

After Ever After Study Guide

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Plot Summary

When Jeffery Alper is in fourth grade, he is struggling with some basic issues related to the fact that he is a cancer survivor. An important part of those issues is that every kid in his class has been to a fundraiser or some event held in Jeffery's honor during the height of his illness. One day, when class is going on as usual, a new boy arrives. He has no hair and a large scar on his head. He walks with a pronounced limp. The teacher instructs the new boy, Thaddeus Isben, to take a seat next to Jeffery. Jeffery notes that's the day he met his best friend.

Four years later, Jeffery and Tad are inseparable. They have faced some of the same challenges over the years and Tad is all but confined to a wheelchair. While Tad deals with more significant physical effects from his years of cancer treatments, Jeffery faces academic challenges. Both boys use laptops because the small motor skills - especially their handwriting - is among their physical challenges. Jeffery also has trouble understanding anything related to numbers. Jeffery has always depended greatly on the advice of his older brother, Steven, but Steven has dropped out of school and moved to Africa where he is studying native drummers.

Jeffery meets Lindsey on the first day of school and is immediately enamored. She returns his affection and they are soon a couple. Then the school announces every eighth grader will be required to pass a standardized test or they won't be allowed to move to ninth grade. Tad begins tutoring Jeffery and his mother sets out to eliminate Jeffery from the requirement, knowing he's making passing grades in math class but will have more trouble with the standardized test. As the date for the standardized testing nears, Lindsay refuses to see Jeffery outside school, citing his need to focus on studying.

The first day of testing is something of a trial run and before the test begins, Tad stands and walks out, followed by every other student. There is media coverage, orchestrated by Tad and Lindsey, and there are soon questions about the standardized testing and about this state's practices in particular.

Meanwhile, Jeffery is preparing to ride in a bike-a-thon to raise money for cancer research, this time in Tad's name. On the day of the race, Tad is back in the hospital dealing with a new cancer and Jeffery is devastated over his friend's relapse. When Jeffery finishes the race, he learns that Tad has died. Jeffery and Lindsey resume their friendship and Jeffery often visits Tad's grave where he can hear his friend's voice on an array of subjects.



Chapters Four Years Ago through Hot Legs

Chapters Four Years Ago through Hot Legs Summary

The story begins with a chapter titled, "Four Years Ago." In that chapter, Jeffery Alper says that he is in fourth grade and that everyone knows him as "The Boy Who Had Cancer." He said he tries to keep a low profile because every kid in his grade has participated in some event held as a fundraiser or to honor Jeffery. On this particular day, the class is interrupted by the entrance of a boy who is introduced as Thaddeus Isben. Tad walks with a prominent limp and has a very noticeable scar on his head. Jeffery immediately recognizes him as a cancer survivor as well. Tad is asked to sit next to Jeffery and when Jeffery introduces himself, he says, "I had cancer too." Tad's response is rude, asking if Jeffery wants a medal. Jeffery says this is the day he met his best friend.

In the next chapter, "The End," Jeffery is participating in a "big day" and is wearing a "hot, sticky gown." Jeffery says that he is numb and hadn't expected that feeling. Jeffery says that he's again become the "Official Town Cause." He remembers back to the day at the beginning of the year when his English teacher, Miss Palma, announced they would be doing journal entries several times a week. For their first one, they were to write about "The Most Annoying Thing in the World." Jeffery says he was diagnosed with cancer when he was four years old and that he'd undergone years of treatment before being declared cancer-free. He says the most annoying thing in the world for him is everything that goes with being a cancer survivor. He remembers the day he'd been finally released from treatment. There had been a party at the hospital and his parents believed he was asleep on the way home. His mom said Jeffery wouldn't be "officially out of the woods for two more years." She is worried about a relapse and says it seems wrong to celebrate at this point. Jeffery's father says they have no option but to move on as if everything will be alright. Miss Palma calls time for the writing assignment and Jeffery doesn't hear her for a moment. She says Jeffery is just like his older brother, Steven, because Steven was always thinking as well. Jeffery says that no one ever compliments him and he hopes that this means the coming year will be good.

In "Hot Legs," Jeffery says there is one other good thing that happens during the first week of school. He is walking through the halls when he encounters a girl trying to pick up her possessions which have spilled all over the floor. Her name is Lindsey Abraham and she has just transferred to Jeffery's school from California. Jeffery is immediately enamored with her. Lindsey is having trouble finding her next class which happens to be the same science class Jeffery has. Lindsey sends Jeffery in a back door to the class room while she enters the front in an effort to keep him from getting in trouble for being late, but the teacher has not yet arrived.



Lindsey takes a seat at the lab table with Jeffery and Tad. Tad immediately begins instant messaging Jeffery and asks who Lindsey is. Jeffery tells Tad Lindsey's name. Tad then demands an introduction. At that moment, the teacher, Mr. Laurenzano, is standing behind the boys and makes the introduction between Tad and Lindsey, asking if the boys object if he now returns to teaching with their attention.

Tad leaves class early in order to maneuver his wheelchair through the halls ahead of the rush. After class, Lindsey asks what Mr. Laurenzano was talking about and Jeffery admits that he should have shut up but he tells her about the instant messages. Lindsey points out she and Jeffery have talked so long that he's going to be late for class and asks him to show her to her next class so that he will have an excuse for being late.

Chapters Four Years Ago through Hot Legs Analysis

A person might expect that Tad's rude comment to Jeffery immediately after Jeffery introduces himself might put Jeffery off. The details of how their friendship evolves are not detailed and are left to the reader's imagination. Much later it will become evident that Tad doesn't believe he'll live to adulthood and that he pushes many people away in an effort to keep them from becoming attached to him.

Jeffery and Tad each have laptops for any writing assignments because both have a loss of small motor function that makes it difficult to write legibly. Jeffery recalls a day when some member of the class complained that Tad and Jeffery got the special treatment of a laptop. Jeffery says Tad was furious and called the boy out, saying what wasn't fair was that the boy would probably live to see his eighteenth birthday and could walk and have complete control of his hands. Tad says he'd gladly give the boy his laptop and his wheelchair in order to have those other benefits. Jeffery seems to believe Tad's response was at least a little over the top but admires his willingness to stand up in that situation.

The humorous side of the story is evident from the third chapter. This is where Tad sends Jeffery an instant message and asks who Lindsey is. Tad phrases the first question so that he's asking who the "hot babe" is and Jeffery responds that it's Tad's mom. When Tad clarifies that it's the "hot babe" sitting across from them, Jeffery responds with Lindsey's name and says he "had her flown in from California for my personal amusement. You can look at her if you want, though." The boys are obviously good friends and their joking along these lines is an important part of their friendship.



Lost in the Mail through The Pact

Lost in the Mail through The Pact Summary

In "Lost in the Mail," Jeffery arrives home from school and discovers a letter from the school superintendent. He can't imagine what he might have done to already be in trouble but opens the letter to find out. It's a "boring" letter with information about "educational equity" and other "awkward phrases," but then Jeffery sees there is a requirement that all eighth grade students pass a standardized test at the end of the year. Students who don't pass will have to repeat the eighth grade. Jeffery shoves the letter into the garbage disposal and doesn't say anything about it to his parents. Jeffery's mother is a teacher but she teaches in Pennsylvania so doesn't yet know about the new New Jersey law regarding standardized tests.

Talk at the dinner table turns to school and Jeffery's mother wants to know all about it. Jeffery mentions his teacher, Miss Palma, and Mrs. Alper says Steven had also liked Miss Palma. Jeffery's parents say Steven's journals may still be in Steven's room. Jeffery soon realizes Steven was in the eighth grade when Jeffery was going through cancer treatments.

