee keeps prioritizing Rufus when Peck has been there for her, and he storms away. Aimee doesn't know where she stands with Peck or with herself.

To Aimee, what went down this evening isn't black and white: what Rufus did was certainly wrong, but what Peck did was even worse. This means that she has a choice to make: does she drop Peck for making such a poor choice, or does she forgive him and deal with the guilt that will surely accompany that choice? Showing that Aimee has such a significant decision to make drives home the point that a person's choices matter every day—even if they're not slated to die. Knowing one is going to live isn't an excuse to make cruel or regrettable choices.

**MATEO, 4:26 A.M.**

Mateo thinks he's failing to break out. On one hand, he doesn't want to be around drunk partiers; on the other, he secretly believes that partying on the train is where he belongs. He's just too afraid of disappointing people or looking like a fool. Surprisingly, Rufus follows Mateo into the hospital. Mateo reads the receptionist's **nametag** and asks the receptionist, Jared, to see Dad. Jared refuses to let Mateo see Dad outside of visiting hours—until Rufus notes that Mateo is dying. Jared reminds Mateo that Dad is in a coma, which surprises Rufus, but Mateo says he still wants to say goodbye. Jared checks Mateo and Rufus in and offers his condolences. Somehow, they seem far more genuine than Andrea's. On the way up, Mateo apologizes for not getting into the party car.

Jared's nametag forces Mateo and Rufus to see Jared as a person with a name, not just a nondescript receptionist. In other words, the nametag is a way to form a connection and humanize someone. This shows that even within the reader's world, structures exist to connect people more intimately with one another in all sorts of ways. That Andrea's behavior still sticks with Mateo speaks to how poorly she does her job—though Mateo tries to ignore it, she's made his day worse by seeming to cheapen his impending death.



Mateo struggles up the stairs. From a few flights above, Rufus calls down that Mateo has to open himself up to new experiences. Mateo replies that he'll feel more confident once he's said goodbye. He leaves Rufus in the waiting area and goes to Dad's room. Dad has been here for almost two weeks, since he suffered a stroke. Mateo has been waiting to hear that Dad is going to die, but now, he's free of that responsibility. He takes Dad's hand and tries not to cry; he doesn't want Dad to wake up and find that Mateo is gone. Mateo is also frustrated that Dad's not around—Dad should be here for Mateo, since he was here when Mateo was **born** and when Mateo's mom died. On the back of his **photo**, Mateo writes Dad a note, promising to be brave, and puts it on the dresser.

Though Mateo might not have many close relationships in his life, his desire to see Dad and say goodbye speaks to the power of his familial bonds. Up until he found himself alone on his End Day, Mateo might not have seen the need for lots of in-person friends because he had Dad. However, now that Mateo doesn't have either parent to guide him, he must turn to people like Rufus to help him get through the day and make his mark on the world.



Elizabeth, Dad's nurse, enters and assures Mateo that Dad is in good hands. Mateo knows he has to say goodbye and says that it's not fair that he has to leave without hearing Dad's voice. Elizabeth asks if Mateo can tell her about Dad, since she knows so little about him. Mateo remembers Dad saying that people can become immortal through stories—he's kept Mateo's mom alive this way. Mateo says that Dad loved creating lists and thought his lists were hilarious. Dad was a great storyteller, and at times, Mateo felt like he was on the beach when Dad proposed to his mom the first time. Rufus interrupts, awed, and Mateo invites him in. Mateo says that his mom turned Dad down twice, but she agreed to marry him when she found out she was pregnant.

Mateo asks for 10 more minutes alone. He takes Dad's hand and says it's his turn to tell a story; he hopes Dad can hear. Mateo starts to say something about himself, but he can't say it. The truth is complicated, even though he thinks it might not even mess things up. He thinks he's keeping a secret, even from himself, because the lie is easier. Instead, Mateo sings parts of "Take This Waltz," one of Dad's favorites.

RUFUS, 4:46 A.M.

Rufus thinks he's going to have to knock Mateo out to get him out of the hospital; that's what someone would've had to do to get Rufus away from his own dad. After 10 minutes, Rufus cracks the door and hears Mateo singing. Mateo jumps, bright red, and starts to tidy up the room. Rufus assures Mateo that it's clean and that the nurses will take care of Dad. He grabs Mateo by the shoulders and says that Dad doesn't want Mateo here—Mateo got his chance to say goodbye, which Rufus didn't get with his family, and now Rufus needs a friend. Mateo kisses Dad's forehead and says goodbye. It's hard for Rufus to watch. Mateo says he hopes Dad will wake up today, but he follows Rufus and closes the door.

MATEO, 4:58 A.M.

It's not too late to run back to Dad, but Mateo doesn't want to put people at the hospital at risk. He wants to listen to music, especially since Rufus caught him singing—he wants to listen to "Come What May," which Mateo's mom sang to Dad in the shower before her water broke. The boys look both ways before crossing the street. On the other side, there's a homeless man going through trash bags. Mateo and Rufus look down as the man asks for a dollar. Mateo mutters to Rufus that he wants to give the man money, and he fishes out \$18. Rufus asks why, and Mateo responds that this man clearly needs it—but Rufus says that he's been duped before.

Elizabeth's desire to connect with Mateo and with Dad is a way of showing she cares. When Mateo brings up the idea that people can become immortal through stories, it offers up the metafictional idea that even Mateo and Rufus will get to live on beyond this day as long as readers continue to read the novel. As readers continue to pick up the book, they will learn the power of storytelling to bolster relationships and keep people alive.



Though Mateo doesn't share his secret with the reader, it's clear that he has one—and hopefully, he'll be willing to voice it by the end of the day. The fact that he's willing to share it with Dad underlines the strength of their relationship, especially since it seems as though this secret is something that Mateo hasn't shared with anyone.



Even though Mateo has openly voiced that he wants to be the kind of person who sings like this, it's still uncomfortable to be caught singing. Mateo may want to change and become a different person, but he's not yet willing to trust Rufus enough to be vulnerable in front of him. However, Rufus's pep talk does give Mateo the strength to leave Dad's bedside and go out into the world. Their budding friendship helps Mateo move away from his blood family and toward his new chosen family.



For Mateo, his birth and his life are linked inextricably to his mother's death—it's implied that his mom died in childbirth, so now it's impossible for Mateo to escape the fact that life and death are intimately connected. Meanwhile, though giving this homeless man money might not do much, for Mateo, it's a way to connect with someone and hopefully to improve this man's day. Making a choice like this gives Mateo the satisfaction of having his last act potentially be one of kindness.



Mateo shares that when he was in fifth grade, a guy asked for a dollar, punched him, and stole his lunch money. But Mateo says that he shouldn't be the judge of who needs help. Rufus parks his bike, fishes out \$20, and leads Mateo to the homeless man. He makes Mateo talk. Mateo holds out the cash, assures the skeptical man that this isn't a trick, and apologizes that it isn't more. The man hurries to Mateo and hugs him, and Mateo hugs him back. The man reminds him of Dad. The man thanks Mateo and Rufus and walks away. Rufus says that hopefully, karma will reward Mateo. Mateo thinks that people shouldn't do good things for karma, but says that they did a good thing by not treating the man like he's invisible. He's glad Rufus didn't mention that they're dying; it would've cheapened it.

Especially since the homeless man's hug reminds Mateo of Dad, this gesture drives home the idea that people aren't all that different from one another—and all of them, no matter their economic standing or where they live, desire human connection and respect. Mateo gets at this when he suggests that what they really did was make sure this man didn't feel invisible. This is, in many ways, what Mateo has spent his entire life doing—whether on CountDowners or here with this man, Mateo makes a point to help others feel like they matter and like someone is listening.



DELILAH GREY, 5:00 A.M.

Death-Cast called Delilah Gray two hours ago with the news that she's dying today, but Delilah doesn't believe it—this must be a prank that her ex-fiancé Victor, a Death-Cast employee, is playing on her. That's very illegal, and she can't believe he'd do it. She deletes the email receipt of her call with her herald and thinks about calling Victor, but she decides not to—she doesn't want to give him the satisfaction of being paranoid. Delilah vows to not second-guess her day, just as she didn't second-guess calling off her engagement.

While Mateo and Rufus make the choice to live their last day to the fullest because they know that they're dying, Delilah does the opposite: she vows to live because she's convinced she's not dying. Her choice to believe that she's not dying is a survival mechanism that allows her to get through the day—otherwise, it's possible she'd go through her final hours terrified and unable to live her life to the fullest.



Delilah admires her technicolor hair, which her boss thinks is too bright, and opens her laptop. She's supposed to write a season premiere recap for the show *Hipster House*, and she knows she's lucky to have grunt work so that the real writers can cover the “respected franchises.” She turns on the TV to watch the premiere again, but the news catches her eye. A news anchor says that the 25-year-old Howie Maldonado, the star of the Scorpius Hawthorne films, is dying today. Delilah leaps up—she's going to report on this story.

Rather than having to conduct interviews with friends or families of celebrities after a celebrity's death, news establishments can now interview celebrities knowing it'll be the last time—which makes these interviews all the more valuable. Delilah's desire to report on this story reads as somewhat callous. A person is dying, even if he's a celebrity, and he deserves respect and dignity like anyone else.



MATEO, 5:20 A.M.

Mateo withdraws \$400 out of an ATM and puts it in an envelope for Lidia. He suggests they hang out in Lidia's lobby since it's too early to visit, but Rufus says it's time for breakfast. Mateo is happy to follow. Rufus takes Mateo to his favorite café and leads Mateo to a booth in the back, which he says is his spot. He comes about twice per week. When Mateo asks if this is Rufus's neighborhood, Rufus says it has been for the last few months since he was placed in foster care. Mateo realizes how little he knows about Rufus and how one-sided this Last Friendship is. Rufus points out the Decker discount. Meals are free, which is unusual.

That free meals for Deckers are unusual can be read as both questionably moral and as proof that despite the way death works in the novel, life still goes on. Businesses possibly can't afford to give every dying person free meals; they have bills to pay too. The fact that this café chooses to give free meals suggests that the owners may be especially compassionate—they might be trying their best to recognize the humanity and the tragedy of the dying Deckers who come through.



A waitress walks up, greets them, and tries to make small talk before asking the boys' orders. Her **nametag** reads "Rae." Rufus says he's changing things up today, since it's his last chance, and he asks what Rae would suggest. She laughs for a moment when she asks if they got the alert, but then she becomes very serious. Rae tries to sell Rufus on the Everything Special but then admits that her favorite meal is the grilled chicken salad. Rufus orders that. Mateo asks for Rufus's usual. They hear Rae tell the chef to put their table first, and Mateo wonders if Andrea was like Rae before her job "killed her compassion." They discuss the merits of telling their friends that they're dying. Mateo doesn't want to ruin people's days, but Rufus insists they need to stop caring what other people think.

Again, Rae's nametag forces Rufus and Mateo to humanize her and see her as a full person, not just as a waitress. They're forced to make this connection with Rae—something that seemingly has a deeply emotional effect on her. However, comparing her to Andrea may not be entirely fair. While it's unclear how many Deckers Rae serves every day, Andrea speaks to dozens of Deckers per day—Andrea has to numb herself in order to make it through, while Rae doesn't deal exclusively with dying people. This means that Rae is better able to acknowledge the tragedy without getting stuck in it.



Rae returns with their food and says that if they need anything, to yell for her. Mateo sizes up his French toast, which reminds him of Dad. He offers some to Rufus, but Rufus grabs Rae's forgotten notepad, starts to draw a map, and says he wanted to travel the world taking **photos**. He draws the countries he'll never visit. Mateo suggests they visit the Travel Arena, which has good reviews on CountDowners, but Rufus says he never reads that sort of thing. He asks Mateo what Mateo wanted to do. Mateo says he wanted to be an architect, but he doesn't share that he dreams of performing on a stage he built. He mentions that he played with Legos a lot. Rufus did too. Rufus takes a bite of the French toast and Mateo asks for the bill. He tips 300 percent and thanks the staff.

Mateo's conception of how to live his final day is majorly influenced by what he reads online. It's unthinkable for him to try to figure out what he actually wants to do, since his experiences with Deckers seems to have been mostly contained to CountDowners and online reviews of places like the Travel Arena. It's important to Mateo that this café continue to treat other Deckers with compassion, so he does what he can to help them keep doing this. Paying his bill, tipping so well, and making sure to thank everyone lets the café know that treating Deckers like this is admirable.



RUFUS, 5:53 A.M.

