

Among the Enemy Study Guide

Among the Enemy by Margaret Peterson Haddix

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Plot Summary

Matthias, Percy, and Alia are three friends living at the Neidler School. The country has experienced a severe shortage of food and all families are banned from having more than two children. Third children are illegal and, if captured by the Population Police, are killed. Matthias, Percy, and Alia are all third children living with fake identity papers. They are roused out of their beds one night by the Population Police. They are told there is a new ruler in the country and that they are going to be given an opportunity to work for their country. They are not given a choice but are loaded onto trucks and overhear one of the guards say "the little ones" won't last long in the labor camps. The three friends manage to get on the same truck where they are all strapped in. Matthias manages to break his own strap. He finds a nail and begins trying to break through the straps of the others. When it's obvious he won't be able to free them, he drops the nail through a hole in the truck, causing a flat. The truck flips and Alia is injured but Percy and Matthias grab her and run away. They soon encounter a gunfight between Population Police and rebels and Percy is shot. With both of them injured Matthias finds a safe place in the rebel house for his friends and goes to the home of an ally, Mr. Talbot, for help.

Mrs. Talbot returns to the house with Matthias but there's soon another gunfight. Matthias is caught outside and he escapes with Tiddy, an officer with the Population Police. Matthias produces fake identification papers and Tiddy soon spreads the word that Matthias helped him escape with his life. Because of Tiddy, Matthias is accepted by the Population Police and its commander, who is very close to Tiddy. Then Tiddy is killed and Matthias is taken in by the commander, who grieves over Tiddy's death and believes Matthias is doing the same.

Matthias soon discovers some people he knew are living at Population Police headquarters and that they are planning to destroy a warehouse that holds all the legitimate identification cards. Meanwhile Matthias learns that one of the officers, a man named Mike, is really on the side of the rebels. Matthias and Mike help put food in the hands of some hungry people and destroy the warehouse. Mike and Matthias escape and soon learn the Population Police are touting them as heroes in a strange turn of events. Mike plans to return to the Population Police but Matthias wants to visit Mr. Talbot first. There, he discovers Mrs. Talbot, Alia, and Percy are alive and well.

Chapters 1 through 5

Chapters 1 through 5 Summary

As the story opens, Matthias and Percy are asleep at the Niedler School when the Population Police arrive, rousing everyone from their beds and forcing them into the cafeteria. Matthias and Percy have lived on the run for so long they are quickly awake and grab possessions, such as their shoes. The two boys consider running but can't bring themselves to leave Alia behind. When they reach the dining hall, Percy and Matthias find Alia but by then it's too late to try to escape. They listen to a commander of the Population Police as he tells them they are worthless. This man then tells them their country has a new leader and they'll be given an opportunity to work for their country. The children are then ordered to the waiting trucks. Percy and Matthias have enough presence of mind to gather some of their possessions and they push to get themselves loaded onto the same truck as Alia but one of the officers snatches the boys' possessions, throwing the bundle away. As they are being loaded, one of the police officers asks another why they are even bothering taking the children to the work camps. He says the "little ones" will die quickly there. The children are strapped into seats on the truck so they will have difficulty escaping. Matthias reaches for his knife but realizes it is in the bundle of clothing the officer threw away.

Matthias' restraint gives under his weight and he is suddenly free. Alia urges him to leave but he refuses to go without Alia and Percy. Then the truck is moving and Matthias knows he's missed his chance.

In Chapter Two, Matthias and Percy consider their situation. They wonder if they might be able to escape and speculate their destination might not be too bad. Matthias doesn't believe it. They find a nail and Matthias plans to saw through the belts holding the other two in. Percy insists he work on Alia's belt first. Matthias soon realizes it will be impossible to get through the other two belts before they arrive at their destination. As the truck slows to a crawl, Matthias shoves his hand through a hole in the floor of the truck and causes a flat. The truck veers sharply to the side and crashes into a tree. Matthias looks up just in time to see a tree falling toward the truck.

In Chapter Three, Percy reveals that the falling tree splintered the side of the truck, releasing Percy. Matthias realizes there's something slippery on the floor of the truck and tries to reassure himself that it's tree sap but fears it's blood. Alia is unconscious and Percy and Matthias manage to get her out of the truck. They rush into the woods, carrying Alia, and run for awhile. Percy says he doesn't believe anyone is chasing them and they stop to rest. Matthias' final thought before he falls asleep is that it will be his fault if Alia dies.