After dinner, Jeffery goes for a bike ride. He says it's easy for him to gain weight and because of his limp he isn't able to participate in many physical activities, but he enjoys bike riding and does it often. On this particular evening, Jeffery thinks about Steven and the fact that Steven was the only person who didn't cry about Jeffery's illness in front of Jeffery. Steven and his girlfriend, Annette, were - in Jeffery's opinion - soul mates until Steven dropped out of college and went to Africa where he's learning about native drummers.

In "The Pact," Jeffery's teachers focus on the need for students to be prepared for the tests. Miss Palma's journal assignment for the day is to "write about a time you were pressured to do something with which you didn't agree." Jeffery, Lindsey, and Tad are in a gym class taught by Mr. McGrath who talks much like a military drill sergeant. Jeffery and Tad do not participate in regular gym class but use the workout room dedicated for athletes. Jeffery is working out and Tad begins coming up with ideas to ensure that Jeffery isn't held back in eighth grade because of the standardized test. Tad offers to tutor Jeffery but Jeffery says Tad already helps him a great deal of the time. Tad then suggests Jeffery let his mother start working on the educational angle, saying as a teacher she is bound to know how to appeal that decision. Jeffery is furious at the suggestion and then reveals that he hadn't given his parents the letter so they don't know about the tests. Jeffery says extra studying won't help him pass the test. He compares it to Tad's situation by saying it would be as if the school said Tad can't graduate unless he walks across the stage. This prompts a pact between the boys that Jeff will study with Tad as his tutor and Tad will begin exercising so that he can walk across the stage on graduation day. Jeffery is immediately having second thoughts but Tad stands up and is ready to get started.



Lost in the Mail through The Pact Analysis

Jeffery's relationship with his father is extremely strained because there is a miscommunication between them. Jeffery's father is an accountant. He says his dad lives for numbers and goes overboard, even when it's not work related. As an example, his father will figure stats for baseball players and adjust them during game play. Jeffery can study frantically for a math test and still fail because he simply can't retain and apply the information. The miscommunication is Jeffery's father's frustration that he can't make this easier for Jeffery. To Jeffery, his father's frustration seems to be anger and Jeffery tries to avoid studying with his father's help.

Jeffery knows that he is likely to fail a standardized test because he has so much difficulty in math. He shows a moment of complete immaturity when he rips open the letter announcing the tests and then throws it away.

Jeffery is obviously hurt by Steven's trip to Africa. Jeffery says that Steven had been a major part of his support network when Jeffery was going through cancer treatments and then later when he was struggling to fit in at school and become more like a normal kid. Even after Steven had gone away to college, Jeffery had called or texted him daily to seek his brother's advice. This dependence is an important part of Jeffery's character in that he has such a need for Steven's support for years after his cancer treatments end. Steven had told his parents he couldn't stand Jeffery's continued dependence and that was one of the reasons he'd decided to go to Africa. There, he doesn't have cell or Internet service so Jeffery has had to learn to cope with more of his life on his own. Jeffery's mother will later say Steven didn't get the opportunity to go through the natural rebellions teenagers experience because of Jeffery's illness and that going to Africa was Steven's way of fulfilling that natural need to rebel.

Miss Palma seems to disagree with the standardized testing. She assigns the class to write journal entries about "a time they were pressured into doing something with which they didn't agree." Miss Palma also refers to the "idiotic" tests. It all seems to indicate that she is going to do what she's told with regard to the standardized tests but that she doesn't think it's right.



Handsome Babe Magnet Rides Again through Payback

Handsome Babe Magnet Rides Again through Payback Summary

In "The Handsome Babe Magnet Rides Again," Jeffery says that any time a cancer survivor begins a friendship with a girl that might turn into a relationship, there's the requirement to have "the conversation" in which the cancer is revealed. He saw the difficulties in the relationship between Steven and Annette and says the discussion about cancer complicates things even more. That evening, Tad told Jeffery's mom about Lindsey and she quizzes him about it. Jeffery's dad tries to change the subject for Jeffery's sake but it takes several tries to get Mrs. Alper off the subject. Jeffery then learns that Tad also said he'll be tutoring Jeffery this semester and will be arriving later that evening.

Tad drills Jeffery on his math but they also talk about Lindsey. Tad says he's had the opportunity to watch Lindsey and believes Jeffery has a chance of having her as a girlfriend. Jeffery asks why Tad is making it his business to evaluate Lindsey and Tad reveals that he's spent time wondering about his future. He says he's wondered if he will live long enough to kiss a girl, drive a car, and graduate high school, but it's only now that he's started wondering if a girl might be willing to kiss him.

In "Payback," Tad dresses out for gym - a change from his usual routine - and his time on the exercise bike captures the attention of other kids in the class. Tad has weak legs but his upper body is toned from pushing his wheelchair. He next presses Jeffery to lift weights.

In English class, the writing assignment is to relate a conversation. Jeffery writes about Steven's conversation with their parents when Steven announces his intention to go to Africa. No one knows Jeffery can hear when Steven says he gets dozens of texts and questions from Jeffery each week, that he's let his life revolve around Jeffery's, and that he wants to do something for himself for a change. His mother asks why Steven has to go so far away and Steven says the point is that he's completely out of contact. He says each time he considers not answering Jeffery's texts or emails, he remembers how Jeffery looked soon after his diagnosis, on a day when he'd thrown up on Steven's shoes. In another assignment, Jeffery is supposed to write a letter to someone he admires. He writes to Steven though he knows he won't ever actually send it. He asks if Steven has ever kept a secret from their parents and wishes he could ask about all sorts of current issues in his life, including the fact that he likes Lindsey and that Tad seems to be "all weird." Jeffery says the reason he admires Steven is that Steven always told Jeffery the truth, even when it wasn't easy.



Handsome Babe Magnet Rides Again through Payback Analysis

Jeffery talks about "the conversation" that inevitably arises when a person is a cancer survivor. He says it usually goes one of three ways and any of the three is not positive. The first is that the person's response to the news is, "And how's that working out for you." The second is a stupid question, such as to ask why he isn't bald. The third, which seems to be what most people would tend for, is to say that it must have been difficult and then compare it with something else. The example Jeffery gives is having tonsils removed. The point seems to be that a person who learns that Jeffery is a cancer survivor will almost always flounder in their search to find something to say.

When Steven announces his intention to go to Africa, his mom says she doesn't know if she can stand being completely out of touch with him. She says she's never had to worry about Steven and Steven counters, saying it could be time for her to start worrying about him a little. Steven's point is not that he wants his mother to worry but that he doesn't want everything for the entire family to revolve around Jeffery's cancer. This is an important part of one of the themes of the story and relates to the effects of cancer.



Partners through Night of the Living Waterfowl

Partners through Night of the Living Waterfowl Summary

In "Partners," there are science experiments that require partners and Tad moves off to a different partner so that Lindsey and Jeffery are partners. Jeffery enjoys it immensely though he says he has trouble concentrating on anything other than Lindsey. Later, Tad and Jeffery are in gym class and Tad becomes angry. He asks Jeffery to guess why he quit walking completely and points out that a girl in their class, Brianna Slack, had teased him about his limp. Jeffery points out Tad had called her "Zitzilla" and Tad says he'd only called her a name after she'd teased him. Tad reveals that he'd liked Brianna and that's why her teasing had hurt so much.

There is an upcoming dance, the Halloween Hop. Tad suggests he and Jeffery go together as Star Wars characters with Tad in his wheelchair as R2-D2. Lindsey sits with them in science and asks if they are going to the dance. Tad says they are but teasingly says that "my date," referring to Jeffery, is "being difficult." Lindsey says that there is nothing that ensures Jeffery is Tad's date and it's suddenly decided that she'll be going with Jeffery. Tad suggests Lindsey share her costume choice so Jeffery can dress in keeping with her theme but she merely says he should "think Disney."