Rufus admits that he wishes he could have one last meal with the Plutos. At the very least, they could text him back. He tosses Mateo his helmet and tells him to stand on his bike's back pegs; Tagoe always did that. Mateo tries, but then he leaps off and says he thinks they should walk. Rufus considers riding off alone, but he decides to walk next to Mateo.

Rufus could easily choose to go on without Mateo, but he'd be alone if he did that. At this point, even if Mateo is cramping Rufus's style, it's still more important to Rufus to stay, be with another person, and work on their friendship on his last day.



MATEO, 6:14 A.M.

Mateo feels like the worst Last Friend ever and says that this is going to be awful. He tells Rufus that Lidia was destroyed when her boyfriend, Christian, died and never got to meet Penny. Rufus asks what happened. Mateo hesitates, but he realizes that Rufus will die with the story. He says that Christian went to Pennsylvania to sell stuff, and that's when he got his Death-Cast alert. Lidia slept through all his attempts to reach her, and he died with a Decker truck driver trying to get home. Mateo remembers how Lidia seemed to resent Penny at first. Since then, Lidia dropped out of high school to care for Penny with her grandmother; she's not close with her parents or Christian's. Mateo doesn't want to make her life more complicated by springing his death on her.

Trusting Rufus with the story of Christian's death allows Mateo to learn that he can trust others with his secrets. Now, cultivating this sense of intimacy with Rufus may allow Mateo the strength to trust others with the truth about who he wants to be as the day wears on. Lidia's initial reaction to Penny speaks again to the connectedness of life and death—Penny's birth, just like Mateo's, is unfortunately linked to a parent's death. This makes it clear that it's impossible to have one without the other.



Mateo calls Lidia. She's awake and agrees that Mateo can visit. Rufus stays downstairs to call his friends while Mateo heads up. Lidia is frantically heating up formula while Penny screams. Mateo sends Lidia to brush her teeth and gives Penny the bottle. Lidia returns with the news that Howie Maldonado got his alert today, and Mateo shares that there's nothing new with Dad. He tickles and burps Penny, thinking he'll never get to do this with his own kids. Lidia settles Penny in front of cartoons, and Mateo asks what he can do to help. He cleans up Penny's toys and tells the reader that Lidia initially wanted to study politics, architecture, and music history. She used to get her hair done weekly. Now, she never approves **photos** to go online because she thinks she looks tired, but Mateo thinks she glows.

Mateo sits with Penny and thinks that this is Penny's beginning, but one day, Death-Cast will call her. He tells Penny that he hopes she becomes immortal so that she can rule forever. Lidia catches this and asks why Mateo is talking like this. She raises an eyebrow when Mateo says he just wants Penny to live forever. Mateo tells the reader that normally, he and Lidia don't talk about their relationship, but he feels it's important to say something today. He says that Lidia is doing a selfless thing by raising Penny. Lidia looks suspicious, and Mateo says he should leave soon. Lidia asks Mateo to do a few more chores before he goes. When Lidia leaves the room, Mateo leaves the envelope of money, grabs the garbage, and leaves. He blocks Lidia's number, hoping she'll understand.

RUFUS, 6:48 A.M.

Rufus scrolls through Instagram. He's certain that Malcolm and Tagoe are asleep, since they're not texting back and they haven't been on Instagram. He's in the middle of texting an apology to Aimee when Mateo races down the stairs and out the front door, insisting they need to leave before Lidia chases them. Outside, Rufus tells Mateo to say whatever he needs to say and not carry it around. Mateo shouts and sits on the curb. Rufus grabs Mateo, takes him to the safety of a wall, and sits down next to him. He tells Mateo that he can do whatever he wants with his last day, but if he wants help living it, he has Rufus. Mateo says he wants to keep moving forward and puts his glasses back on.

As far as Mateo is concerned, Lidia's life has changed for the better since having Penny. She might not be in school anymore, and she might be tired, but her connection with her daughter brings her to life in a way that academics never did. Similarly, Penny seems to bring Mateo to life. The way he plays with Penny is very unselfconscious, which implies that being around kids—who are at the beginning of their lives and don't fear death yet—is one way for Mateo to work on breaking out of his shell. Surrounding himself with life and potential, in other words, is extremely beneficial.



Though Penny may be living life as though death doesn't exist—as a baby, she doesn't yet understand what death means—Mateo cannot escape the fact that even Penny is mortal. This helps Mateo decide to live his life boldly throughout the day. By recognizing that anyone, even an innocent child, could die at any second, Mateo is able to see the importance of doing things he might never get to do again. Saying these things to Lidia before shutting her out is, in his mind, a way to have his cake and eat it too: Lidia will know he loves her, but Mateo seems to think she'll be better off if she doesn't know he's going to die beforehand.



The way that Rufus talks about social media is very different from how Mateo talks about it. For Rufus and his friends, it's just one more way for them to connect—it's a single aspect of a strong relationship that began in person, not a substitute for human connection. However, his misinterpretation of Malcolm and Tagoe's silence does show that even when people use social media like this, it still can't tell the entire story—they need to see each other for that.

Rufus says he didn't get to say goodbye to his friends, but he dances around what happened at his funeral. He refuses to set up a Countdowners profile, but he allows Mateo to look through his Instagram. It makes Rufus feel exposed. Mateo asks why all the **photos** are black and white, and Rufus explains that he started his account when he moved into the foster home because his life "lost color" after his parents died. Mateo smiles, brightens up, and suggests that Rufus should post everything from today on his Instagram—in color, so that the Plutos can remember him that way. Rufus loves the idea and asks Mateo to take a photo now. He uploads it and hopes that the people who matter will remember Rufus as the person he really is, not as the person who punched Peck for no good reason.

Rufus latches onto documenting his End Day on Instagram because it'll give his friends a way to remember him. As much, photos begin to symbolize not just life and memory, but the idea that there are ways for people to live on long after they're gone. Rufus also still recognizes that he has a choice in how people see him now and how people remember him. Doing kind things, like leaving pictures for his friends, will help Rufus be the better person he wants to be, not the person who was violent and mean.



PATRICK "PECK" GAVIN, 7:08 A.M.

Peck didn't receive a call from Death-Cast today, so he's not dying. He expected the call before Rufus got his, though. Peck presses a frozen hamburger patty to his face and thinks that he shouldn't have left Aimee in the street. He called her and argued, but they hung up when Aimee said she wanted to see Rufus again. Peck used to follow a certain code with people like Rufus—Rufus's prospects don't look good if he's still alive when Peck wakes up.

Because Peck isn't dying today, he feels as though he can make choices (like to kill Rufus) that might ruin his life—consequences other than death don't seem so bad. In the world of the novel, it seems that for some characters, death has taken over as the only real reason to take stock of their choices.



RUFUS, 7:12 A.M.

Mateo and Rufus get the same notification that there's a Make-A-Moment location nearby. Mateo explains that the locations launched last fall; they're like the Make-A-Wish Foundation. Deckers can go use virtual reality simulations to skydive and take other risks safely. Rufus suggests it's a rip-off, but Mateo doesn't think it's that bad. Rufus steps off the curb without looking, but Mateo holds him back—they look both ways and then cross the street. Rufus thinks that he should be nervous after watching his family drown. Just then, Mateo's phone rings: it's Lidia calling from her grandmother's phone, but Mateo ignores it. Rufus tries again to call Malcolm and Tagoe, and then he FaceTimes Aimee. She picks up right before Rufus is ready to hang up.

Make-A-Moment sprang up to fill the Deckers' perceived need to go through experiences like this before they die. Given that the novel overwhelmingly suggests Rufus has a better handle on how to best use social media, it's likely that he's right in his assessment of Make-A-Moment. From the way that Mateo interacts with death, though, it's understandable that he'd be interested in Make-A-Moment. For him, these kinds of contrived experiences are just what he wants, anyway, since they're safe.



Aimee is shocked that Rufus is alive, seems dazed when Rufus introduces Mateo, and says that things got crazy after Rufus left. She explains that Malcolm and Tagoe got arrested thanks to Peck. Enraged, Rufus storms away from Mateo, who looks terrified. Aimee tells Rufus he can't go looking for them. Rufus raises a fist to punch a car window, but he lowers it—that's not him, even if he messed up and hit Peck. Rufus asks if Aimee broke up with Peck, but Aimee says it's complicated. Rufus says it's not complicated; Aimee should be loyal to the Plutos and should ditch the guy who put her friends in jail. Rufus says he has to get back to his real friend and hangs up, but Mateo is gone.

AIMEE DUBOIS, 7:18 A.M.

Aimee stops trying to call Rufus. He might have blocked her, or he might be dead. She comments on all his Instagram **photos** asking him to call her and then she changes into workout clothes. Aimee got into exercise since becoming a Pluto. When she tried to steal from Francis, she discovered Jenn Lori's dumbbells instead and started lifting. She's loved stealing for a long time, but she found that working on herself makes her feel better and more powerful than stealing. She already misses running with Rufus while he bikes.

MATEO, 7:22 A.M.

Mateo races away from Rufus, figuring it's better to die alone after living alone. He doesn't want to know what Rufus did that got his friends arrested. Mateo stops to rest at a daycare, and he wonders if he should go home and write more letters. He thinks back to a chemistry teacher who made him feel seen. Just then, Rufus rides up on his bike, leaps off, and grabs Mateo. Rufus looks scared and asks if Mateo is crazy. Mateo points out that Rufus never mentioned he's on the run. Rufus suggests they go somewhere and he'll tell the whole truth about his family and about what he did. Mateo leads Rufus into Central Park. They stumble into the *Alice in Wonderland* sculpture, which Mateo has never seen since he and Dad spent more time in Althea Park.

The boys sit on the sculpture. Mateo thinks that Rufus is awkward and silent in the same way that people were when his history teacher would talk about how beneficial Death-Cast is. He asks if Rufus killed someone. Rufus says that he jumped Aimee's new boyfriend because he was angry and felt unwanted, lost, and like he needed to take it out on someone. Mateo understands that Rufus isn't a monster and just made a mistake. Rufus says his friends are paying the price—and Rufus abandoned them, right after he abandoned his family.

Again, now that Rufus knows for sure that he's dying, he understands the importance of making choices that allow him to be who he wants to be while he still has the chance. Further, he's starting to understand the consequences of not tempering his aggressive emotions—he might lose Mateo if he doesn't outwardly manifest the kind person he knows he is inside. In order to be at peace with his last day and not spend it alone, Rufus has to put his best self forward, even though it's understandably hard to do so.



Instagram is, again, just another way for Aimee and Rufus to connect; it's not the entirety of their relationship. The way that Aimee started exercising is a testament to the importance of making good decisions, even if one isn't dying today. She understands that stealing would've gotten her in trouble, while working on herself makes her a better person and friend—and now, she has to use that lesson in her decision of what to do about Rufus.



Rufus makes an important point: it's dangerous for Mateo to run off on his own on the day he's supposed to die. At least if they're together, they can look out for each other—but this does, importantly, require trust. In order to build trust, Rufus is going to have to come clean with Mateo and give him a reason to stick around. Coming across the Alice in Wonderland statue heightens the sense of absurdity and strangeness of this day. It's strange for Mateo to grapple so closely with his death; he feels, in some ways, as though his world has turned upside-down like Alice's did.



It's easy for Mateo to see that Rufus is hurting and needs a friend on this day. This helps Mateo to see that he has something to give, too. He can show Rufus respect and compassion, and that's exactly what Rufus needs right now. By thinking of the relationship as something that's two-sided, Mateo can begin to build confidence and understand that he can be the person he wants to be—and he can start by being a good friend.



RUFUS, 7:53 A.M.

Rufus thinks he's lucky to have a Last Friend with his support network gone; he's able to keep his family alive this way. He says that his mom woke up to the Death-Cast alert on May 10, while Rufus and Olivia were playing cards. Then, the herald asked to speak to Rufus's dad—and then to Olivia. Mateo asks if Rufus was scared that he was on the list too, but Rufus checked the database: he wasn't. Olivia could barely look at him, and Rufus spent the whole day missing his family. He and Olivia were super close—Rufus came out to Olivia first. Mateo brushes this off, and Rufus wonders if Mateo cares at all—but he knows they're friends. Mateo asks if Rufus came out to his parents. Rufus says he did, and it made his mom sad that she'd never meet her future son- or daughter-in-law.

Mateo tells Rufus he doesn't have to continue, but Rufus continues the story. Olivia wanted to go to the family's cabin in Albany. Rufus rode shotgun, figuring that increased their chances of surviving a crash, but their car flew off the slick road and into the Hudson River. Rufus admits that he sometimes forgets his family's voices, but he'll never forget their screams. Mateo comforts Rufus, assures him that he isn't leaving, and suggests they go make a moment. Rufus agrees.