In Chapter Four, Matthias wakes and he and Percy discuss the fate of the other children, worrying that they didn't stop to help any of them. Percy says he washed Alia's head wound and used a piece of her nightgown for a bandage. Matthias doesn't have a



plan but Percy has been thinking while Matthias was asleep and has come up with an idea. He says Mr. Hendricks, headmaster of a school Matthias, Percy, and Alia once visited, has a cottage where they'll be safe. Matthias agrees, picks up Alia, and the three head out again.

In Chapter Five, the boys walk all day and Matthias carries Alia the entire time, refusing to take a break or let Percy relieve him. He plans to make it all the way to Mr. Hendricks' house but gives in at dusk when Percy insists they need to find shelter for the night, pointing out that it's cold and Alia is wearing only a nightgown. Alia wakes and Matthias says he's sorry he caused her to get hurt. Alia doesn't seem to remember what happened to her. Percy scouts ahead and calls out that he believes he's found something but before he can say anything more, Matthias hears a gunshot.

Chapters 1 through 5 Analysis

Matthias berates himself as soon as the Population Police arrive and take the children into custody. He is furious with himself for not being prepared for the arrest. He says they should have been sleeping in their clothes with their possessions handy so they wouldn't be in their current position. Matthias and the others are just children. Matthias is about thirteen and Percy is about nine. Alia is only about six. The children don't know exactly how old they are. They have lived nomadic lives, mostly in hiding, because all three are illegal third children. These children often live under assumed identities to avoid being killed by the Population Police. The country is in chaos and there isn't enough food which has prompted the law against more than two children in each family.

Matthias knows as the truck is slowing down that they have minutes to come up with an escape plan. With that knowledge, Matthias shoves a nail through the hole in the bed of the truck and causes a flat. This is a plan on the spur of the moment. While it's not well thought out, it is at least an effort. However, several children are injured during the wreck, including Alia, and Matthias blames himself for this. These are among Matthias's character traits. He takes action without always thinking through the possibilities of hurting others and he carries a heavy burden of guilt whenever his actions cause harm to others.

When Matthias wakes, he expects Percy to ask if he is feeling okay or to say Alia is awake. Instead, Percy says, "Samuel would have stopped and helped those other kids." This mirrors Matthias's own fears and thoughts, and is evidence that Samuel's teachings have taken hold in the lives of Matthias and Percy. Samuel was a religious man and taught the children his beliefs. As soon as Matthias begins to think about the wreck, he worries that some of the children died because of him. When Matthias picks up Alia to resume their journey in Chapter Four, he welcomes the pain in his muscles as punishment for his actions.

Chapters 6 through 11

Chapters 6 through 11 Summary

In Chapter Six, Matthias rushes to hide himself and Alia behind a log. He can barely see but is able to make out men in dark uniforms and knows it's the Population Police. Initially, it seems the police might be shooting at Percy and Matthias but it's then revealed there's actually rebels in a nearby shack, and they are involved in the gunfight. The police kill all the rebels and pile their bodies near the road with a sign that reads, "Enemies of the People."

After the police leave, Percy signals Matthias that the way is clear and Matthias heads down the hill toward the shack. Matthias immediately realizes Percy has been shot in the leg. There's a great deal of blood and then Percy passes out.

In Chapter Seven, Matthias is left to get both Percy and Alia to shelter and he decides to head for the rebel's shack. He is afraid to leave either in order to get the other to safety for fear he won't be able to find them when he returns. He carries Alia and basically drags Percy with one arm around Percy's chest. Once they are in the shack, Matthias begins to search for candles or anything else of use. He is crawling on the floor, searching by feel, when he finds a latch. He isn't initially certain what he's found but when he pushes against it a section of the floor rises.

In Chapter Eight, Matthias takes a minute to process what he's seeing when the floor rises. Then he realizes there is light below the floor and he discovers a room equipped with cots and a sink. He decides the Population Police didn't find the room when they had the shootout with the rebels so it will be a safe place to spend the night. He manages to get Alia down the ladder and onto a cot but falls as he's taking Percy down.