In "Night of the Living Waterfowl," Miss Palma makes a new writing assignment. Students are to pretend they are writing a biography about themselves from the third person perspective of a scholar in the future. Jeffery's begins with the words, "She came as a princess. He came as a duck." Jeffery says he'd finally come up with the idea of Donald Duck as a costume for the East Village Middle School's Halloween Hop only to find Lindsey was Cinderella. Jeffery and Lindsey have a good time anyway and Tad teases Jeffery the following Monday. Jeffery says that he had had "the conversation" with Lindsey and that she'd been very informed because her grandmother was a breast cancer survivor.

Partners through Night of the Living Waterfowl Analysis

Jeffery says Lindsey had asked if he was past the five-year mark of remission. That is something of a magical milestone for many cancer survivors because the odds of the cancer returning have potentially dropped for most survivors at that point. When Jeffery tells Tad about this conversation, Tad seems sad and Jeffery remembers that Tad hasn't yet passed his five-year mark. What Jeffery doesn't know is that Tad may already know his cancer has returned.



Tad is angry that Jeffery shared with Lindsey the pact the two have about graduation. In this pact, they agreed that Tad would tutor Jeffery in math so that he can pass and Jeffery is going to help Tad train so that he can walk across the stage. Tad asks Jeffery what Lindsey will think if he isn't able to make that walk. Again, it seems likely that Tad already knows he is facing another round of cancer and that he might not be able to continue his training or that he might not even be alive to see graduation.



The End of Thanksgiving through Grounded, Sorta

The End of Thanksgiving through Grounded, Sorta Summary

In "The End of Thanksgiving," Jeffery gets an eighty-six in math on his first report card of the year. His father is ecstatic. Tad, meanwhile, has progressed to the point that he can walk twenty-two steps on the treadmill. Jeffery says neither will land anyone in the record books but both were huge achievements.

The day after Thanksgiving, Jeffery's mom goes shopping and his dad goes to work. Jeffery rides his bike to Tad's house. Tad's younger sister, Yvonne, is also there. Tad calls Yvonne the "ERC," or "Emergency Replacement Child," because she was born a year after his diagnosis. Tad says his parents had Yvonne in case Tad didn't survive the cancer. Jeffery later dropped by Lindsey's house but she is out of town with her parents.

On Monday, Jeffery returns to school. He is called to the office of Dr. Galley, the counselor. Jeffery is worried but Dr. Galley begins by saying his first period grades are good and his teachers haven't reported any problems in his classes. Jeffery is about to excuse himself, thinking the meeting is over, when Dr. Galley drops the bombshell - she's just gotten off the phone with Mrs. Alper and they've been talking about the standardized tests.

In "Grounded, Sorta," Jeffery's mother is furious that he didn't tell her about the testing. His mother tells Jeffery that Mr. Alper is frustrated at the fact that he can't make things easier for Jeffery but isn't angry at Jeffery over his lack of mathematical ability. The next day Jeffery relates the conversation he overhears between his parents. He says his mother wants to intervene and says the education system cannot hold Jeffery "responsible for having a brain injury." Jeffery says their talk was interrupted by Steven's phone call and he didn't hear any more of the conversation. Just then in Jeffery and Tad's conversation, Lindsey walks up and asks what they're talking about. Jeffery stutters around for a moment and Tad says if anyone needs proof that Jeffery is "retarded," Tad can record Jeffery trying to talk to Lindsey.

In English, the students begin reading "Cyrano de Bergerac." In the play, a character performs a "beau gesture" or beautiful gesture. Tad says he wants to perform that kind of deed, "something everyone will be talking about for a long time."



The End of Thanksgiving through Grounded, Sorta Analysis

It is in the chapter titled "The End of Thanksgiving" that Jeffery goes into some detail about the effects of cancer treatment on a child and their families. Jeffery says most children take for granted many things about their everyday lives, including that they are going to live. The reality of mortality is probably to be expected but there are other things children take for granted such as their parents ability to take care of them financially. A child with cancer faces the fact that most things are not certain. As an example, Jeffery says there was a girl in the hospital when he was undergoing treatments. One day Steven arrived to discover the girl had died. Steven was horrified and an emotional wreck because it caught him off guard. Jeffery, however, had always known that cancer victims died and wasn't particularly surprised by the development. This is an important aspect of the story and details the effects of cancer.

Tad seems to want to perform his "beau geste" because the class is reading *Cyrano de Bergerac* but in truth it's probably because he has either already been diagnosed with cancer or is feeling his mortality as sometimes happens with those with terminal illnesses.



Challenges through This Chapter is Private

Challenges through This Chapter is Private Summary

In "Challenges," Jeffery and the other students are surprised to learn they are taking a surprise version of the standardized tests in an effort to see how they'll do on the real thing. Jeffery is given extra time to complete tests because of his difficulty focusing and so is late entering English class. A girl in the class is just reading her journal entry as Jeffery walks in. The assignment is for students to write about a time they "faced a challenge head-on." When it's Tad's turn to read, he's obviously angry about the girl's entry. He begins to make up an entry about imaginary friends who are having sleepovers. He says one isn't invited and will be hurt if he goes without her so he'd "pretended to have leprosy" in order to get out of the situation, opting to go shopping with his mom at the mall instead. Tad goes on with the story, saying that everyone was very sorry for him after his weekend bout of leprosy. Tad then goes into another story about having just dyed his hair before being ordered into a chlorinated pool in gym class when Miss Palma roars out for Tad to stop.

Miss Palma says that it is obvious Tad has suffered a great deal but that doesn't mean his classmates haven't also faced difficulties in their own way. She says her class is a "safe place" to share any feelings without fear of being mocked. Then she asks why he'd felt the need to make fun of a classmate. Tad is told he'll have to write a new journal entry to turn in. Miss Palma allows the class free time after that and Jeffery is trying to study but Tad begins sending him messages. He talks about the pain of being a child with a brain tumor compared to the pain of dealing with his second round of cancer, a recurring brain tumor. He goes on to talk about how difficult it is to make friends because kids worry the cancer is somehow contagious or that they'll become close friends only to have to make new friends when Tad dies.

Jeffery realizes that Tad, to a great degree, is being realistic for their situations. He remembers that the other students initially worry about the kid who's absent but, after months of constant absences, that worry turns to indifference. However, he points out that Tad can be should be nicer to people. He suggests Tad consider that his "beau geste." As Tad leaves the room, he apologizes to Miss Palma. That evening, Tad goes to Jeffery's house with eggnog as an apology for having been rude earlier.

In "Joy to the World," Jeffery writes an email to Steven though he knows he won't ever send it. He says he got lots of great gifts but has never been that worried about the presents. He recalls one Christmas when he'd gotten a lot of presents including video games to play in the hospital, and that his favorite part of that year had been a snowball fight with Steven and their cousins. Jeffery says he got Lindsey a box of oranges from California for Christmas because she'd said she missed the fresh oranges most about leaving California. Jeffery says Lindsey had given him a "Hello, Kitty" bicycle horn as a



joke and an entire album of the pictures she'd digitally alters so it seemed as if the two of them were in the same photos.