MATEO, 8:32 A.M.

Rufus stops in front of a sporting goods store and shares that he and Olivia loved to ski. They always went back to the same slope, even though everyone in the family got hurt once. Olivia insisted they not ski there anymore after Rufus was hospitalized. The boys reach the Make-A-Moment station, and Rufus takes a **photo** of the entrance and uploads it to Instagram. He shows Mateo his phone, and Mateo asks why Aimee is trying so hard to contact him. Rufus insists that he's done with Aimee, since her boyfriend landed Malcolm and Tagoe in jail. He insists he doesn't have feelings for her and marches inside.

A young black woman whose **nametag** reads "Deirdre" welcomes Mateo and Rufus and offers them a binder of experiences: skydiving, zip-lining, windsurfing, and more. Mateo suggests they do mountain biking, but Rufus says they should do skydiving, and Mateo agrees. They sign their waivers. Rufus makes a joke about it, but Deirdre doesn't laugh. The boys pay \$240, and Deirdre leads through a long hallway. Mateo peeks in the windows of the rooms that line the hall. Some Deckers inside are in racecars, a couple kisses in a hot air balloon six feet off the ground, and a man not wearing goggles holds the back of a girl who's on a horse. He's crying. Mateo can't tell who the Decker is, but it makes him sad enough that he stops looking.

As Mateo and Rufus get to know each other, they both begin to recognize just how important it is to not be alone on their End Day. Alone, they wouldn't be able to tell these stories to anyone who could really help them process their emotions. Rufus also gives voice to Mateo's reasons for not telling Lidia about his impending death: Rufus spent his family's last day missing them, and they weren't even dead yet. In this way, death can sometimes make people feel even less connected.



Rufus's comment about never forgetting his family's screams suggests that death can sometimes be more meaningful and easier to remember than life. The sound of his parents and sister dying is, in parts of Rufus's subconscious mind, more worthy of remembering than what his parents sounded like during good times.



Just as Mateo see his mother and Dad around town, Rufus cannot help but see his family members everywhere too. In this sense, their families are with them today, even if they're not around in person. And by continuing to talk about their families and share these moments with each other, Mateo and Rufus can effectively bring their parents back to life for a short time.



Deirdre's lacking sense of humor may be a requirement of her job rather than a personality trait—she might be instructed to never make light of a person's death. But it could also indicate that Deirdre's job is emotionally-taxing and she simply doesn't see anything funny about it. While Rufus and Mateo might be the ones forking over money for experiences like this before dying, Deirdre might be dealing with the emotional trauma of getting a paycheck in exchange for interacting with people who are soon to be dead. If seeing the people in the horse room makes Mateo upset, it likely also upsets Deirdre to some degree.



In their room, Mateo and Rufus get dressed in harnesses and ask their instructor, Madeline, to take their **photo**. She offers to take more for them while they're diving and then explains that to start their experience, they'll press the button on their goggles. She locks their harnesses to hooks and leads them up a platform. Rufus and Mateo put on their goggles and the experience begins: they're in a plane, and a man gives Mateo the thumbs-up. Mateo is terrified that his harness might break, but Rufus leaps into the void. Mateo lifts his goggles to check that Rufus is okay, even if it ruins the experience. Then, he jumps. It's exciting for a minute, but Mateo doesn't feel relieved when he sees their landing field—he knew he was safe the whole time.

After the experience, Madeline helps them out of their gear. As Mateo and Rufus pass Deirdre, Rufus suggests that they should've waited to swim with sharks, and Mateo thanks Deirdre. Outside, Rufus admits that the main jump was fine, but then it got weird. Mateo says he felt the same. Rufus suggests that they should've read reviews first, but Mateo points out that there aren't many, and he apologizes for wasting their time. Rufus says it wasn't a waste of time and posts the **photo** of them in their gear to Instagram.

LIDIA VARGAS, 9:14 A.M.

Lidia isn't dying today because she didn't get a call from Death-Cast. If she were, though, she'd tell everyone, unlike Mateo. Lidia figured it out and called Mateo and her Abuelita, and Abuelita came home. Penny is wailing. Lidia knows all of Penny's cries and what they mean, but she can't fix this one—Penny wants her Uncle Mateo. Lidia logs onto Facebook: Mateo's profile is a "wasteland." He's never shared much about himself, but he's great at letting other people know they matter by liking and commenting. She clicks through all his **photos**, but it's too painful. Tomorrow, she'll put up a status about her best friend dying. She'll never know how Mateo spent his End Day, but she hopes he finds what he's looking for.

When Mateo doesn't feel impressed or thrilled with their skydiving experience, it indicates that he's ready to move out of his shell and try something more interesting. Even after just a few hours of trying to live authentically, Mateo is already getting closer to becoming the person he wants to be. He's also becoming more like Rufus, who didn't think that Make-A-Moment was going to be particularly thrilling to begin with. Despite how benign this experience is, leaping still represents progress—Mateo is learning to trust those around him who want to keep him safe.



Rufus makes the point that safe experiences like this are a fact of life. They might not be life-altering in major ways, but they nevertheless happen and are important. Even though this experience was artificial and a little weird, it still was an important step for Mateo to realize this. Now, he understands the value of taking risks, and that staying entirely percent safe and sheltered is boring.



Even if Mateo's Facebook profile might leave a lot to be desired, Lidia still sees that Mateo left a mark on his friends' lives on social media by commenting on their posts. This suggests that while Mateo might not be as connected to the real world and to real people as Rufus, for instance, but he still used social media as a tool to help him connect better with his real-life friends. This provides a fairly accurate representation of the kind of person Mateo is: he cares for others in every way possible, even if he doesn't always care for himself.



RUFUS, 9:41 A.M.

Under a highway, Rufus and Mateo stumble across abandoned payphones in a ditch. Mateo tries to protest, but he follows Rufus through a chain-link fence. Rufus uploads a photo of some graffiti that he knows Malcolm would like as Mateo picks up a pair of shoes and says that this place is like a graveyard. Mateo says that last year, he bumped into a kid their age with a bloody nose and no sneakers, so he gave the kid his sneakers. Rufus moves among the discarded payphones, finds one that has “CALL ME, LENA” written on it, and he says he feels like Indiana Jones. With a smile, Mateo says he watched those movies obsessively as a kid; Dad would hide “treasure”—laundry money—for Mateo to find.

Mateo apologizes for “hijacking” Rufus’s moment, but Rufus says it’s fine—he’s not interested in talking about the societal implications of removing payphones; he just thinks this place is cool. The boys admit that they know few, if any, phone numbers of people they know, and they list all the things that are going extinct including film cameras, post offices, DVD players, and landlines. Quietly, Mateo says that libraries will go eventually. Rufus wonders if he’s thinking about the Scorpius Hawthorne books. Rufus says that Mateo is right: people are horrible and everything is dying. Mateo adds that people only react and points to himself as a prime example.

TAGOE HAYES, 9:48 A.M.

Tagoe didn’t receive a call from Death-Cast today because he’s not dying, but he’ll never forget the look on Rufus’s face when Rufus received the alert. In their holding cell, he and Malcolm are surprised that the cell smells like vomit but not urine. Tagoe takes off his glasses. Malcolm got mad once when Tagoe did this during a game of Cards Against Humanity, but Tagoe did it because the card making fun of suicide made him think of his father. Tagoe’s neck aches—he has a tic that makes his neck jerk, which he suppresses to make others comfortable. Tagoe puts his glasses back on, and the boys discuss what they’d do if they got the Death-Cast call. Malcolm starts to ask a question, but Tagoe answers: he wouldn’t look for his parents. He only wants people around who want to be in his life, like Rufus. Tagoe’s neck jerks.

The graffiti on the payphone makes it clear that everyone, even complete strangers, are out searching for connection and making that search public. Graffiti isn’t social media, but in this instance, it works in a similar way. Discovering that they both love the Indiana Jones movies helps Rufus and Mateo understand that though they may have seemed very different at first, their upbringings share important similarities. As they learn these things, they both become more real and more human to each other.



Mateo sees his and Rufus’s deaths as just one event in a long line of deaths—and some of those deaths are of inanimate objects, or of technology. Conceptualizing their own deaths through this mindset allows Mateo to get some distance and understand that everyone and everything dies at some point. Even if he’s dying at a tragically young age, he’s still part of a much larger cycle that will keep going long after he’s gone.



Like Malcolm, Tagoe isn’t focused on the consequences to his own future of being in jail—for him, everything is about Rufus right now. Taking off his glasses is a way for him to disconnect from the world. Though the novel overwhelmingly insists that connection is positive, there are times when people need a moment to themselves to process. And even though Tagoe does this, he also suppresses his tic to make others comfortable—clear proof that he’s willing to make himself uncomfortable so that he has a better chance of connecting with others.



KENDRICK O'CONNELL, 10:03 A.M.

Kendrick didn't receive a call from Death-Cast and isn't dying today, but he just lost his job. He's never been lucky; his parents' marriage was awful, and on the day he got new sneakers, kids jumped him and stole them. A kid in glasses gave Kendrick his shoes, but Kendrick didn't care about that kid at all—he just didn't want to get beaten up again. Damian Rivas, a classmate, taught Kendrick to fight, and now, Kendrick is a “Knockout King.” He has no one to fight now that Peck got a girlfriend and their gang is over.

It's possible that Kendrick was the kid that Mateo gave his shoes to. If this is true, it reinforces the novel's assertion that connection is important—and it introduces the idea that whether people know it or not, each person is connected to everyone else in some way. Kendrick's violent tendencies stem from the fact that for the most part, other people haven't treated him like he matters. This suggests that inattention can be extremely dehumanizing and damaging—not just for the person who's ignored, but for the people that individual comes in contact with.

**MATEO 10:12 A.M.**

As Rufus rides his bike beside Mateo, Mateo says he has one idea: he'd like to go visit his mom's grave. Rufus agrees, but he stops in at a drugstore first, where he buys Mateo a set of Legos as a thank-you for the Instagram idea. After this, they catch their train and talk about where Rufus wanted to travel. As they chat, the lights flicker and everything shuts off. The intercom says that there's a delay in the system, but Mateo thinks that someone could stab them. He scoots toward Rufus so their legs touch, hoping to protect Rufus so that Rufus can see the Plutos again. Rufus turns on the flashlight on his phone, massages Mateo's shoulder, and then dumps Legos into Mateo's lap. He tells Mateo to build something.

Buying Mateo the Legos and then talking Mateo down from his panic attack are tender, meaningful ways that Rufus can deepen his connection with Mateo and show that he cares and is listening. Furthermore, it works. Because of Rufus's kindness, Mateo is able to make the most of his best day and spend it doing new things, not just panicking about his impending death. In other words, Rufus's kindness refocuses Mateo's attention to the act of living, rather than letting him dwell on dying.



Mateo's heart is pounding, but he aimlessly puts bricks together. Rufus asks where Mateo wanted to travel. Mateo feels suffocated—now that he's dying and can't travel, he wants to go everywhere and do everything. After a minute, Mateo realizes he's building a sanctuary—it reminds him of home. At home, he hid from excitement, but home also kept him safe, alive, and happy. Mateo finishes his sanctuary and his head droops. He snaps awake and apologizes for not listening, but Rufus insists that Mateo rest. Mateo argues, but he eventually agrees. He knows that Rufus is watching him. It's weird at first, but then it feels nice, like he has a personal guardian.

After only a few hours with Rufus, Mateo is already in a better place to think about his relationship to home. Just as his social media presence is multifaceted (he did focus on death, but he also made others feel loved on Facebook), home isn't as one-dimensional as he thought at first. Staying home helped him stay safe—and it turned him into the kind of person who's prepared to be Rufus's Last Friend.

**RUFUS, 10:39 A.M.**

Rufus knows it sounds creepy, but he has to take a **photo** of Mateo sleeping. He thinks being on a train with a kid who's holding a Lego house, on his way to visit his mother's headstone, is Instagram-worthy. A moment after Rufus takes the picture, the lights come back on and the train moves. Mateo's face starts to shift and twitch. Rufus wonders if Mateo is epileptic, but then Mateo starts repeating, “No,” over and over. He's having a nightmare, so Rufus wakes him up.

Capturing this tender moment is a way for Rufus to record the trajectory of his friendship with Mateo. It also allows him to focus on the trust that he and Mateo are building—sleeping on a train like this requires some level of trust, especially on the day that one knows they're going to die.