In Chapter Nine, Matthias worries about Percy's leg. He wonders if the wound will heal with the bullet inside or if he needs to try to remove the bullet. He finds some bread and gives bread soaked in water to both Percy and Alia, eats a little himself, and goes to sleep. Alia wakes him, crying in pain. He urges her back to sleep but then can't sleep himself. He begins a thorough search of the room, hoping to find some medical supplies. He finally locates a safe in the wall and when he manages to get it open discovers it's filled with fake identification cards. He finds three with pictures and information suitable for himself, Percy, and Alia. Matthias checks the wounds and discovers Alia's head wound is oozing yellow fluid. He comes to realize he's going to have to go for help and knows he can't possibly take Percy and Alia with him.

In Chapter Ten, Matthias feeds Alia and Percy a little more and tries to wake them enough to explain where he's going. Matthias heads out and is struck again by the sight of the bodies of the rebels piled up near the road. He notes the sign that reads, "Enemies of the People" and writes on the back of it, "The Population Police did this."



In Chapter Eleven, Matthias worries about being caught as he continues to run. Matthias finds Mr. Hendricks's house where he finds Mr. Hendricks's friends, Mr. and Mrs. Talbot, are there as well. Matthias tries to tell them about Percy and Alia but collapses and is put to bed and fed broth. He finally gets his story out and then listens as the adults move to another room to discuss the situation. Mrs. Talbot is deciding she'll go for the children but there are concerns as to whether Percy and Alia could possibly still be alive and whether Mrs. Talbot could get there without encountering the Population Police. Mrs. Talbot makes it clear she's going to go and Matthias interrupts, saying he's going to go as well.

Chapters 6 through 11 Analysis

There's an interesting conversation between a commander of the Population Police and one of the police officers at the shack where the rebels are killed. The dead rebels are all piled near the road and it's decided there should be a sign posted with the bodies. A police officer asks what the sign should say and suggests the word "rebels" be included in the message. The commander objects, saying they must not use the word "rebel" because it would imply that it's possible to rebel against the Population Police. This is very much like traditional Communism with government officials insisting the people show no sign of rebelling against the government's dictates and directives.

When Matthias is crawling around in the shack belonging to the rebels, he realizes several people died there just a short time earlier. Matthias thinks, "God rest their souls," another indication of his religious teachings at Samuel's hands.

The children often play a game they learned from Samuel in which they list their blessings. As they are making their way through the forest after leaving the wrecked truck, Percy begins the game but Matthias doesn't help. When Matthias has Percy and Alia settled into the basement he begins the game himself and wishes his friends would help him finish the game.

Matthias considers his current situation and compares that to how his life was a short time earlier. He says that amid all the death and horror of the times, he'd at least had his friendship with Percy and Alia as a comfort. Prior to Samuel's death, he'd also depended greatly on Samuel's protection. Matthias undoubtedly had the idea that his life was troubled then but now realizes he'd been better off than he'd realized.

Matthias overhears Mr. and Mrs. Talbot talking about the dangers of going back for Percy and Alia. Mrs. Talbot, whose name is Theodora, says she has to try to save the children. Mr. Talbot says he can't stand the thought of losing her "too." Matthias remembers the death of the Talbot's third child, a daughter named Jen, who had been raised in luxury but had been killed as an illegal third child.

Chapters 12 through 16

Chapters 12 through 16 Summary

In Chapter Twelve, Mrs. Talbot insists they take food, medicine, and clothing in case they can't return to Mr. Hendricks's house immediately. Mr. Talbot, whose name is George, wants to go along but Mrs. Talbot says he's wanted and, if they are stopped, his presence would prompt immediate arrests. The Talbots have a fancy car and Mrs. Talbot decides it's too fancy. She has a plan to dent up the car and they do so. She says if the mobs of rebels stop them, they want it to look like they've stolen the car. If the Population Police stop them, they want it to look as if they were wealthy but have fallen into a difficult situation.