When Jeffery returns to school after the Christmas break, he discovers that he hasn't passed the pretest. Tad is not in school and his father says Tad has gone to Philadelphia for tests which Jeffery knows means Tad is back in the hospital. However, Tad has been in several times for various tests and it's never been very serious so Jeffery dismisses the idea this might be different. Jeffery is supposed to be going to Tad's for tutoring and is still grounded for hiding the letter about the tests but he manages to slip out to Lindsey's house instead when Tad isn't available. In "This Chapter is Private, Keep Out," Jeffery says Lindsey has mistletoe at her bedroom door.

Challenges through This Chapter is Private Analysis

Tad's messages to Jeffery about his journal entry are an honest look at the emotional roller-coaster that he has been on and the reason he wanted to make fun of another student rather than face his own. The physical pain is obvious but Tad goes into detail about some of the emotional pain as well, though he tries to hide it behind a lot of silliness. He says some kids don't want to sit with him in the lunch room because, if he dies, they'll have to find someone new to sit with and rearranging seats in a lunch room is a hassle. It's obvious that Tad is dealing with his own fears now more than ever before and that he was probably lashing out at his classmate because of that. However, Miss Palma was right to chastise him because Tad doesn't have the right to hurt the feelings of someone else just because that person hasn't faced the life-or-death challenges Tad has faced.

When Jeffery and Lindsey are about to walk back to his house after exchanging Christmas gifts, Jeffery confides in Lindsey that he's self-conscious about his limp. He doesn't know what reaction that will garner but Lindsey begins to question him about it, asking why he limps and whether it hurts. Jeffery, in his letter to Steven that he won't ever send, asks Steven if he'd ever felt like the girls in his life had gone off to learn important things while they were learning to fry bugs with a magnifying glass or how to make fart noises with their arm pits.



Tad and Lindsey, Part I through The Enemy of Math

Tad and Lindsey, Part I through The Enemy of Math Summary

In "Tad and Lindsey, Part I," Jeffery has to go to math tutoring one afternoon a week in an effort to get him ready for the test. His tutor is Mr. McGrath, the gym teacher. Jeffery is obviously lacking in self-confidence and tries to explain to McGrath that he has a problem working quickly. McGrath counters, saying Jeffery has what's necessary to work hard because he's seen it. McGrath then says he'd been opposed to Jeffery and Tad having access to the gym equipment set aside for athletes rather than going through the regular gym classes with the rest of the students. But he'd watched and noted that Jeffery worked hard during his time on the equipment and that he'd managed to get Tad walking this year. McGrath says if anyone had told him at the beginning of the year that either of those things would happen, he'd have said it was impossible. However, the proof is in the actions and McGrath says that's evidence Jeffery can accomplish anything he sets out to do.

A few days later, Lindsey is telling Jeffery about a situation in California in which a building project of a friend has been stopped because of endangered toads. While Lindsey isn't that interested in toads in particular, she says that she's supposed to be creating a video project for another class and wants it to be important - like the court case involving the toads. Jeffery tells her that Tad has recently said something similar and gives her a brief overview of Tad's idea about a "beau gesture." Jeffery suggests they get together. He says they might unite to "save a tree or something." Jeffery says he hadn't really meant it but that Lindsey is immediately latched onto the idea. The next day, Lindsey has lunch with Tad.

In "Tad and Lindsey, Part II," Tad arrives home that afternoon feeling the beginnings of a virus. He's soon throwing up and feverish, symptoms that send his mother rushing with him to the hospital as it had ever since his diagnosis with cancer. They spend most of the night in the emergency room with a series of tests being run. He's released with the assurance that it's just a virus and told to remain home until the fever is gone. Jeffery says that leaves Tad and Lindsey free to "conspire against" him for the next three days.

Jeffery instant messages Lindsey and learns that that Lindsey is encouraging Tad to be nice to Brianna with an eye toward asking her out. Lindsey is certain Brianna likes Tad. Brianna also relates messages from Tad, asking if Jeffery is studying math, and Jeffery is a bit angry that Tad doesn't call and ask for himself. Brianna reminds Jeffery of the need to study, saying she can't go to high school without him around. Later, Tad relates his effort to be nice to Brianna. They are in the cafeteria when Tad sees her and offers her catsup. Brianna points out she's having an Italian hoagie and that she would never eat catsup on that kind of sandwich, then calls Tad a "dork." Later, Tad is following her



down a hallway trying to come up with something to talk about when Brianna turns and accuses him of being some kind of weird stalker. Then in English class the subject turns to forgiveness. Tad says a person shouldn't be hated for his entire life because of one thing said in anger. Brianna counters, saying it's different if the "insulter" is constantly making derogatory remarks and even more so if the person doesn't apologize for years. Tad is silent after this and Brianna says the insulter "isn't usually at a loss for words." Tad responds, "He's sorry now." Tad says at this point Miss Palma interrupts, saying she's come to the conclusion they are no longer really talking about the play they're reading.

In "The Enemy of Math," Jeffery returns to school to find Tad has lost all the ground they'd gained with regard to walking. Tad continues to be overly nice to Brianna. Jeffery learns he's also failed another sample test aimed at marking his progress toward passing the standardized math test. One evening Jeffery overhears his parents talking. His father says it's "bad enough we're not telling Jeff about the other thing," but Jeffery doesn't learn what that "other thing" is. Mrs. Alper, meanwhile, has been writing letters objecting to the standardized test as the sole indicator of whether Jeffery should pass eighth grade. It's during this conversation that Jeffery also learns his parents have taken out a second mortgage on the house and that it's at least partly because Mrs. Alper didn't work for awhile while Jeffery was ill.

Tad and Lindsey, Part I through The Enemy of Math Analysis

The afternoon after Jeffery's first math session with McGrath, his parents ask about the class. Jeffery doesn't tell them about the heart-to-heart he'd had with Mr. McGrath but says the class was alright. They then ask about Tad and Jeffery says he seemed fine. His parents share a look but when Jeffery asks about it, they brush it off, saying it was nothing. It's the first real clue that Tad is back in treatment and that Mr. and Mrs. Alper already know about it.

There's a very brief but important paragraph in the scene in which Jeffery is being taken to the emergency room. Jeffery remembers years ago when he was coming from and going to the various treatments and hospital stays. His parents had often pulled over to the side of the road for him to vomit and Jeffery remembers that Steven was always there to tell him everything was going to be alright. On the way to the emergency room, Jeffery has his mother pull over so he can throw up and he realizes that he no longer needs Steven to tell him that it's going to be alright, that he knows it. This epiphany is presented in just two short paragraphs but is an important sign of Jeffery's emerging maturity and his newly-acquired ability to stand on his own without Steven.

At one point during Mr. and Mrs. Alper's conversations in "The Enemy of Math," Mr. Alper suggests that Jeffery doesn't love him. Mrs. Alper says that's not true but Mr. Alper says Jeffery won't let him help with math homework. This is the evidence Jeffery has needed with regard to his father's attitude regarding Jeffery's math homework.



Jeffery remembers several scenes from his childhood involving Steven's activities and friends. At one point Steven had a girlfriend, but Jeffery's immune system had been compromised by his treatments and Steven wouldn't let the girl in the house. In another memory, Steven is having a school event and they have to leave early when Jeffery becomes ill. Jeffery realizes, maybe for the first time, that a great deal of Steven's life has been dictated by Jeffery's illness.



The Real Enemy of Math through A Big Growth Year

The Real Enemy of Math through A Big Growth Year Summary

In "The Real Enemy of Math," Jeffery is at Tad's house studying when Yvonne comes into the room. Tad is rude to her, basically insisting she go get refreshments for them. When she's gone, Jeffery points out that Tad is being mean and asks why he is always so mean to Yvonne. Tad says he's always expected he'll die and that it will be easier for everyone if Yvonne isn't so attached to him when it happens. Jeffery says it's the "dumbest thing he's ever heard" but Tad counters, asking if Jeffery hasn't ever felt the same. Jeffery can actually remember having those same thoughts in class. When they've finished the snack, Tad tells Yvonne it was "perfect." His compliment makes her blush and obviously makes her happy.