MATEO, 10:42 A.M.

Mateo isn't on the mountain anymore—he's on the train. He tells Rufus that he was skiing in the dream, but he lost his poles and a boulder chased him. He saw his Lego sanctuary, but it was huge. Mateo flew off the mountain as headless birds circled above him. Rufus grins, but he shifts closer and assures Mateo that boulders won't chase him. Mateo thinks it's awful that this was his last dream ever.

Even if Mateo is getting to experience a lot of meaningful things, this is still life—not everything is going to be perfect. However unfortunate it is that his last dream was a nightmare, Mateo has the choice to either focus on these bad moments or focus on the fact that he's out with a friend who cares for him and whom Mateo trusts.

**DELILAH GRAY, 11:08 A.M.**

Though Delilah's employer, *Infinite Weekly*, has secured Howie Maldonado's interview, Delilah won't be the one conducting it. Her boss, Sandy, ignores Delilah's pleas and assurances that she knows everything about Howie. Delilah begs; she knows that this is how she'll move up in the industry. Further, the Scorpius Hawthorne books and movies nurtured her love for this kind of writing and turned her into a "paid fangirl." She asks if Sandy knows all about Howie. Sandy sighs and agrees, but she sends Dalilah to find a copy of Howie's book before they meet him at two o'clock. Delilah heads off to find a bookstore and trips off the curb. A car stops feet from her face, but Delilah knows she's not dying today.

The way that Delilah talks about Howie and her desire to tag along on the interview betrays some of the less desirable aspects of fame: to many, like Delilah, Howie isn't a person. He's a character they love and can connect with online. Because of this, Delilah isn't necessarily thinking of Howie as an individual who, on his last day, deserves the same kind of compassion and care that anyone else does. In this case, the knowledge that a person is going to die today brings out the worst in others.

**MATEO, 11:32 A.M.**

Mateo hasn't been to the cemetery since he was 12, so he doesn't know the fastest way to his mom's grave. As he and Rufus wander, they discuss the afterlife. Rufus says he believes in two afterlives: the first begins when someone receives their call. Deckers only *think* they're alive and therefore enter the second afterlife without regrets. Mateo asks if it'd be better if they knew they were dead, but Rufus says that defeats the purpose—if they knew they were dead, it'd be like Make-A-Moment. He says he doesn't really believe in God, so heaven is just a place for dead people to hang out. Mateo agrees with this and wonders if the rest of Rufus's theory is correct. Mateo says he hopes reincarnation is real but that his afterlife is like a theater where you can watch your entire life and the lives of others, if they let you.

To a degree, Rufus is right—people treat Deckers differently because they know that the Deckers' time is limited. However, he also gets at one of the things that the novel suggests is good about the way death works in the world of the novel: people do have the opportunity to say goodbye and reframe who they are for their loved ones. While all of this is correct, Rufus's ideas on the afterlife also ignore the fact that people could die at any time and should use that fact to make the most of all their days, not just their final one.



Mateo stops dead. They're almost to his mom's grave, and next to it, a man is digging Mateo's grave. Rufus asks the gravedigger for some privacy and shouts at him when the gravedigger says he's in a hurry, which makes the gravedigger leave. Dizzy, Mateo reads his mom's headstone and asks for a minute alone. He knows that Rufus will be there when he turns around. Mateo thinks that everything has come full circle: his mom died the day he was **born**, and now, he'll be buried next to her. As a kid, he couldn't wrap his head around his mom being his mom, but Dad pointed out that Mom couldn't be there for Mateo because during her complicated birth, she made sure Mateo was okay instead of taking care of herself.

Mateo kneels in front of his mother's headstone and asks if she's excited to meet him. He says that she's had lots of time in her theater to watch herself die while a nurse held Mateo. Mateo wonders if the nurse could've helped Mom with the bleeding if she hadn't been holding him. He recounts one of his favorite stories that Dad told about Mom and asks if he's going to find love in heaven, since he won't find it here. He asks Mom to look after him. Then, Mateo sits down in his unfinished grave. Rufus sits in it too, and he says that he's going to be cremated, like his family. He wants the Plutos to scatter his ashes at Althea Park.

Mateo and Rufus talk about their different experiences in Althea Park: it's where Dad taught Mateo about clouds, and it's where Rufus kissed a girl. Mateo marvels that he can chat and not think about his death. He asks if Rufus believes in fate. Rufus doesn't and insists that their meeting isn't special—they both just downloaded an app. Mateo points out that their families and friends are out of commission today, and that's the only reason they ended up on Last Friend. It has to be fate. It starts to pour down rain as Rufus helps Mateo out of his grave. Mateo kisses his mother's headstone and notices Rufus taking a **photo**. Mateo looks at his placeholder headstone and thinks that soon, it'll say, "He Lived for Everyone," and it will be true.

MATEO, 12:22 P.M.

Mateo tells the reader that 12 hours ago, he received the call saying he's going to die. He's said lots of goodbyes since then, none more important than the one he said to Past Mateo. Past Mateo stayed home when Rufus took the current Mateo out into the world. The boys are here together, and Mateo wants to help Rufus in any way he can. Mateo feels more alive than ever.

The fact that Mateo's mom died in childbirth with him forces him to recognize that birth and death are intimately tied to each other. Given the way that Dad describes Mom's choices in her final hours, it's easy to see where Mateo got his generous and caring spirit—thanks to Dad's stories, his mom showed him the importance of looking out for others and making sure they're safe and comfortable. Trusting Rufus to still be there also speaks to the growing strength of the boys' friendship.



Wondering if the nurse could've helped Mom is another nod to the idea that all actions have consequences, some of them unforeseen—because the nurse chose (or was told) to hold Mateo, she didn't have the opportunity to do any number of other things. Mateo also realizes that it's impossible to predict the outcome of every choice, which might help prevent him from overthinking as he goes through the rest of his day.



Even if Rufus is right that the boys just happened to download the same app, he's missing critical elements of the way they met. Most importantly, both boys reached out because they were lonely. Though it's debatable whether this has to do with fate or not, Mateo makes the case that in order to connect with anyone, people must be willing to put themselves out into the world.



Having said goodbye to his mom, Mateo can now turn his attention to helping Rufus achieve his own sense of closure. As Mateo comes alive and comes to terms with his decisions, he chooses to take the words on his headstone to heart: he's going to live for Rufus now.



RUFUS, 12:35 P.M.

Rufus is ready for anything as he follows Mateo; he got a power nap on the train. They decide that if they're still alive in a little while, they'll visit the Travel Arena to take advantage of shorter lines. Rufus suspects that they're going to do charity work or that Mateo arranged a meeting with Aimee, but Mateo leads Rufus to the pier in Chelsea. Mateo explains that they're here so Rufus can get some closure, like Mateo did at his mom's grave. They walk to the end of the pier. Rufus says this feels like a joke—like his family and the Plutos are going to rush out at him. He'd be mad, but happy. He admits, for the first time, that he left his parents and Olivia. He doesn't know if it was a reflex, but it would've been easy to sink with them. Maybe, if they'd tried, they would've lived.

Mateo reminds Rufus that Death-Cast is never wrong, but Rufus continues to list what he could've done. He says that his parents made sure he got out of the car, but then they just sat there. Mateo tells Rufus that this wasn't his fault, takes Rufus's bike, and walks away. Rufus gives in and sobs for his family, his friends, and Aimee—and because he's met a great friend and with whom he doesn't even have a day to spend. He turns around to find Mateo walking the bike in circles. Mateo says that Rufus needed to snap and that if he needs to snap again, Mateo will support that—they're Last Friends for life.

The very fact that Mateo is leading Rufus now indicates how far Mateo has already come in his quest. Having already done the things that are most important to him, he can now turn his attention to helping others. When Rufus admits that he left his parents in the river, it forces Rufus to admit that on some level, he did want to live—he didn't want to drown with his family because his life, at that point, meant more to him than staying with his family. The consequence of this choice is mostly guilt and shame—feelings the novel implies are understandable but not entirely healthy. Wanting to live isn't a shameful thing—it's a normal human instinct.



Though Rufus's parents accepted their fate, their final choice was to make sure that Rufus got to go on and live. The novel suggests that this was admirable of them, even if Rufus resents them for it on some level. In a sense, Rufus is focusing more on the fact that his parents seemingly chose to abandon him than he is on the truth: that they knew it wasn't Rufus's time and did everything in their power to help Rufus understand that.

**DELILAH GREY, 12:52 P.M.**

Delilah rushes to the only bookstore with Howie's novel still in stock. She ignores a man's catcall and stays far away from the curb. She prays that Howie doesn't move his interview time up so she doesn't miss it, but she remembers that there are greater stakes in Howie's life right now.

Finally, Delilah is starting to understand that Howie is a human being who's dying, not just a celebrity she won't be able to talk to again. He probably has loved ones to connect with before his time is up—reporters might be the last thing he's interested in right now.

**VIN PEARCE, 12:55 P.M.**

Vin received his Death-Cast call just after midnight. It wasn't surprising. He's upset that the woman with the colorful hair ignored him and that there are two boys walking a bike when they should be riding it. Vin loves it when people are afraid of him, especially in the wrestling ring. Four months ago, however, he started to feel muscle pains and weakness. His coach eventually pulled him out of the ring. Though Vin's father died of multiple sclerosis, Vin believed he was destined for better. Presently, Vin walks to the gym where he's been training for seven years. He sneaks into the generator room and pulls out a homemade bomb.

Vin refers to both Delilah (the woman with the bright hair) and Rufus and Mateo (the boys with the bike) here, reminding the reader again that everyone is connected. This is true even if, like Vin, someone has no interest in connecting with others and instead wants to take lives with them when they go. The novel attributes this desire to Vin's own lack of connections, and his sense that since his life wasn't exactly what he wanted it to be, it's worthless. Again, this shows that anger and isolation are dangerous states of being.



MATEO, 12:58 P.M.

Mateo and Rufus pass a bookstore, and Mateo thinks he needs some books after seeing a scary man with the gym bag. Rufus agrees to go in. Mateo knows this is a bad idea since he can't read all the books. He wonders if a bookshelf will crush him. Instead, Mateo knocks into a display table and knocks books over. A man whose **nametag** says "Joel" assures Mateo that it's fine. Rufus shadows Mateo as Mateo reads staff recommendations. In front of the romance section, he stops in front of books wrapped in brown paper. Rufus asks if Mateo has ever dated. Mateo hasn't. Rufus shares that Aimee was his first relationship, but he tried to date at his last school. He suggests that Mateo sends postcards to his past crushes.

If Mateo chooses to send the postcards, they'd function in much in the same way that photos do: they'd remind everyone who received one that Mateo lived, and they'd provide those recipients with a piece of Mateo to remember. In addition to Joel's nametag humanizing him for Mateo, his kindness also means that Mateo is more willing to take notice. Joel shows here that he's good at his job: because he makes Mateo feel at ease, Mateo is able to have one final joyful experience in a bookstore.



Mateo grabs a dozen postcards and one of the wrapped mystery books, and Joel checks him out. Mateo thinks that with the postcards, he can apply Rufus's advice to use his voice. Mateo tells Rufus that when he was nine, he asked Dad if love was hiding under the couch or in the closet. Dad told Mateo that love is a superpower, but not one that they can always control. Blushing, Mateo says he shouldn't have said such a stupid thing, but Rufus smiles and says that he loves it. Mateo looks up, noting how much he likes Rufus's eyes, and he asks how he knows when love is love. Before Rufus can answer, glass shatters, and the boys are blown backwards. Mateo slams into a car and almost passes out. Rufus's eyes are closed, and the postcards are scattered. Rufus and a woman with brightly colored hair are alive, but other people aren't.

Deciding to send the postcards and taking Rufus's advice to heart is a step in the right direction for Mateo. He's learning that hanging out on social media all day isn't going to make people feel as connected to him as actively reaching out via postcards will. Fostering more of these connections will help Mateo live longer in his loved ones' memories in much the same way that Mateo's mom continues to live on as Mateo talks about her. As Vin's bomb explodes, Rufus and Mateo are forced to come face to face with the fact that dying in the explosion could've been their fate had things gone just a little bit differently.

**RUFUS, 1:14 P.M.**

Just over 12 hours ago, Rufus learned he was going to die. Now, he sits on the curb hugging his knees, terrified. There are firefighters and cops at the scene. Rufus thinks that Deckers need to start identifying themselves so they can avoid being in large groups. He and Mateo could've died. Rufus knows now that although he thought he made peace with the fact that he's going to die, he's never been more afraid of dying.