On the way back to find Percy and Alia, Mrs. Talbot reveals a new piece of information. She says a new law makes it illegal for anyone to buy or sell food unless one member of their family is a member of the Population Police. This happened after the president of the Population Police, a man named Aldous Krakenaur took over as leader of the country. She also tells him about some other kids who are working for the cause by infiltrating the Population Police. Matthias is lulled to sleep by the sound of her voice and the warmth of the car. He wakes when she pulls up in front of the house, recognizing it from Matthias's description of the dead rebels piled up outside. Matthias and Mrs. Talbot go inside and Matthias discovers Percy and Alia are gone.

In Chapter Thirteen, Matthias begins a frantic search for Percy and Alia. Mrs. Talbot makes him stop racing around wildly, insisting they wait for daylight to search for footprints outside. They return inside where Matthias and Mrs. Talbot consider the situation. In addition to Percy and Alia, the hundreds of fake identification cards Matthias had found earlier are missing. Mrs. Talbot hesitates at the door, saying she is always aware of how exposed she is during the daylight. Matthias pushes past her and realizes he isn't leaving footprints in the lawn, meaning Percy and Alia wouldn't have left any either. Just then, Matthias sees a man in a tree.

In Chapter Fourteen, Matthias bends down, pretending to tie his shoe, and whispers to Mrs. Talbot to remain hidden inside the cabin. Matthias can't decide what the man in the tree is trying to tell him but he calls out for Percy and Alia, asking if they are nearby. The man in the tree nods and Matthias asks if they're okay. There's another nod then some gestures and Matthias asks if he's supposed to go away. The man nods again but Matthias is determined to get solid answers about Percy and Alia. By this time he is in the road and suddenly realizes the man is frantically gesturing for him to get away. Matthias wishes he had someone else to make the decision, wishes he knew for certain the man in the tree is an ally, and is still standing in the middle of the road when four Population Police officers rush from a nearby stand of trees.

In Chapter Sixteen, one of the officers yells at Matthias, asking what he's doing. Matthias stutters as he tries to come up with an answer. Suddenly there are gunshots



and three of the four officers fall to the ground. The fourth dives behind Mrs. Talbot's car, pulls his gun, and begins shooting back. Matthias suddenly realizes the man in the tree is part of an ambush. He heads toward the cabin but realizes he might be leading the police to Mrs. Talbot and changes course, going instead to the car. He tells the officer, later introduced as Tiddy, that there are lots of rebels and that they're circling around. He urges the officer into the car, gets in the driver's seat, and leaves the scene.

Once they are in the car, the officer asks how Matthias came to be in that spot. Matthias, recalling Mrs. Talbot's story of how people are being required to join the Population Police, says he was on his way to join. The young officer soon trusts Matthias, says his name is Tidwell but that his friends call him Tiddy. Tiddy explains that the rebels in the cabin near the spot where the gunfight had occurred had been making fake identification cards in order to get more food. He says the rebels had begun fighting among themselves and had actually killed each other. He tells Matthias that's how the rebels died, not knowing that Matthias had seen the Population Police kill the rebels. They arrive at the Population Police headquarters and the guards, seeing Tiddy, allow them to pass. As soon as they are inside, Matthias knows there will be no way to escape.

Chapters 12 through 16 Analysis

While Matthias and Mrs. Talbot are talking, Matthias learns about Samuel's death. Mrs. Talbot says some of the Population Police officers were shooting children and that Samuel had walked up to them and announced their actions were "a sin." Samuel had died for his courageous words but Mrs. Talbot says the outcome was that some of the Population Police began to shoot at their fellow officers. Matthias has thought only of himself with regard to Samuel's death, which is acceptable and believable because he is just a child. He's been angry because Samuel put himself in danger leaving Matthias and several other children without his care and protection. It isn't until Mrs. Talbot is telling him the details that Matthias begins to realize that Samuel's death wasn't selfish and wasn't in vain. Mrs. Talbot says that she'd held onto his action as a point of hope for a long time following Samuel's death.

Tiddy talks to Matthias as they are headed back to the Population Police headquarters. He says at thirteen, Matthias isn't old enough to remember life before the famines. Tiddy says when he was a boy, there were grocery stores with more food stacked in them than Matthias can imagine. This famine Tiddy mentions is the basis of limiting families to only two children and the cause of some of the trouble with rebels. Tiddy says the entire human population would have faced starvation without the laws and the Population Police to enforce them. Tiddy's arguments, on the surface, seem reasonable. The land cannot provide enough food for huge families so families are to be limited to only two children. Tiddy calls it simple math and Matthias says he can see the logic until he looks at the fact that he is one of those illegal third children.