Over the next few weeks, Tad is out of school several times. When Jeffery can't go to Tad's house to study math, he sneaks away to see Lindsey. One day he stops by and watches as Lindsey and her dad are working on a computer program editing footage from a film - a job her father does professionally and at which Lindsey already excels. Later, Lindsey says she won't see Jeffery anymore outside school because she wants him to focus on studying math for the test. Jeffery argues and Lindsey says she feels as if they're having to sneak around because Jeffery's parents don't know they're seeing each other. She says it makes her feel as if they are "in trouble all the time."

It is obvious that Tad is influencing Lindsey's decision as well and Jeffery demands to know what's going on with Tad. Lindsey suggests he stop in at Tad's house and ask Tad. Jeffery says he'd asked Tad several times if he was alright but that Tad hadn't wanted to talk about whatever was keeping him out of school and he'd used that as an excuse not to ask more questions. When Lindsey tells him to go talk to Tad, she tells him she'll be available if he wants to call her to talk "after." Jeffery rides his bike to Tad's house and rings the bell. Tad's mom comes to the door and immediately warns Jeffery to be quiet. Jeffery asks if Yvonne is ill and Tad's mom says that Tad is sleeping. Jeffery then asks why Tad's sleeping so early in the day and his mom says Jeffery should surely remember what it's like to be in cancer treatment. Jeffery realizes he's been stupid not to have seen the signs that Tad has relapsed.

In "A Big Growth Year," Jeffery says he fell apart at Tad's house and Tad's mom called Mrs. Alper to pick up Jeffery. When he got home it was too late to call Lindsey but he hoped he might find her online and logged on. Instead, he found an email from Steven. The letter was filled with what he's doing, including spending time with a girl named Christina who has Internet access and is learning English.



Jeffery is angry at the situation and his response to Steven reveals the depth of his anger. He says that he'll offer Steven an update on his life if Steven can take time from his "Brazilian dance party" to read the email. He says Tad has relapsed, this time with chronic myelogenous leukemia and that the only hope is a bone marrow transplant. Jeffery goes on to say he doesn't want to hear about Steven's adventures while Annette is still in the states, waiting for his return. Then Jeffery's anger begins to cool and he says that he feels sorry for Steven, realizing what Steven's life was like the entire time Jeffery was battling for his own life.

Mrs. Alper and Jeffery talk about Steven's current situation. Mrs. Alper says that Steven was never allowed the opportunity to rebel as a teenager because the entire family remained constantly focused on Jeffery and his survival. She says Steven's decision to go to Africa has taken the place of that typical teenage rebellion and predicts that he'll return home by the time Jeffery graduates eighth grade.

The Real Enemy of Math through A Big Growth Year Analysis

In his email, Steven says he hopes that Jeffery is taking time to slow down and "appreciate the people and things around you." There's a certain irony there for Jeffery because he just discovered that Tad is probably dying.

When Mrs. Alper comes into Jeffery's room after Jeffery has learned that Tad has cancer, she wants to be supportive. Jeffery says that he isn't certain whether he would rather have that attitude or her anger because he'd been sneaking out to Lindsey's. An aspect of this story that isn't discussed is Mrs. Alper's pain and worry while she watches her son battle cancer. The fear is probably revived as she sees Tad relapse. Her worry is seen clearly when Jeffery says he expects his mother to be angry with him for sneaking out to see Lindsey. Mrs. Alper says she can understand that action and that it's "normal" teenage attitudes that prompted Jeffery to do so. She obviously would rather be dealing with this than to have to discuss the fact that Jeffery's best friend is dying of cancer. She doesn't say anything about the impact of Tad's illness on her own emotions but it seems inevitable that she would constantly fear a relapse in Jeffery's life and that Tad's situation would make the come to the forefront.



On the Treadmill through One Small Step for Man

On the Treadmill through One Small Step for Man Summary

In "On the Treadmill," Jeffery tries to talk to Tad about the cancer but Tad refuses to be drawn into a conversation. A few days later, Jeffery reveals that his mother's request to have Jeffery exempted from the tests has been denied. Tad says it's good that Jeffery's father has faith in him but Jeffery says he fears his mother is right and he won't pass. Finally Jeffery grows angry at Tad's reluctance to talk about the cancer and blows up. He says that forgetting to tell your best friend you have a cavity is acceptable but "forgetting" to tell that friend cancer has returned is not. Tad says he had hoped not to talk about the cancer until after the state tests because he hadn't wanted Jeffery to be distracted.

Jeffery urges Tad to keep working on his walking exercises but Tad says getting Jeffery to graduate is more important than Tad's goal of walking across the stage. Then Tad reveals that he would be in isolation in preparation for surgery during graduation. Jeffery goes ballistic, screaming at Tad to get on the treadmill even after Tad says he's been really dizzy and that walking is more pain that he can stand at the moment. Mr. McGrath walks into the room to see what the yelling is about and discovers Tad hunched over with his head in his hands and Jeffery seated on the floor, crying. He sends Jeffery to the counselor. Jeffery tries to calm down on the way but can't. When he enters the secretary's office, she takes "about a millionth of a second to decide she didn't want any part of me," and sends him in to Dr. Galley. Once in the counselor's office, Jeffery tells the entire story and Dr. Galley asks for his application. Jeffery is confused until she makes the point that he didn't ask to have cancer, didn't fill out any applications to have cancer, and that he hadn't prayed or begged for any aspect of the cancer or treatment. Jeffery finally realizes that none of what's happened with Tad or Steven is his fault nor is the reaction of anyone else to his cancer. Jeffery then asks Dr. Galley what he can do for Tad and she says Jeffery can only offer support.

Tad is out for several days after that and "chattered away" when he returned. Over the next few days, several people make comments Jeffery doesn't understand, including to say they are supporting him. He says he is so preoccupied with everything else that he doesn't stop to ask anyone what they're talking about, though he should have.

In "One Small Step for Man," Tad's body is showing the effects of the treatments. His hair is falling out and his face is puffy, but he continues to tell Jeffery that it's "N.B.D.," or "No Big Deal." One day Jeffery comes up with two important ideas at almost the same time. He goes downstairs and asks his father for help with his math homework - a simple action that makes his father ecstatic. He also begins gathering donors for a bike-a-thon he participates in each year to raise money for cancer research, but this time he



is dedicating the proceeds in Tad's name. Brianna Slack walks up to Jeffery and hands him a twenty-dollar bill as a donation toward the ride, but warns Jeffery not to tell Tad she'd done so. Jeffery is having nightmares about the testing and is almost relieved with the day for the first test arrives. As if the students aren't worried enough about the real tests, they have learned that the first day of testing will be tests that don't count toward their graduation. When Jeffery's name is called for his assigned seat, he swears everyone in the entire grade is watching him limp toward his seat. When everyone is seated, they are told to break the seal on the test and begin. Just then Tad coughs loudly and begins wheeling himself toward the exit. Other students stand and follow him and soon the entire grade is walking out on the test. Lindsey hisses at Jeffery to get his attention, tells him to "come on," and he follows them.

The students walk as a group out of the cafeteria where the testing is being held and toward the front doors of the school. Jeffery can't figure out what's going on but overhears some comments swirling around him. Then Jeffery hears Tad and McGrath arguing at the door. McGrath says Tad will be suspended if "one wheel of that chair" goes through the door. Tad responds by standing up and walking out the door, followed by the entire class. Brianna rushes to get his wheelchair and takes it to the bottom of the steps where Tad is obviously struggling to remain on his feet. She shoves the chair out for him to sit in and he collapses, then Brianna says that Tad still walks funny. This time Tad laughs just as Jeffery sees news crews rushing toward the group of students.