Seeing so many other people die makes dying real for Rufus in a way that it wasn't just a few minutes ago. He's also realizing that even if he and Mateo don't purposefully take risks, they can't predict that something like this won't happen. They only have so much control over their final day.

**MATEO, 1:28 P.M.**

The firefighters manage to put the fire out. Mateo is hungry, but he doesn't feel like he can waste his End Day eating when he and Rufus almost died. He sits next to Rufus and watches people talk to the police. Mateo decides to leave the postcards on the ground—he can't write when there are dead Deckers all around.

Dying seems more real to Mateo too, which is why he can't fathom eating. Doing so seems far less important compared to everything else he could be doing, like savoring his last hours with Rufus and continuing to build their friendship.



RUFUS, 1:46 P.M.

Rufus needs to move. He desperately wants to see the Plutos, but he'll settle for a bike ride—he rode after Olivia and his parents died, and when Aimee broke up with him. Mateo and Rufus argue about whether it's safe. Rufus insists that he has to ride but that he doesn't want to leave Mateo, and he reminds Mateo that they're supposed to be living. Mateo looks ill, and he makes Rufus promise to go slowly. Mateo puts on the helmet and stands on the rear pegs, and Rufus pedals forward.

Agreeing to get on the bike is another huge step for Mateo. Having almost died in the bombing, Mateo understands, at least on some level, that he can't entirely control the outcome of the day or when he's going to die. He might as well do something he knows is going to make Rufus happy with his final hours, as doing so is a kind gesture and will help strengthen their friendship.

**DEIRDRE CLAYTON, 1:50 P.M.**

Deirdre didn't receive a call from Death-Cast today telling her she's going to die, but she wants to prove them wrong. She's on the ledge of her building's roof, eight stories in the air, and there are two deliverymen down below watching. This isn't the first time Deirdre has thought about this—in high school, months after Death-Cast started, bullies who thought of Deirdre as a weird lesbian challenged her to a fight. Instead of fighting, Deirdre went to the roof. Back then, she had her best friend to talk her down but today, she's alone. Her job doesn't help. She works at Make-A-Moment, where she charges Deckers for fake memories. She doesn't understand why they don't spend time with loved ones at home, and the two underwhelmed teen boys who came in earlier did her in.

As far as Deirdre is concerned, Make-A-Moment and other businesses like it are cheating Deckers. They're taking their money and giving them ways to waste their final hours—hours that, in Deirdre's opinion, would be better spent with loved ones in a more meaningful way. The teen boys she refers to are likely Mateo and Rufus; again, this indicates that within the world of the novel, everyone is connected to everyone else. And further, Mateo and Rufus could never predict that their words would push Deirdre this far; to them, she was just a stranger.



The boys remind Deirdre of a short story she finished this morning. In it, there's an organization called Life-Cast, which tells people when Deckers will be reincarnated. It follows twin sisters, one of whom dies. Deirdre thought she'd take her story further, but now, she knows that Life-Cast doesn't exist and it's useless to wait for Death-Cast. She wants no part in this world. Deirdre is ready to jump when she sees two boys on a bike down below—they remind her of the boys from earlier. The two boys make her feel less dead inside, so Deirdre decides to live.

Just as Rufus and Mateo unknowingly had the power to push Deirdre to suicide, they also have the power to show her that life is actually worth living. They aren't even aware of this, but Mateo's choice to get on Rufus's bike with him actually saved someone. Connections like this, even if they're not entirely visible, can help give people reasons to value their lives.

**MATEO, 1:52 P.M.**

The bike isn't awful. Rufus dodges deliverymen who are looking up instead of paying attention to their couch, and Mateo feels free as the bike picks up speed. This is more exciting than skydiving at Make-A-Moment. Mateo thinks that if he wasn't a coward or a Decker, he'd lean forward against Rufus and put his arms out. Instead, he holds onto Rufus and decides to do something small but brave when they arrive at their destination.

The discovery that the bike is more exciting and freeing than fake skydiving proves Deirdre's point: it's more fulfilling to be out living life with loved ones and taking risks than it is to spend time in a controlled environment like Make-A-Moment. This is especially true given how much money Make-A-Moment charges, while biking is free.



RUFUS, 2:12 P.M.

As Rufus slows down and pulls into Althea Park, Mateo loosens his grip. Rufus stops, startled, and sees Mateo looking thrilled with himself—he jumped off. Rufus thinks that Mateo had this in him all along. They limp to a playground, sit on a bench, and watch college guys playing handball nearby. They agree that they hated seeing people die in the bombing—and now, Rufus is afraid that they could die here. Mateo points out that Rufus has had lots of good times at Althea Park, including that kiss with the girl. Rufus thinks that his suspicions were correct about Mateo: the kiss bothers him. He challenges Mateo to a game of Gladiator, where they hang from the monkey bars and try to kick each other off. Rufus wraps his legs around Mateo, and they fall, laugh. They decide it was a tie.

Rufus says that for the past few months, his life has felt over. He's wanted to ride his bike into the river at times, and he's angry that he's going to miss so much. Mateo confirms that Rufus isn't going to commit suicide, and the boys try to get each other to promise to not die first. A handball bounces toward them and Mateo picks it up and tosses it back to a guy. The guy notices Mateo's bike and says he just wrecked his; he's saving to buy a new one. Rufus tells the guy to take his bike. He lies that he's moving and can't take it. The guy is hesitant, but he rides away with it. Rufus snaps a **photo** of the guy on his bike, riding back to his friends.

Mateo and Rufus decide to swing, and Rufus snaps more **photos**. Mateo asks if Rufus is going to make any other big changes today, but Rufus doesn't take the bait. They discuss that Deckers can have their ashes put in urns with a tree seed and come back as a tree. Rufus likes the idea, but he thinks he'd sound stupid if he said so.

DAMIEN RIVAS, 2:22 P.M.

Damien isn't dying today because he didn't receive a call from Death-Cast, but he thinks that this is a shame. He's not impressed with his life lately—it's been boring without his usual sources of adrenaline rushes, like starting stuff with his gang. Damien plays darts alone and talks to Peck on the phone. He tells Peck that it was silly to call the cops on Rufus and says they should've dealt with Rufus themselves. Peck agrees and says that the cops likely didn't chase Rufus because he's a Decker. Damien, feeling excited and purposeful, says that it's time to get justice for Peck.

Rufus gets proof that his kindness and respect for Mateo's wishes, and his ability to balance those things with pushing Mateo out of his comfort zone, have paid off—now, Mateo is more comfortable taking risks. Learning this makes Rufus more comfortable with taking risks too. Challenging Mateo to a game of Gladiator brings them physically closer to each other and is a convenient way for Rufus to test whether Mateo is bothered about the kiss because he's romantically interested in Rufus.



Even though Rufus's bike has been an important part of his transformation since his parents' death, now, he doesn't need it anymore. This signifies that Rufus is turning away from objects and turning toward people. Documenting this shift by taking the photo will help his friends following along on Instagram recognize this transition. The fact that Rufus never learns this guy's name drives home that this moment is about Rufus focusing more attention on Mateo—it's not about connecting with others.



Though Rufus only shares his thoughts about cremation with the reader, it's telling that he has thoughts that he believes are too stupid to share—just like Mateo. This shows that the boys are more alike than they know, and that they'd likely be sympathetic to each other if they were to voice the thoughts they're ashamed of.



Damien's thought that it's a shame he's not dying indicates that Damien doesn't think much of his life right now. Though it's understandable to feel down since he doesn't seem to have much purpose to his life, it's clearly dangerous that his source of purpose is hurting others. Even if he doesn't think much of his own life, Damien thinks even less of others' lives.



MATEO, 2:34 P.M.

It starts to rain again, so Mateo and Rufus hide under a pet store awning and look at puppies as they decide what to do. Mateo suggests they ride the train back and forth so they can see the city, and Rufus jumps on the idea. On the train, Rufus suggests they play a game called Traveler that he used to play with Olivia: they'll make up stories about other passengers. Rufus points to a woman in scrubs and quietly says that she's going home to nap, blast pop music, and then discover that her favorite bar is closed. Mateo continues the story: the woman will go back home to watch cable and connect with her friends. Mateo nods to a girl in headphones, drawing on a tablet, and says that she got the tablet to play games but discovered a drawing app.

Rufus and Mateo continue the game. They make up stories for a rain-soaked businessman, a woman with a suitcase, and NYU students with their lives ahead of them. Then, Rufus switches the game to make up stories about himself and Mateo: at one stop, he asks if this is where they spontaneously got their gym memberships after a concert. They discuss getting their tattoos. Rufus got a bike tire, and Mateo got a male seahorse. At the next stop, Rufus says that this is where he works—when he's not traveling and reviewing resorts. Mateo looks at his wrist, where his tattoo should be, and they talk about the future. Mateo marvels at how incredible this imaginary future friendship feels. He leaves the mystery book on the seat for someone to find and says that there's something he wants to do. Mateo and Rufus avoid two girls getting on as they get off the train.

ZOE LANDON, 2:57 P.M.

Zoe received her call from Death-Cast at 12:34 a.m. last night. She just moved to New York to start at NYU and was feeling lonely, but she turned to the Last Friend app. She messaged Mateo first but then found Gabriella. Zoe and Gabriella avoid two boys as they hop on the train. They stop when they see a package on a seat—it might be a bomb. Since Gabriella didn't receive the alert, she's fearless and picks up the package. She's thrilled that it's a book because she loves drawing on paper. Gabriella shares a secret: she's the "Batman of the Manhattan graffiti world." She says that she does graffiti promoting Last Friend and that she leaves tags for the Last Friends she's met. Zoe asks if Gabriella will leave her tag on Broadway so she can have her name there even if it won't be in lights.

Puppies, like Penny, allude to hope for the future, as they're at the beginning of their lives. Meanwhile, playing Traveler allows Mateo and Rufus to get to know each other through storytelling. Making up these stories is also an exercise in choices and consequences, as they have to decide together what happens when a person learns that their favorite bar is closed, for instance. The choice to say that the woman is going to connect with friends speaks to Mateo's belief that connecting with others, even just online, is extremely important and meaningful.



Talking about their shared future like this gives Rufus and Mateo the opportunity to talk about the kind of people they want to be. As they get to know each other better and as they talk about how close they are as imaginary adults, Mateo becomes acutely aware of how little time he has. He has to recognize all the things he'll never be able to do—but instead of making him sad, it makes Mateo want to reach out and help others. Leaving the book is a way for Mateo to pay forward the happiness and connectedness he feels right now.



Zoe and Gabriella are likely the girls that Mateo and Rufus almost bumped into leaving the train—while Gabriella's graffiti is, in all likelihood, what Rufus was looking at when he signed up for Last Friend. Everything that Mateo and Rufus do and every person they meet is somehow connected, which drives home how interconnected human life is in general. Though it's impossible to grasp all the possible consequences of one's actions, this makes it clear that those actions will nevertheless affect someone else—and hopefully, they'll help that person connect to others.



Passengers stare. A gorgeous black woman offers her condolences to Zoe. Gabriella tries to offer Zoe the book, but Zoe refuses to take it. She tells Gabriella to keep it as a gift from her Last Friend. The black woman speaks up again and says that she's happy that Zoe found a Last Friend on her End Day, and that Gabriella does graffiti. The girls decide to open the book together. Zoe hopes that Gabriella keeps being a Last Friend for Deckers, since life, and End Days, shouldn't be lived alone.

Zoe gets at one of the book's main points when she insists that life shouldn't be lived alone. In extreme circumstances, when people feel alone, they can find themselves like Deirdre or like Vin, ready to kill themselves or others. Connecting with other people, the novel insists, is the only way to live and live meaningfully.



MATEO, 3:18 P.M.

Mateo knows that it's a risk to see Lidia again, but he wants to try. He borrows Rufus's phone after they get on the bus (after confirming that the driver isn't a Decker) and calls her. Lidia is incensed, but she agrees to meet Mateo and Rufus at the Travel Arena. They talk about how Penny just hit herself with a toy. They decide to hang up at the same time in case the Plutos try to contact Rufus.

Now that Mateo feels better about who he is and who he's becoming, he understands that reaching out to Lidia again is a favor to her. Though his desire to protect her is admirable, asking to see her again allows Lidia to have the same experience Mateo is: savoring the day knowing that it's Mateo's last.



PECK, 3:21 A.M.