It's unclear whether Tiddy believes the rebels piled alongside the road actually did kill each other or if he's trying to further the propaganda of the Population Police. He tells

Matthias the rebels had turned on each other. It seems possible that Tiddy is very idealistic and that he does believe the story.

Chapters 17 through 24

Chapters 17 through 24 Summary

In Chapter Seventeen, Tiddy announces to other officers that Matthias saved his life. He procures a uniform for Matthias and takes him in to see the headquarters commander. Tiddy tells the commander his three men were killed and says there were "thirty or forty" of the rebels and that they were "heavily armed." The commander asks Matthias how many rebels he saw. He is conflicted. He doesn't want to back up Tiddy's lie but feels a connection to Tiddy that makes him reluctant to say Tiddy is a liar. He settles for neutral ground, says he doesn't know how many people were involved but there were "a lot of bullets." The commander promises Tiddy reinforcements and Matthias begs to go when Tiddy leaves the headquarters. Tiddy says Matthias can't go but takes him to a huge cafeteria with more food than Matthias can imagine. Tiddy tells Matthias to eat and that he'll return soon. Matthias is given a tray with some food. Then a girl puts a cup of fruit on his tray and he realizes he knows her. It's a girl named Nina.

In Chapter Eighteen, Matthias realizes Nina is scowling at him and that he needs to keep her identity secret. Nina had actually escaped Population Police prison with Matthias, Percy, and Alia months earlier. Matthias moves on down the line without saying anything more to Nina. He struggles to figure out what happened to Nina that she's working at the Population Police headquarters. He wonders if she has switched sides. Matthias remembers that he's wearing a Population Police uniform as well and considers Nina might have gotten into a situation so that she has to pretend. Matthias wishes he could have an opportunity to interact with Nina. Just then she arrives at Matthias's table with a dish towel, wiping the table. She tells him to pretend he doesn't know her and then to meet her in the front bathroom at seven that evening. She tells him to go inside, lock the door, and wait for her.

In Chapter Nineteen, Matthias meets another member of the police force named Mike who says he's Tiddy's friend. Mike and Matthias spend some time together. Matthias asks if Tiddy has left yet and Mike says Matthias shouldn't worry about Tiddy who seems to always "come out on top." Matthias is really worried about those Tiddy has gone to fight but hides that information from Mike. Mike has Matthias turn his identification card over as part of his induction into the Population Police. By the time Mike is finished, he tells Matthias he'll be starting an array of classes the following day. One of the classes is an undercover training class and Matthias almost laughs at the irony of his hiding in the Population Police headquarters and taking a class in undercover work.

In Chapter Twenty, Matthias and Mike go for dinner and Matthias finds many of the women are staring at him. When he asks why, Mike says the ladies love a hero and the story of Matthias's bravery in saving Tiddy's life has spread. A little before the time for his meeting with Nina, Matthias finds the bathroom and locks himself inside. He's a little confused about locking the door and is surprised when Nina arrives through the duct

system. Nina reveals that several other children are working the Population Police headquarters. She says they each had plans of sabotage when they joined up but came to realize it's more difficult than it had seemed. She says Trey is working in the mechanic's shop and scrubs out trash cans. Another boy, Lee, shovels the horse stalls.

Matthias is angry that nothing's being done. He says Nina could poison the food and Trey could cut the brake lines of the cars. Nina points out that would be indiscriminate killing and reminds Matthias how serious it would be if they were caught. He admits she's right. Nina points out that Matthias has already had access to officers and the commander and says he might be able to get information that has eluded the rest of them.

Matthias hears Tiddy outside. Nina hurriedly leaves and Matthias joins Tiddy. Matthias asks what happened, praying Tiddy won't say they shot any kids. Tiddy says they burned everything within a fifty mile radius of the shack where he'd found Matthias.