On the Treadmill through One Small Step for Man Analysis

It seems that Tad might be mad that Jeffery is dedicating his bike ride for cancer research in Tad's name and the reader might expect that from Tad's opening words on the subject. He accuses Jeffery of trying to turn him into a "poster child" for the cause and Jeffery says he'd only been trying to make Tad realize that people care about him. Tad isn't angry at all but is deeply touched by the gesture as indicated by his response.

The plan for a mass walk-out is planned by Tad and Lindsey as a means of creating awareness for Jeffery's plight. The fact that the entire student body participates is probably a show of support for Jeffery but may also be an effort by students to show their solid opposition to the test and to each other.



Who Knew... through Perpetual Care

Who Knew... through Perpetual Care Summary

In "Wow, Who Knew They Got New Jersey News Stations in Africa," Jeffery gets an email from Steven. He says Annette had sent him links to. Steven says the first video was Tad's urging "every kid in New Jersey to walk out on the state tests." The second was media coverage of the walk-out. The first video was produced by Lindsey, obviously done as her school video project. Steven says he isn't sure the board of education will listen to the students, but that they are always afraid of media attention. Steven asks Jeffery to ask their mom to get his dark suit cleaned because he'll be home in time for Jeffery's graduation.

On Tuesday, the students are warned another walk-out won't be tolerated and there's no problem. After each section of the test, Tad grills Jeffery. Jeffery says he can understand it because Tad has so much time invested in helping Jeffery study. On the final day of testing, the principal arrives and sends Tad to in-school-suspension. Lindsey calls all the local media and the attention prompts the principal to waive the punishment.

In "Riding Into the Sunset," Jeffery finds he had a great deal of free time because he's no longer dealing with tutoring or homework, and he's no longer grounded. He begins spending time with Lindsey again. One day Jeffery calls Tad. The first sentence is to ask Tad how he's feeling and Tad says he's feeling "rather cancerous today." Jeffery can't visit because Tad is being isolated to prevent the possibility of becoming sick so near his bone marrow transplant surgery. Tad pleads with Jeffery not to become emotional. He says his parents and Yvonne are already emotional and that he's having to deal with everyone else as well - "even the mailman." Tad does have a request. He says that he has sent Jeffery a package but asks that Jeffery not open it until the day of the bike ride.

The day arrives and Jeffery discovers there's a pair of pull-ups and an iPod. A note from Tad says that Jeffery should put on "your big boy pants" and "crank out fifty miles" on the bike ride. Jeffery starts the iPod as he begins his ride. He is crying as he listens to some of the songs and, at one point, sees Lindsey holding a sign urging him on. When he reaches the finish line he realizes his mother is crying.

In "Graduation," Jeffery returns to the story of graduation day. He says he isn't looking around though he knows exactly where he'd find Lindsey, Steven and Annette, and his parents. He also isn't looking for Tad but he knows Tad's parents and Yvonne are in the stands. Jeffery says that Tad's mother had made a request and that Jeffery had agreed to do it. Jeffery says there had been a huge scandal related to the standardized testing and it isn't going to be used to determine who passes. Jeffery passed.

Just then Jeffery's name is called and he stands to cross the stage. The principal announces that Jeffery is going to be accepting Tad's diploma as well. Jeffery steps on stage and falters. He can't make himself keep walking but just then Mrs. Palma



appears. She says this is Jeffery's "beau gesture" for Tad and urges him on. He says he has to make the walk because he's walking for two.

In "Perpetual Care," the summer is over and Jeffery will have his first day of high school the following day. He is at Tad's grave and is carrying on a conversation, imagining Tad's responses. He says he's spent a little time with Yvonne and that she's sad but is a pretty cool kid. He imagines Tad's response as being, "Oh barf. But Jeff? Thanks." Lindsey arrives and asks if Jeffery is alright. She says Steven told her where Jeffery could be found. She tells Jeffery she's "a little nervous" about starting high school and suggests they go for a bike ride.

Who Knew... through Perpetual Care Analysis

One day Lindsey notices that Tad winces in obvious pain and she asks him about it. He patiently explains that it's the side effect of one of the drugs that he's taking and makes it out to be routine. After Tad's gone that day, Lindsey asks Jeffery how Tad can be so calm and self-possessed with his illness. Jeffery, speaking from experience, says it's impossible to do anything about what's happening while it's happening, and that it's better to simply accept and get past the treatments. He also says that it's difficult for the moms to watch their children be ill and the best way to help them is to remain strong and matter-of-fact. This attitude seems very mature but it also seems mature that Jeffery can analyze it so well. Jeffery says he's seen "three-year-old girls" who urged their parents not to cry while the child while having a tube inserted into her chest. Lindsey says she believes Jeffery is very brave as well but Jeffery thinks that's not true. However, Jeffery is - for the first time - on the other side of the treatments. He is now in the position to worry about Tad without treatment concerns of his own to think about. He is in the unique position to see how his mother felt when she was unable to do anything for Jeffery except worry.

The songs on the iPod are sappy songs. Most of them are older and all of them have a common theme of saying goodbye. The lyrics include "the hardest part of this is losing you," "would it be the same, if I saw you in heaven," and finally, "na na na na, na na na na, hey hey hey, good-bye." There is foreshadowing here and it is seen again when Jeffery says that he wishes he had known that the bike ride was going to be the last fun time he has for a long time.



Characters

Jeffery Alper

Jeffery is a teen who had cancer as a child and is in remission by the time that he is in eighth grade. Though he is officially cancer-free, he deals constantly with the worry that it will return and with the after-effects of treatments. One of those is that Jeffery is known as the kid who had cancer. Others are that he has trouble with math, walks with a limp, and has horrible handwriting. Jeffery is lacking in self-confidence and often wishes he had the bravado exhibited by his best friend, Tad. Jeffery is a thoughtful person but is distracted by Lindsey when Tad again becomes ill. Probably because of that, he misses the signs that Tad is again in treatment. Jeffery has lived with the reality of death since he was being treated more than five years earlier and says a kid with cancer learns that death and other tragedies are a fact of life at a much younger age than most children. However, Jeffery loses emotional control when he learns that Tad is back in treatment for yet another form of cancer. Jeffery knows that Tad, having come through treatment twice, is not likely to survive another round. Jeffery is meanwhile dealing with his feelings for his family, especially for his brother Steven who has gone to Africa for the sole purpose of putting some distance between himself and the family. Jeffery has depended on Steven for advice his entire life and Steven has been more focused on Jeffery because of the cancer than he might otherwise have had.

Thaddeus Isben

Jeffery's best friend is also known as Tad. Thaddeus has had more serious physical side-effects of the cancer treatments he endured as a child and his limp is so pronounced that he gives up and depends on a wheel chair. Tad is self-confident to the point that he seems pushy, but it's mostly an act to cover his insecurities. Tad has a younger sister and he is usually not very kind to her. Jeffery points this out to him one day and Tad indicates he's trying to keep her from becoming overly attached to him in case he dies. Though Tad tries hard to come across as a selfish person, he asks to tutor Jeffery when it becomes clear that Jeffery is having trouble in math and may not pass the eighth grade because of it. Tad then makes a point to walk out on a standardized test in protest, an action that brings a lot of attention to the testing practices and eventually eliminates the use of testing as the sole means of determining if a student passes a grade. Tad is nearing the end of his eighth grade year when it's discovered that he has developed a new form of cancer. He doesn't tell Jeffery about it for a long time and seems to accept that he probably won't live through the next attempt to save his life. Tad dies on a day when Jeffery is riding a bike-a-thon with the money being donated to research in Tad's name. Tad continues to be an influence in Jeffery's life even after his death and Jeffery can imagine Tad's words on many subjects.