Peck gets his gang back together. His nickname comes from the fact that his punches are ineffective and harmless—but he's an extra body, and he has access to a gun. Damien and Kendrick watch as Peck digs in his closet. Peck wonders if he has it in him and if he's okay never seeing Aimee again. He thinks he has to respect himself for once by shooting the person who disrespected him. Peck retrieves the gun and opens up Rufus's Instagram account. To his displeasure, there are lots of comments from Aimee on Rufus's **photos**. He says they'll wait for Rufus to post where he is.

It's particularly insulting for Peck to discover Aimee's comments on Rufus's Instagram, as it drives home for him that he's not the one at the forefront of Aimee's mind. Though this is arguably a good thing given that Peck is a selfish and cruel person, Aimee also can't predict that her lack of attention is going to make Peck even more willing to shoot Rufus. It's not her responsibility to control Peck's actions, but her choices nevertheless influence his.



MATEO, 3:26 P.M.

When they reach the Travel Arena, Mateo keeps Rufus from slipping on his way off the bus. They get in the line for Deckers; the line on their left is for terminally ill people, and on the one on the right is for bored people who aren't dying. Mateo says he'd love the chance to barter with Death to live another day, or at least to choose how he dies. Mateo thinks he'd die in his sleep after living bravely and becoming the kind of person worthy of a romantic relationship. Rufus is incredulous. Lidia gets out of an Uber, and Mateo runs to her. They hug, Lidia slaps Rufus, and then they hug again. Lidia cries that Mateo is supposed to be with her forever and vote for Penny when she runs for president. Mateo apologizes.

Though Mateo never indicates that Lidia influenced what he chose to put on his headstone ("He Lived for Everyone"), it's likely that she did have an impact on this choice—the way she talks about Penny suggests that she lives for Penny in much the same way that Mateo lives for others. In this way, the novel shows that it's essential to live for others to some degree. Lidia must live for Penny in order to successfully parent, and both Rufus and Mateo must partially live for each other in order to help the other have the best End Day they can.



Lidia assures Mateo that it's not his fault, but Mateo says it might be—if he didn't hide so much, he might have street smarts, and his death could still be his own fault. Lidia tells him to shut up; the world is unsafe anyway. She wishes she'd shown him that some risks are worth it, but Mateo thinks she already has: she showed him that sometimes, people unexpectedly have children they love more than anything. Mateo says that he's taking risks today, and since they're never going to be able to road trip with Penny in the future, they're going to travel together now. He introduces Lidia and Rufus. At the front of the line, the teller offers condolences for all three of them. When he learns that Lidia isn't dying, he says that her ticket is \$100, so Mateo pays for Lidia's ticket and leaves a large donation.

Rufus suggests they take one of the tours. Mateo suggests Around the World in 80 Minutes, so they climb onto the trolley. The other Deckers on board have incurable illnesses. The driver, Leslie, offers her condolences and begins the tour. The replicas of different places are fantastic. Rufus cheers for his roots in Cuba, and Lidia talks about Colombia when they get there. When the trolley stops in Puerto Rico, Rufus drags Mateo and Lidia off to check out the Rainforest Jump. They walk through a rainforest room and listen to tree frogs. Mateo thinks of Dad's stories of catching frogs to sell as pets when he was a kid. They reach a room with lifeguards around a 20-foot cliff. Mateo watches a girl fall backwards into the pool and come up, laughing. The lifeguards scold her, but she doesn't care.

RUFUS, 4:24 P.M.

Rufus isn't sure about jumping; he hasn't even been in a pool since his family died. Rufus refuses to jump, and Lidia tells Mateo that he shouldn't jump either, but Mateo gets in line anyway. Rufus is thrilled that Mateo has undergone this transformation. Mateo waves Rufus and Lidia over to jump with him and tells Rufus that he'll regret not jumping. Rufus agrees, strips to his underwear, and accepts arm floaties from a lifeguard. Rufus, Mateo, and Lidia grab hands and jump. Lidia lets go as soon as they hit the water, but Rufus and Mateo hold on and meet eyes under the water. Above the water, Rufus laughs and hugs Mateo. He feels like he's been baptized and like he left his anger underwater. Rufus doesn't mention holding hands, but he hopes that Mateo now knows where they stand. He says that it's time to go to a Decker dance club.

Lidia is right: the world is unsafe no matter what a person does or doesn't do. By pointing this out, the novel implicitly prompts readers to recognize that while they might not get an alert about their impending death like individuals in the novel, they should still live life understanding that they're mortal. On another note, the Travel Arena's business model is arguably more ethical than Make-A-Moment's, since they don't charge Decker. However, it's questionable that they charge friends and family for the privilege of making memories with loved ones. Either way, both organizations are focused on profit, even if they're exploiting a different group of people.



Thinking about Dad in the Puerto Rico section makes Dad feel more present for Mateo. Even though Dad can't be awake and present for Mateo's last day, he's still not forgotten—and remembering Dad helps Mateo decide that the Rainforest Jump is something he wants to do. Even though the Rainforest Jump is still contrived, like the virtual reality experiences at Make-A-Moment, there's much greater room for error—which makes it feel like more of a risk. To Mateo, this is a perfect stepping-stone: he's still safe, but he has to be willing to actually experience something.



This is a major turning point for Rufus, since he leaves his anger behind after the jump. It's also the moment in which Rufus and Mateo begin to more openly feel out how their relationship. Lidia letting go of Mateo and Rufus's hands is symbolic of her letting Mateo and Rufus go when the boys die—while hanging onto each other represents Rufus and Mateo's deep connection. Having taken this step, Rufus knows that Mateo is ready for another experience in the real world at the dance club.



OFFICER ANDRADE, 4:32 P.M.

Officer Andrade didn't receive his Death-Cast call and isn't dying today, but as a police officer, he fears dying every night. He lost his partner, Graham, two months ago. Andrade thinks of Graham when he looks at the foster kids in the holding cell, upset because their brother is a Decker. He hasn't been looking for Rufus, since he doesn't think Rufus will cause trouble like the Decker who killed Graham. Graham insisted on going to work and saving lives. They were pursuing a Decker who signed up for Bangers, an online challenge where Deckers kill themselves in unique ways. The families of the Decker with the most popular death get money. Graham died while trying to prevent a Decker from riding his motorcycle off a bridge. Andrade wants to focus on getting the channel shut down, and so he lets the boys go. If Rufus is still alive, they should be with him.

The foster kids are presumably Malcolm and Tagoe. Officer Andrade makes the case that social media can do horrible things in some cases—Bangers a horrifying concept, and it personally deprived Andrade of a person he loved. In effect, Andrade understands that while social media might have its upsides and its downsides, what's most important is giving people opportunities to live and to love. Letting Malcolm and Tagoe go free does this, as does working to get Bangers taken down. Last Friend does this too—though people abuse it, it still brings people like Rufus and Mateo together.

**PATRICK "PECK" GAVIN, 4:59 P.M.**

Kendrick and Damien suggest that Rufus might be dead already, but Peck continues to refresh Rufus's Instagram. Peck wants Rufus dead, and he wants to be the one to kill him.

Peck doesn't care that shooting Rufus will ruin his life in a variety of ways—but because he didn't get the call and knows he's not dying, the consequences seem worth it.

**RUFUS, 5:01 P.M.; PATRICK "PECK" GAVIN, 5:05 P.M.**

Rufus chooses not to speculate on what it means that the line for Clint's Graveyard is much shorter than it was last night. His phone goes off: it's the Plutos. Mateo explains to Lidia what this means as Rufus answers the FaceTime. Malcolm and Tagoe are surprised and overjoyed that Rufus is still alive. Mateo asks them to bring Aimee and come to Clint's, but to leave Peck at home. Tagoe says they'll be there soon and they hang up. Rufus takes a **photo** of the Clint's Graveyard sign and uploads it to Instagram. Peck sees the post, puts his gun in his backpack, and leads his friends out of the house.

Even as Rufus and Mateo go to Clint's Graveyard to spend their final hours living, it's impossible for them to ignore that they and so many others will spend their final hours here. Though Rufus is posting about his day with the intention of giving his friends something to remember him by, this doesn't mean that he can fully control how people interact with his Instagram. Any social media, the novel shows, can be abused.



MATEO, 5:14 P.M.

Mateo thinks he's experienced miracles today. He found Rufus, their friends are joining them, and Clint's Graveyard could be a great place for Mateo to outgrow his insecurities. The bouncer is friendly and lets the boys in. Mateo burns as she checks Rufus out, but Mateo's blush changes when Rufus squeezes his shoulder. Rufus reminds Mateo that there's no pressure, but he has to have fun. As soon as Mateo enters the club, he immediately regrets not spending as much time here as possible. One wall is covered in Decker graffiti. Lidia grabs Mateo's hand, and Mateo thinks that her hand has history—he held her hand when Penny was born and after Christian died. He feels happy, even though he has every reason to be sad.

Rufus reminds Mateo that he can sing when he's ready. They watch a teenager sing karaoke onstage, and Mateo realizes that no one will judge him tomorrow. He thinks he's stupid for ever caring about what other people think; he wasted time caring about the wrong things. They head for the bar, order sodas, and drink a toast to smiling. Rufus moves close to Mateo and over the loud cheers, says that he knows Mateo stopped singing to Dad when he interrupted—but no one is judging him and he has to go for it. The kid singing finishes and everyone applauds. Mateo says that Rufus has to sing with him. Rufus agrees and says they're going to sing "American Pie." They listen to a girl name Jasmine sing, and Mateo bops along. He stops, embarrassed, but then he keeps dancing.

DJ LouOw welcomes Rufus and Mateo to the stage, and they congratulate the last performer. The boys accept their microphones. The song starts, and Rufus begins to sing. Mateo joins in and tears up—he feels like the song connects with the Deckers in the audience. When the song ends, Mateo grabs Rufus's hand and they bow. Behind the curtains, Mateo kisses Rufus, the person who brought him to life. Rufus asks what took him so long. Mateo says that he had to be sure that Rufus was who he thought he was, and the best part of dying is Rufus's friendship. Mateo never thought he'd get to say this to anyone and tells Rufus that Rufus gave him his life. Rufus says that Mateo has done the same for him. As they lean in again, Rufus notices the Plutos and smiles.

Though it's certainly tragic that Mateo experiences regret on his final day alive, that regret has a purpose—trying to escape regret is the reason he wound up here in the first place. In other words, regret isn't always bad, as it can be a powerful motivator. Trying to stave it off can push people to do things they've always wanted to do, and it can help them find meaning and purpose in their lives. Mateo now sees that asking Lidia to join him was a kind thing to do. It not only gives him the satisfaction of spending time with his best friend; it helps Lidia find closure too.



Though Rufus hasn't given any indication prior to this that singing is important to him, he nevertheless understands that singing with Mateo will strengthen their relationship and help Mateo get over his stage fright. Since it seems that Mateo was comfortable singing in front of Dad, Mateo's willingness to sing with Rufus suggests that their relationship is similarly close and intimate. This is further supported by Mateo's decision to keep dancing in front of Rufus—he no longer fears that Rufus will think he's being silly or stupid.



Finding love and a connection with another person helped Mateo come to terms with who he is and who he loves. Choosing to confess his true feelings for Rufus allows Mateo to live his final hours as his true self—not as the terrified, closeted Mateo he was at the beginning of the novel. Now that Mateo has effectively come out to Rufus and accepted who he is, he's even more aware of his own worth and that his life has meaning to it—he no longer considers dying alone to be an acceptable option. Further, the arrival of the Plutos brings everything together: now Rufus, too, can spend his final hours with his friends and tell them how much they mean to him.



HOWIE MALDONADO, 5:23 P.M.

Howie received a call from Death-Cast just before three a.m. telling him that he's going to die. His Twitter followers are in an uproar. He's been in a guarded hotel room all day, but not even his fame can keep him alive. Howie has only seen his lawyer and his literary agent, who needed Howie to sign the contract for Howie's next (ghostwritten) book. He's taken calls from several people, including his parents in San Juan. Howie tried to convince them to stay in L.A. with him after he got famous, but they loved San Juan too much. It bothers Howie that his parents will be fine; they already watch his life like fans and strangers. Howie put out a final goodbye photo on Twitter last night.

Howie is in the car with Sandy and Delilah. Sandy asks where Howie is headed. Howie scrolls through social media since he usually gets to check out of these interviews, but the love he's getting online is more than he can handle. Howie refuses to answer Sandy's question. He's on his way to see his first love, Lena, who flew in from Arkansas—they could've made it if Howie hadn't gotten famous. He spent years missing her so much that he wrote her name on payphones and coffee tables. Now, Lena is married and loves her quiet life. Sandy asks for Howie's proudest accomplishment, and Howie says he's proud of his art. He tries not to roll his eyes and thinks that Delilah sees through his non-answers.