Lindsey Abraham

A girl who begins attending school with Tad and Jeffery in eighth grade, Lindsey is originally from California and she and Jeffery are soon a couple. Lindsay plans with Tad to stage the walk-out on the first day of the standardized testing and pushes Jeffery to do his best for the tests that will determine if he passes the eighth grade.

Steven Alper

Jeffery's older brother, Steven remains strong the entire time that Jeffery is undergoing cancer treatments but later leaves college and home behind to go to Africa. Steven needs that time away to find his own purpose in life but it is difficult for Jeffery to be apart from him. Jeffery overhears a conversation just as Steven is preparing to leave in which Steven says Jeffery's constant need for Steven's attention prompts his decision to move such a great distance to a place where he doesn't even have Internet or cell phone service.

Mrs. Alper

Jeffery's mother, she is a teacher and immediately realizes that Jeffery is likely to fail the standardized test. Mrs. Alper has trouble dealing with the situation after Jeffery is officially in remission and tells her husband that she can't help but worry they are celebrating something that won't last.

Mr. Alper

Jeffery's father, he is an accountant and is in pain at seeing Jeffery struggle in math. Mr. Alper is greatly disappointed that Jeffery doesn't want his help studying. Once Jeffery realizes this is the case, he asks his father for help and Mr. Alper is very happy.

Yvonne Isben

Tad's younger sister, Yvonne is referred to by Tad as "ERC" or "emergency replacement child." Yvonne adores Tad even though he is often mean to her. Tad says he's trying to keep Yvonne from becoming so attached to him that she's devastated when he dies. Yvonne is heartbroken when Tad dies and Jeffery begins spending some time with her.

Brianna Slack

This is the girl Tad calls "Zitzilla" after she teases him about his limp. Brianna is in the same grade as Tad and Jeffery and is among those who walk out on the first day of testing. It's Brianna who rushes to Tad with his wheelchair after the walkout.

Mr. McGrath

This is Jeffery's gym teacher who is also his math tutor. Jeffery is struggling with both math and his self-confidence when he begins the math tutoring. He doesn't really like Mr. McGrath who has the personality of a military drill sergeant but it's Mr. McGrath who gives Jeffery a level of confidence he'd been lacking by pointing out that Jeffery has accomplished a great deal in gym class.

Annette

This is Steven's girlfriend. She is still in the states when Steven goes to Africa but apparently waits for him to get the desire to travel out of his system. Annette is the one who sends Steven the media coverage of the walk-out at the middle school staged by Tad and Lindsey to object to the standardized tests.



Objects/Places

New Jersey

This is the state where Jeffery lives and attends school.

Pennsylvania

This is where Jeffery's mother teaches school.

California

This is where Lindsey lives before moving to attend Jeffery's school.

Halloween Hop

This is the dance Jeffery attends in eighth grade.

Donald Duck

This is the costume that Jeffery wears to the Halloween dance.

East Village Middle School

This is where Jeffery, Tad, and Lindsey attend eighth grade.

The Conversation

This is the talk Jeffery says all cancer survivors have to have with anyone who might be a potential girlfriend.

Cyrano de Bergerac

This is the play the students read in English that prompts Tad's magnificent gesture.

Oranges

This is what Jeffery buys for Lindsey for Christmas.

A Hello Kitty bicycle horn

This is what Lindsey gives Jeffery for Christmas as a joke.



Themes

The Reality of Mortality

In the chapter titled, "The End of Thanksgiving," Jeffery talks about the lessons children with cancer learn much earlier than most healthy kids. He says there was a girl who'd also had cancer who died and Steven had completely lost control of his emotions over the girl's death. When Jeffery didn't, Steven asked why Jeffery wasn't sad. Jeffery says that he was sad about the girl's death, but that he wasn't surprised. He says healthy children don't think about the bad things that can happen in their everyday lives. Cancer patients, faced with the constant reality of their own mortality and the mortality of other children with cancer, are also apt to realize other aspects of their lives aren't as secure and ordered as they had wish. The two examples are that parents might lose their jobs or the stock market might crash. The point is that nothing is guaranteed and that children who are not personally dealing with cancer don't learn the lessons like the cancer victims themselves. This is seen clearly in the fact that Steven stands by Jeffery throughout his treatment and remains strong during the entire ordeal. However, Steven doesn't get the message of mortality to the same degree as Jeffery. Even though Steven is very close to Jeffery and deals with a lot, he doesn't understand mortality as quickly or as completely as Jeffery.

The Effects of Cancer

Jeffery has cancer as a child but is in remission by the time he's in fourth grade. However, by then he is well known because the community has turned out in support of him for many benefits that ranged from spaghetti suppers to concerts, all to raise money for Jeffery's treatment. Meanwhile, Jeffery's mother has taken a leave from her job to be with Jeffery through his treatments, putting an even larger financial strain on the family. Jeffery learns his family has a second mortgage on the house and that they are struggling to hold their situation together, due to Jeffery's cancer treatments. There are physical effects as well. Jeffery walks with a slight limp and has small motor skills issues which make it difficult for him to write. He uses a laptop for assignments. Jeffery also has difficulties with numbers and though he studies extremely hard, he often can't remember what he's learned by the time he sits down to a math test. The effects on Tad are different. Tad's physical limitations are more pronounced and he becomes so self-conscious about his limp that he gives up and uses a wheelchair almost all the time. There are also effects on the families. Jeffery's older brother Steven is forced into the role of supporter for Jeffery during treatments. He misses out on a number of teenage events because the family is focused on Jeffery's treatments and this prompts his decision to move to Africa for several months as an adult. Another effect is that the kids with cancer learn about their own mortality at a much younger age. In Tad's case, this results in his efforts to keep his sister from becoming overly-attached to him so she won't be so completely devastated when he dies.



Coming of Age

In many ways, Jeffery is an important example of the coming of age theme. Jeffery ages by four years from the opening pages of the book through the final chapter but he matures greatly during that time. When Jeffery is in eighth grade, he meets a girl who is new to his school and has a girlfriend for the first time. Jeffery soon realizes that he's not nearly as mature as Lindsey, which is in and of itself a sign of maturity. Jeffery says that it seems as if Lindsey went to "some secret girl school" where she learned many important things while Jeffery was learning ridiculously unimportant things. Jeffery also recognizes maturity in his friend Tad and says he wishes he could be as strong and outspoken as Tad. Jeffery has a difficult time with numbers and, as a result, he often does poorly in math. His father is an accountant and Jeffery believes his father hates him for his inability to excel in math. When Jeffery's mother explains to him his father's attitude, Jeffery finally realizes that his refusal to let his father help him with homework has greatly damaged Jeffery's relationship with his dad. Jeffery takes the step to rectify that, an action that takes a great deal of maturity that Jeffery was incapable of just a few months earlier. Perhaps to an even greater degree, the theme is seen in Steven's life. Jeffery doesn't understand Steven's decision to leave his family, home, and friends behind if he'd been planning all along to come home at some point. Steven needs the opportunity to grow on his own and he misses that as an adolescent because the family's entire focus is on Jeffery's illness and survival.



Style

Point of View

The book is in the first person from the limited perspective of Jeffery Alper. This limited perspective is vital to the twists near the end of the story. Jeffery and his best friend Tad are in eighth grade but Jeffery becomes somewhat self-absorbed after he establishes a relationship with Lindsey. With that change in focus, Jeffery misses signs that Tad is back in treatment for a new round of cancer and that Tad and Lindsey have staged a walk-out in protest of the standardized testing. Since Jeffery misses the planning of the walk-out and the signs that Tad has relapsed, the reader doesn't know these facts until near the end of the book. There are clues of these upcoming events and Jeffery relates those clues which helps the reader come to some basic conclusions. This is acceptable and appropriate for the story. The limitations means the reader is not given any information other than what Jeffery knows. This leaves the reader to come to some conclusions on their own. For example, Tad refers to his younger sister as an "ERC" or "emergency replacement child." Yvonne was born about a year after Tad was diagnosed with cancer and it could be that Tad's parents had another child in an effort to have bone marrow transplants available for Tad. Jeffery doesn't know this to be the case, the reader doesn't know the truth either.

Setting

The story is set in a town in New Jersey. The exact location is not important and the overall setting seems reasonable to the story line. There are several specific settings within the overall settings. These include the East Village Middle School where Tad, Jeffery, and Lindsey are in eighth grade. There is not a great deal of description of any of the settings though the settings are all ordinary, everyday places that the reader will not have trouble imagining. The school is the most important of these. East Village Middle School is a typical school with nothing special or out of the ordinary. There is a cafeteria where the standardized testing takes place. There is a gym with a room filled with exercise equipment. The science room is a lab setting with students seated at tables. Other specific settings include Tad's house and Jeffery's house. Jeffery's house is described to a slightly greater degree than Tad's house but there is still not a great deal of detail. One aspect is the existence of a duct in Jeffery's room that provides the ability to hear conversations in the kitchen. This is how Jeffery learned the reason behind Steven's decision to leave the country. The story is set obviously in modern times. There are cell phones, the Internet, and computers.

Language and Meaning

The story is written in the first person and is extremely informal. There are words such as "sorta" used in the story that are appropriate to the target audience. There are also



passages that include texts with some of the more common text shortcuts included. The reader who isn't familiar with texting shortcuts will likely understand these passages. The overall tone of the story is one of courage and hope despite obstacles and Tad's need to face yet another round of cancer treatments. The story occurs mainly in chronological order with one significant exception. The second chapter begins with Jeffery's eighth grade graduation. He says he is numb and hadn't expected that would be possible on "such a big day." This is an important piece of foreshadowing that something horrible is going to happen to Jeffery over the course of the year. The timeframe then changes to the beginning of the eighth grade year when Jeffery begins an English assignment in which he's supposed to write about "the most annoying thing in the world." He outlines one of the biggest issues with being a cancer survivor and the next chapter meshes smoothly into that writing assignment. The remainder of the book is presented in chronological order. There are many other pieces of foreshadowing throughout the book. One of the most important is Jeffery's note on graduation day that he is again the "official town cause." Jeffery begins to suspect there is something going on between his girlfriend and his best friend but doesn't discover that they have staged a protest to standardized testing on his behalf until near the end of the book.

Structure

The book is divided into twenty-five chapters of widely varying lengths. For example, there is a chapter titled, "Private, Keep Out." That chapter has only three sentences for a total of three lines of type. The third chapter, titled, "Hot Legs," is around fifteen pages. The majority of the chapters are between six and thirteen pages in length. The chapters are not numbered and are titled with words. Chapter titles include Four Years Ago; The End; Hot Legs; Lost in the Mail; The Pact; The Handsome Babe Magnet Rides Again; Payback; Partners; Night of the Living Waterfowl; The End of Thanksgiving; Grounded, Sorta; Challenges; Joy to the World; This Chapter is Private - Keep Out; Tad and Lindsey, Part I; Tad and Lindsey, Part II; The Enemy of Math; The Real Enemy of Math; A Big Growth Year; On the Treadmill; One Small Step for Man; Wow, Who Knew They Got New Jersey News Stations in Africa?; Riding into the Sunset; Graduation; and Perpetual Care. The chapter titles are all in lower case letters and lend a clue as to the contents of that chapter. For example, in the chapter titled "Wow, Who Knew They Got New Jersey News Stations in Africa?" Jeffery hears from his older brother Steven who is temporarily living in Africa after seeing Jeffery's school on the news.



Quotes

"I couldn't figure out what I had done to get in trouble so early in the year, but you can believe I was dying to know. I debated for about twelve seconds, but of course I gave in and ripped that sucker open like a rodeo bull going after a slow cowboy" (Lost in the Mail, p. 28).

"But if a regular, ordinary relationship is like juggling a bunch of different-size, jagged pieces of metal - and from what had been going on between my brother and Annette, that seemed to be a pretty good simile - then throwing cancer into the mix is like juggling a bunch of different-size, jagged pieces of metal while riding a skateboard on the edge of the Grand Canyon" (The Handsome Babe Magnet Rides Again, p. 55).

"By the end of an hour with Tad, I felt like my brain was going to explode in a gooey, slimy spray all over the keyboard" (The Handsome Babe Magnet Rides Again, p. 60).

"I know it's not easy to be like Tad, who constantly thinks the whole planet is zooming toward some kind of gigantic cosmic toilet. But skipping around being all jolly is just asking the world to smack up upside the head with a tennis racket" (The End of Thanksgiving, p. 99).

"It stands for 'Emergency Replacement Child.' She was born less than a year after Tad was first diagnosed, so he insists his parents only had her in case he didn't survive" (The End of Thanksgiving, p. 101).

"That somehow, while you'd been learning how to incinerate bugs with a magnifying glass and make fart noises with your armpit, she'd taken some secret girl class that made her an expert on guys?" (Joy to the World, p. 136).

"Now, if you can get that flabby pos-tee-rior of yours in shape and get your stubborn friend to walk, don't you think you can pass some mamby-pamby math test?" (Tad and Lindsey, Part I, p. 149).

"All the while, Tad continued to be nice to Brianna and she continued to treat him like most people treat toe fungus" (The Enemy of Math, p. 169).

"Forgetting to tell your best friend you have a bad hangnail - that's minor. Forgetting to tell your best friend you have freaking leukemia is major!" (On the Treadmill, p. 203).

"Surviving twice was pretty rare, and three times? Let's just say if this were the Kentucky Derby, Tad would be a long shot" (Wow, Who Knew They Got New Jersey News Stations in Africa? p. 234).

"Don't go getting all emotional on me. I've been getting it from my mom, my dad, my sister, the freaking mailman - I don't need it from you too" (Riding Into the Sunset, p. 239).



"She told me the doctors hooked him up to every machine in the place but was not use. My best friend's heart stopped at 10:32 AM" (Graduation, p. 251).

"And I know that, even through all of the horrible things that happened to Tad in his three bouts with cancer, Tad's life wasn't pointless" (Perpetual Care, p. 258).



Topics for Discussion

Describe Jeffery Alper and Thaddeus Isben. How do the two become best friends? How are they similar? Why are they best friends?

Who is Lindsey Abraham? Describe her relationship with Jeffery? With Tad? How does she impact the lives of each?

What is the "beau gesture" that Tad sets out to perform? What is the "beau gesture" that Jeffery performs? What is the significance of the two gestures? What is the importance of each?

Who is Steven? Describe his relationship with Jeffery. How has Steven's life been impacted by Jeffery? By Jeffery's cancer? Why does Steven go to Africa?

What is the most important theme of the story? List at least three times this theme is seen in the story.

Describe how Jeffery learns that Tad has cancer again. What is Jeffery's reaction? What are the clues leading up to the discovery?

What is the significance of the standardized testing to Jeffery? What happens to bring it to the attention of the media?