Sandy asks where Howie would be without the Scorpius role. He says he'd be in San Juan, but he has no idea where he'd be professionally. Delilah speaks over Sandy and asks what Howie regrets; Sandy says she's firing Delilah. Howie turns to Delilah and says he loves what he did, but he doesn't know who he really is. When Delilah asks what he'd do differently, Howie says he would've only done what mattered to him, like the Scorpius films. He would've used the money to spend time with the people who love him, and admits that he's in town to talk about a book he didn't even write. Delilah asks what would've made Howie happy. Happy thinks that love would've, which surprises him—he can go online for attention and he never feels lonely, but intimacy is different.

Howie says that his life is "a double-edged sword": he's famous because he got the Scorpius gig. If he hadn't gotten it, he might be in love and be an actual son to his parents—and would've learned Spanish so that he could speak to his grandmother without a translator. He says that he wouldn't have just been a bank account to his family. Even Sandy seems invested as Delilah asks if Howie would've been happy if he wasn't successful but had those other things. Howie says he thinks he would be, and just then, the car jerks. Howie closes his eyes.

Though Howie's exists separately from his social media presence, he ties the two together anyway. To a degree, this is a reflection of the present day—most celebrities have a social media presence of some sort—but it's also possible that Howie turned to social media to fill the gaps left when his parents returned to San Juan. Howie made the choice to sit with his fame, and his parents chose to connect more deeply with each other—and now they all have to come to terms with these choices.



It's very likely that the note Rufus found scribbled on a payphone earlier in the novel was something that Howie wrote to Lena. Once again, all the characters in the novel are connected to one another in some way, even if they never meet in person or have anything to do with one another. Sandy's interview questions make it clear that she doesn't see Howie as a person—she's not concerned with anything beyond the characters he's played in films.



Unlike Sandy, Delilah now sees that while Howie is who he is because of his fame, he's also a human being like anyone else. And further, once Delilah digs under the persona and tries to genuinely connect with Howie, he's is more than willing to open up and answer her questions. Being seen, even if just by a stranger or a business acquaintance, is enough to elicit truthful answers rather than canned responses. Howie's realization that intimacy and online attention are different entities drives home the novel's insistence that on its own, social media isn't enough of a connecting force—it's simply a tool.



Sandy's investment makes it clear that deep, meaningful conversations like this are compelling for all manner of people—it's not enough to spout meaningless answers. Notably, Howie suggests that he would've made more of an effort to connect in person with people if he hadn't closed himself off to real connections—again, meaningful, in-person connections are more important than anything else.



THE GANG WITH NO NAME; 5:36 P.M.

Death-Cast didn't call Peck, Kendrick, and Damien today, so they're living like their lives can't end. The boys run through the streets as though the law can't touch them and like speeding cars don't exist. Two of the boys laugh when a car spins out of control, hits another car, and then crashes into a wall. Peck focuses on reaching Rufus and pulling out his gun.

Once again, the novel makes it clear that a person doesn't have to die for their life to be over—the gang will suffer major changes to their lives if they follow through with attempting to kill Rufus. For that matter, they may have already done enough damage to their own lives by causing a car crash, which the novel implies is the same one that likely kills Howie.

**DELILAH GRAY, 5:37 P.M.**

Delilah is alive, but she knows Howie isn't. She'll remember the sound of his head cracking against the window forever. Her heart beats fast—she's already survived an explosion and a car accident that three boys caused. Delilah thinks that Death has already had two shots; they're not meeting today.

Delilah confirms that Peck, Damien, and Kendrick caused the crash. The boys' carelessness, selfishness, and desire to hurt others have now killed a person whom they never intended to hurt.

**RUFUS, 5:39 P.M.**

Rufus wants to hold Mateo's hand, but he knows he has to hug his friends. Rufus hugs Aimee, Tagoe, and Malcolm in a group hug and says he loves them. They pull back, but Rufus hugs Aimee again and apologizes for shutting her out. She says that she's also sorry for playing both sides and tells Rufus he's more important. Rufus thinks that Mateo helped him get his life back together. Now, he'll be remembered as the friend he is. He introduces Mateo and Lidia to the Plutos and gives his friends an account of what he and Mateo have done. A song ends, and Aimee suggests they dance. Mateo is the first one to agree.

There was never a guarantee that Rufus was going to get this opportunity to hug and speak to his friends again, so he knows he has to take it and say everything he possibly can. Apologizing and saying that he loves them is a way for Rufus to admit that he's human and has made a mistake—but he wants his friends to remember that he was able to turn himself around in his final day because of friendship, connection, and love.

**MATEO, 5:48 P.M.**

Mateo drags Rufus to the dance floor as a guy performs an original rap about death. In any other circumstance, it'd be depressing—but with his friends and with Rufus, Mateo feels okay. The boys dance closer to each other, and as the song gets faster, Rufus asks Mateo to slow dance. Rufus leans in and says that he wishes they had more time so they could bike, go to arcades, and take the Staten Island ferry. Mateo says he wants to go to the beach and play with their friends, but he also wants to watch bad movies. Mateo thinks he wants them to have more history than just one day. He rests his forehead against Rufus and says he has to talk to Lidia. Rufus follows Mateo, and Mateo leads Lidia to a quiet spot.

As it gets later and later in the day, both Mateo and Rufus become increasingly aware that they don't have much time left. Though they do take this time to lament all the things they'll never get to do with each other, they also make sure to take advantage of the opportunity to dance, kiss, and be as close as they can. Mateo's insistence that he needs to talk to Lidia shows that even as he shifts his focus to Rufus, he's still loyal to Lidia and wants her to accept and support him in his new relationship with Rufus.



Lidia sees Rufus and Mateo holding hands. Mateo apologizes for never telling her that he likes guys; he thought he had more time to accept himself. Lidia says she wants to slap Mateo, but she hugs him instead. She asks what she's going to do without Mateo. Mateo thinks that this is the reason he didn't want to tell people he's dying—he can't answer questions like this. He just wants people to live. On the graffiti wall, he finds a pen that works, and he writes that he and Lidia were here together. He asks Lidia to promise that she'll be okay, even if it's a lie. Before Lidia can answer, Mateo notices that the Plutos and Aimee are standing between Rufus and three guys. A guy pulls a gun. Mateo races for them, knowing he won't get to touch Rufus alive again. Lidia screams.

The dead, Mateo suggests, don't have a lot of power. They can't help their loved ones grieve or make sense of what happened. All a dying person can do is make sure that they spend as much quality time as possible with their friends while they're still alive and hope that their friends can use those memories to overcome their grief. However, the novel again asks readers to consider that in the real world, people die unexpectedly every day. It's important to tell people that they matter every day, as one might not have the chance to do so again.



RUFUS, 5:59 P.M.

At first, Rufus that Aimee brought Peck, but she stands between Peck and Rufus. He knows he can't be a hero, but he can't make peace with this. Aimee begs for Peck to stop, and she points out that this will end his life too, but Peck is incensed. Aimee says that she'll never care about Peck again if he shoots Rufus, and Rufus vows to haunt Aimee and Peck if they get back together. Mateo sneaks up behind Peck and punches him in the face, which gives Rufus a chance. One of Peck's friends starts to swing at Mateo, but he stops and seems to recognize Mateo. Malcolm body-slams Peck, sending him flying, and Rufus picks up the gun and points it at Peck. He knows he can end this, but he shoots at the wall instead. He grabs Mateo and they run.

Once Rufus has ahold of the gun, he has to make the defining choice of whether or not to shoot Peck. Because Rufus has found Mateo, gotten to see his friends, and has learned that his life has meaning, he knows that shooting Peck isn't how he wants to go out. Choosing to run away with Mateo instead suggests Rufus will care for others instead of being violent when given the choice. Peck will have to live with his choice to threaten Rufus at gunpoint—but Rufus won't have to live with the guilt of taking another's life.



DALMA YOUNG, 6:20 P.M.

Dalma isn't dying today because she didn't receive a call from Death-Cast. If she was going to die, she'd spend the day with her half-sister and maybe a Last Friend, since she created the app. She tries to convince her half-sister, Dahlia, that she doesn't really want to work for Last Friend. Dahlia asks how the meetings with Facebook went, and Dalma replies that Twitter might launch the new feature next month. The new feature would allow Last Friend users to prepare their final tweets and statuses so their online legacy isn't just a viral video of a dog.

Given that Dalma created the Last Friend app, it's reasonable to assume that she understands the power of friendship and of connection. It's important enough to her to dedicate her life to helping people find friendship in their final hours—and it's something that she'd spend her final hours doing, too. The new feature would help people to reach online friends in addition to in-person ones, depending on their final update.



Dahlia says that her last message would be a *Moulin Rouge!* quote. Dalma has thought often about what she'd choose. She knows that Last Friend is a great resource, even though a serial killer murdered 11 users last summer. She's been tempted to sell the app—but moments like earlier, when she saw the two girls on the train and one admitted that she did Last Friend graffiti, give her hope. Before Dalma can tell Dahlia what her last message would be, two teen boys race past. She doesn't know who they are or how long they've been friends. Dalma says that her last message would be to tell others to “find [their] people. And to treat each day like a lifetime.”

Though Dalma has to deal with the guilt and a sense of responsibility for creating the platform that enabled the serial killer to find victims, she also cannot entirely control how people interact with the app. This is one of social media's shortcomings, but it doesn't mean that social media is entirely bad. It still brings people together, and it still adds meaning and purpose to people's lives.



MATEO, 6:24 P.M.

Mateo and Rufus sit against a wall, holding hands. Mateo wants to be somewhere safe, and he admits that he'd never hit anyone before punching Peck. Rufus tells him that punching someone who has a gun is stupid, but Mateo doesn't regret it. Mateo imagines watching Rufus die and thinks that this connection is the last thing he expected when they met. He starts to cry and says he already misses Lidia and the Plutos. Rufus says they can't risk their lives again, and Mateo agrees, but he says that he'd like to go home where he's safe. He's starting to feel panicky, and he knows that there's a difference between living fearlessly and knowing that he *should* be afraid. Rufus agrees to go.

Especially as the evening wears on, things begin to seem even scarier—the odds of the boys dying are getting higher by the minute. That Mateo didn't expect this kind of a connection is understandable, but it also suggests that he didn't fully grasp what social media could do before today. Now, he realizes that it's a tool that he can use to build his community and connect intimately with people—but only if he chooses to be brave and take his connections offline.



THE PLUTOS, 6:33 P.M.

The three Plutos aren't dying today, but their fourth member got the Death-Cast call. They know that Rufus won't survive, but they're relieved that Rufus didn't die at Peck's hand. They cheer as the cops drive away with Peck and his gang, hoping that they spend more time in jail than Malcolm and Tagoe did earlier. Aimee regrets her role in everything today, but she's glad that Peck didn't kill Rufus. Tomorrow, everything will change for the Plutos. They're used to starting over, but they know that Rufus's death will stick with them forever. The narrator says that people are born into families, but they walk into friendships. Some don't last, but others are worth all the risks.

In Aimee's case, regret is helpful because it will encourage her to make better choices in the future and to be loyal to her friends whenever possible. While Malcolm and Tagoe's time in jail could've ended much worse, the idea that their friendship with Rufus made that possibility worth it speaks to the power of friendship—friends can honor one another and provide support much like a family would.



RUFUS, 7:17 P.M.

Rufus and Mateo pass the garden where Mateo buried the bird. Mateo asks if it's okay if they visit Dad again as he leads Rufus up the stairs. Rufus is fine with that. Mateo says he misses being too young to fear death, and he even misses being paranoid. As Mateo unlocks his door, he says that he can't believe he's bringing a boy home and that there's no one for Rufus to meet. Rufus looks at Mateo's school pictures. Mateo says that he thinks he disappointed Dad by signing up for online classes. Rufus reminds Mateo that he'll get to go tell Dad everything soon.

Mateo leads Rufus to his room—it's a mess. Mateo starts to pick up books and explains that he had a panic attack earlier, but he wants to clean up so that Dad doesn't know he was scared when Dad comes home. Rufus says that he doesn't like Mateo being scared either, but Mateo says it's fine. As Rufus picks up a scrap of the map, he notices the Luigi hat and puts it on Mateo's head. Rufus laughs, pulls out his phone to take **photos**, and tells Mateo to jump on his bed. Mateo grins and leaps onto the bed.

MATEO, 7:34 P.M.

Mateo knows that Rufus loves how he's acting, and Mateo loves it too. They sit on the edge of the bed, out of breath, and then Mateo announces that he's going to sing for Rufus. He tells Rufus to feel special as he starts to play and sing Elton John's "Your Song." He's off-key, but he doesn't care. Mateo catches sight of Rufus filming. When Mateo finishes, Rufus tears up and says that Mateo has been hiding from him. He says he hates that they found each other through an app. Mateo says that he likes Last Friend; it forces people to get out there and admit that they want to connect.

Mateo fetches snacks and drinks, and they talk about their histories. Rufus declares that the bed is their safe island; they can't die if they stay put. Mateo makes Rufus promise to find him in the afterlife and to make it easy, since Mateo might not have his glasses. Rufus puts on Mateo's glasses and takes a selfie of them. The **photo** makes it look like they've been together for ages. Mateo spits out that he would've loved Rufus if they had more time. He doesn't care that some people think you shouldn't say "I love you" before a certain point. Since they're about to die, he's going to say "I love you" as many times as he wants.

As the time of Mateo's death gets closer, he becomes even more aware of all the different ways he's thought of his death and of his life. He understands that despite only having lived for 18 years, he's gone from not understanding death, to knowing about it and fearing it, to accepting it and still fearing it. Even though he accepts that it's going to happen now, the fear remains—Mateo is still human and so he understandably still values his life.



Even though Mateo is afraid, that fear doesn't rule him anymore. That's why he's able to follow Rufus's request and lose himself jumping on the bed for a few minutes. Even in a time of tragedy, life, happiness, and love still exist—and that's what Rufus seeks to record through photographing their final day.



Mateo gets at the heart of what social media can do well: it forces people to admit that they're lonely and want more out of their lives. Even though Mateo has known for a long time that he wanted more out of his life, it wasn't until today that he was able to recognize that "more" really meant connections with people. Though Mateo might still die with some regrets, he'll also die having put himself out there and formed connections with someone he loves.



Through this final photo, Rufus is able to create the sense that Mateo and Rufus really have had more than one day together. While the novel never comes down definitively on what an afterlife might look like, this final conversation shows one benefit of believing in the afterlife: it helps Mateo and Rufus feel like they can continue to find purpose even after they're dead. If love exists in the afterlife, they can die believing that their lives on Earth were worth it.



RUFUS, 7:54 P.M.

Rufus says he loves Mateo too. If Rufus hadn't worked so hard to be the person he's become over the course of the day, he'd punch something. Rufus is angry that the world is so cruel—he asks if finding each other is what killed them. Mateo insists that their story isn't just that they met, fell in love, and died; they were going to die today anyway, but they kept each other alive. He climbs into Rufus's lap and says that the story is that they met, fell in love, and *lived*. Mateo suggests that it might be better to have gotten things right and been happy for a day instead of wrong for a longer life. Rufus thinks that Mateo is right. They lie down and Rufus kisses Mateo.

Rufus may have turned himself around and become the friend and romantic partner that he's always wanted to be, but that doesn't mean he still doesn't feel anger and the desire to be violent sometimes. His anger, though, is justified: it's heartbreaking that good, loveable people like Rufus and Mateo are still going to die young. But understanding that they're mortal will ideally encourage readers to take the boys' lessons to heart and live their own lives to the fullest.

**MATEO, 8:41 P.M.**

Mateo wakes up feeling like he can't die. He doesn't check the clock as he puts his glasses on, kisses Rufus, and checks that Rufus is still alive. Mateo knows that Rufus will kill him for leaving the bed, but he wants to introduce Rufus to Dad and to make tea. He puts the kettle on the stove and switches the burner on. His heart sinks. He knows death is coming, but the blaze still surprises him.

Making tea for Rufus is something kind and selfless—and yet, it's implied that this is what kills Mateo. In this sense, Mateo dies living for everyone else, just as he had put on his headstone. Hopefully, Sean won't dwell on the fact that the stove blew up because he didn't fix it—it wasn't something he could predict.

**RUFUS, 8:47 P.M.**

Rufus wakes up choking on smoke. He reaches for Mateo, but he's alone. Rufus grabs his phone, shouts for Mateo, and crawls to the front door, searching for Mateo. He coughs in the hallway, thinking that later, Mateo can tell him about all these neighbors. Rufus coughs and runs back inside. He doesn't know why Mateo broke the rules and got out of bed, but he's certain that Mateo was trying to do something nice. Near the kitchen, Rufus finds Mateo's body—his skin is boiled. Rufus drags Mateo away from the fire. In the hallway, Rufus cradles Mateo's body. Neighbors try to pull Rufus away as firefighters arrive, but Rufus lashes out. He finally tells a firefighter that Mateo didn't receive an alert today and he shouts for the firefighters to do something. A medic pulls out a body bag. Rufus snatches it away—he thinks that Mateo isn't dead.

Even though Rufus knows that both he and Mateo are going to die today, it doesn't make it any easier to deal with Mateo's death when it happens. In this sense, the world of the novel isn't so different from the reader's world, and the novel's lessons still hold true: humans are mortal and could die at any time, so it's important to make the most of each moment and do one's best to connect with others. Rufus's reaction also speaks to the intensity of his relationship with Mateo. In some ways, his chosen family with Mateo may have been more meaningful than Rufus's actual familial relationships.



At 9:16, Rufus sits on the curb as medics bag up Mateo's body. The medics attend to Rufus in the ambulance. Rufus is enraged, but he talks to Mateo through the body bag. Ten minutes later, from a hospital bed, Rufus scrolls through his phone and reads all the comments on his Instagram. Tagoe, Malcolm, and Aimee all leave heartfelt comments. Rufus texts them all that Mateo died, and he tells them to scatter his ashes at Althea Park and to be there for one another. Twenty minutes after this, Rufus snaps awake from a nightmare in which Mateo was on fire, blaming Rufus for his death. Rufus knows that Mateo wouldn't blame him. He thinks that Mateo didn't deserve to die like that, but he died a hero. Mateo saved Rufus.

Rufus is entirely justified in feeling cheated and as though this isn't fair—it isn't. However, rather than allowing his anger to rule his final hours, Rufus chooses to reach out to his friends. By doing this, he's able to connect one final time. When, like Mateo, Rufus also experiences a nightmare the last time he sleeps, it drives home that both boys are, to a degree, living through a nightmare. However, they can choose to reframe this and live to the fullest on their last day.



LIDIA VARGAS, 10:10 P.M.

Lidia is on the couch eating candy with Penny. Penny is behaving herself like she knows something is wrong. Lidia's phone rings and she recognizes the number: it's Rufus. Lidia knows that Mateo died and punches the couch, which scares Penny. Penny grabs Lidia's hands and says "Mommy," which makes Lidia put herself back together. She picks up the phone and Rufus says he's still at the hospital, where Dad is. He wants to visit Dad and tell him that Mateo is gay, since Mateo didn't get the chance. Lidia promises to do it if Rufus can't. Rufus says he wants to let Dad know how brave Mateo was, and he tells Lidia everything. Tomorrow, Lidia will build the bookcase that Mateo bought Penny and put up **photos** of him. She'll keep him alive that way.

Now that Mateo is gone, the photos become a way for Lidia to keep Mateo's memory alive and make sure that Penny grows up knowing who he was. In this way, Mateo will be able to be there for Penny, just not in the way that he and Lidia expected. Lidia's promise to call Dad if need be shows that over the course of this day, she too has learned the importance of making choices that help others. By doing this, she can make sure that Rufus understands that he's also her friend, and that they're connected through their shared love of Mateo.



DELILAH GREY, 10:12 P.M.

Delilah writes Howie Maldonado's obituary. From Howie, she learned that life is about balances. She's pretty sure she won't die today, but she still has two hours until midnight. She sits at a café across from Althea Park, where she first met Victor. She hasn't called Victor, even though these could be her final hours. Delilah pulls out her engagement ring and spins it on the table, ultimately deciding to call Victor. She hopes that he's messing with her and wonders if employees get to decide who dies. Maybe Victor decided her time was up because he's heartbroken.

The way that Delilah focuses on how she might only have two hours to live suggests that she's starting to take it seriously that she might die—and it's possible that she's regretting how she spent her last day. Even if Delilah decides she regrets it, though, it's important to keep in mind that she gave Howie the opportunity to speak the truth and be his true self for his fans. Like Mateo, Howie got to die as the person he wanted to be.



VICTOR GALLAHER, 10:13 P.M.

Death-Cast didn't call Victor last night because he's not dying, though employees learn of their impending deaths when administrators call them in for a private meeting. Victor is more depressed than usual, since Delilah tried to break up with him. He knows that she did this because he's been in a funk since he started working at Death-Cast three months ago. He's on his way to an appointment with the in-house therapist, partly because of his personal life and partly because his job is killing him—but the money and the health insurance are good. He enters the building with Andrea, who's worked here since the beginning. Victor knows she needs the job, though she hates it.

As Victor and Andrea get in the elevator, Victor's phone rings: it's Delilah. She immediately asks Victor if Victor had someone harass her with an End Day call because he's upset. Delilah promises that she won't report him if he did. Victor can tell that Delilah isn't messing with him. He asks where she is. When he learns that she's at the Althea diner, he says he's on his way. Delilah cries that she wasted her day, but Victor tells her she's going to be okay. This is the first time he's lied to a Decker. He races out his elevator, knowing Delilah could die any minute, and he speeds to Althea.

RUFUS, 10:14 P.M.

Rufus's last Instagram **photo** is the one of him and Mateo, with Rufus wearing Mateo's glasses. He's thankful that Mateo made him post in color. Rufus refuses to stay in bed and decides to honor Mateo's last wish by visiting Dad. Rufus marches into the room, where Dad is still in a coma. Rufus takes a seat, introduces himself, and says that Mateo was very brave—Mateo died as the person he always wanted to be. Rufus scrolls through all the photos he took today and explains them all for Dad. He plays the video of Mateo singing "Your Song." Rufus notices that the heart monitor doesn't respond, which is heartbreaking. He wonders if being in a coma is even worse than dying young.

Victor's insistence that Andrea hates her job adds even more nuance to Andrea's character. She's not so different from Victor, and yet the way that she's chosen to handle the stressors of her job is wildly different. Though this doesn't excuse the awful way in which Andrea treats Deckers, it does offer hope that she was compassionate once. This, combined with Victor's slipping mental health, drives home how difficult professions like this are for people. While Deckers have the opportunity to live for one day, heralds must live with death every day that they work.



Because Victor has a close and personal connection with Delilah, lying to her comes easily—but it's a kindness that he feels he has to do. Even if rushing to Delilah is hopeless and even if she's still going to die, it's important for both her and for Victor to believe that they're doing everything they can to help each other in this tense moment. Lying may be morally questionable, but in this situation, it's the only way that Victor can live with himself.



Deciding on this photo as his last one shows that Rufus now fully understands the power of love, friendship, and connection—he wants his friends to remember him as a happy person in love. The video of Mateo playing and singing is another way for Rufus to keep Mateo alive for the time being, but it's significant that Rufus doesn't say anything about sending the video to others. While the selfie is something that Rufus wants to broadcast to the world, it seems that Mateo's singing was something intimate that Rufus is going to take to the grave.



Rufus picks up the photo of Dad and Mateo on Mateo's birthday. He wishes he'd known Mateo longer, and he reads the note on the back. Rufus digs out the drawing he did at the diner this morning and writes a note to Dad on it. He tells Dad his Instagram username and says that Mateo was brave on his End Day. Rufus leaves the note with the photo and then leaves the hospital. Twenty minutes later, Rufus, exhausted and shaking, walks to Althea Park. He imagines Death stalking him, and he misses his family and Mateo. He hopes that there's an afterlife and that Mateo will make it easy to find him. Rufus decides that if he finds his family first, he'll hug them and then find Mateo. He puts on headphones and watches Mateo sing to him again. Rufus crosses the street without anyone to hold him back.

Rufus focuses on the afterlife in part because he's dying alone. By believing that he's going to see his family and Mateo again soon, he's able to move through the world and at least pretend to be the brave person he's been all day. It's implied that Rufus may die crossing the street (potentially due to Victor hitting him with his car as he speeds to Althea). The fact that Rufus spent his last hour with Dad indicates how much Rufus loves Mateo, even after such a short time. Their connection helped them both become the people they wanted to be, and they both helped each other achieve their goals as they faced down their final day. Though Rufus is scared, he can now face death knowing that he did everything he could.





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