In Chapter Twenty-one, Matthias keeps repeating Tiddy's words, that nothing could have survived the fires they set fifty miles around the cabin. He fights to remain standing but believes he doesn't care if the Population Police discover he is a rebel. Suddenly Matthias realizes Tiddy is saying he feels strange and then he's grasping his eyes, saying he can't see. He then falls to the floor, screaming in pain. When he stops thrashing, Matthias knows Tiddy is dead.

In Chapter Twenty-two, the idea that Tiddy might have died from a biological weapon prompts the soldiers to run away. Matthias stands there as soldiers arrive wearing masks and gloves. They scrub the floor and there are whispers of Tiddy being poisoned. Matthias's thoughts immediately return to his telling Nina a short time earlier that she could poison the soldiers. Matthias is still standing by the bathroom door when one of the men with a mask pulls him away. Matthias realizes it's the commander. The commander takes Matthias to a small room near his office and puts him to bed. When Matthias wakes, the commander is in the room. He says Tiddy was like a son to him though he'd tried not to show favoritism. The commander then says Matthias had saved Tiddy's life once and that he hadn't thanked Matthias for that. The commander says Tiddy had picked up identification cards coated in poison. Matthias thinks about Alia and Percy and begins to cry. The commander thinks about Tiddy and begins to cry.

In Chapter Twenty-four, Matthias spends several weeks in the little room, thinking about nothing. At one point a servant tries to take Matthias's sweater, the one he'd been wearing when he was brought to the Population Police headquarters, but Matthias refuses. The sweater is stained with Alia's blood and is a constant reminder of Alia and Percy. The commander believes the sweater holds sentimental value because it reminds Matthias of Tiddy and instructs the servants to leave it alone.

One day Nina brings Matthias his dinner tray and tries to talk to him. He writes that the room might be bugged and she writes back they can still communicate. Matthias wants only to be left alone and tells the commander the servant is bothering him, prompting that she be sent away. The commander sits on Matthias's bed and says others can't



possibly understand Matthias's grief. He then says he understands Matthias and that Matthias understands the commander. The commander tells Matthias to get dressed and Matthias obeys. When they leave the office, guards snap to attention. The commander tells Matthias he could one day be in charge.

Once they are outside, the commander says the rebellions have been quelled. He says the people were too hungry to continue fighting and the cold weather has further damped their efforts to fight. They arrive at a warehouse and the commander takes Matthias inside where there is a single guard. When the lights are turned on, Matthias sees row upon row of food. Matthias sees that some of the vegetables are rotting and the commander says they simply throw it away when it ruins. In that moment, Matthias realizes he is nothing like the commander and that he has to get over the loss of his friends to fight back.

In Chapter Twenty-four, Matthias steels himself not to pull away at the commander's touch as they leave the warehouse. As they are driving back to the headquarters, Matthias can't control himself. He asks why the food is being kept when no one is going to eat it. The commander says it's a complicated plan that was devised by Tiddy.

Chapters 17 through 24 Analysis

The scene in which Matthias wants to go with Tiddy is a prime example of perspective. Matthias wants to go because he wants to escape and find a way to reunite with Percy and Alia. Tiddy believes Matthias wants to go so he can fight.

Mike tells Matthias the property housing the Population Police headquarters was once the home of a wealthy family. Mike then says that once all the rebels have been quelled, the members of the Population Police force will be given beautiful homes, just like this one. This sounds similar to the propaganda spouted by socialists. It will later be revealed that Mike is on the side of the rebellion and so probably doesn't actually believe this. However, it's notable that he's reciting the propaganda being taught to all the members of the Population Police, probably both as a recruiting tool and as a means of retaining those who might otherwise question the tactics of the police.

Matthias learns that everything is destroyed within a fifty-mile radius of the shack where he'd left Mrs. Talbot and hears Tiddy say there's no way anyone could have survived the fire storm. Matthias takes that as a fact that Percy, Alia, and Mrs. Talbot are dead. In fact, they aren't but they believe Matthias is dead.

There's a moment in Matthias's life when he suddenly realizes he has to step out of his grief. Matthias knows he's been letting the commander treat him "like a pet." Matthias has probably helped the commander recover from his grief over losing Tiddy. The commander apparently doesn't have a son of his own and wants someone who will follow in his footsteps. He seems to find young boys he can put in this role, first Tiddy and now Matthias.

The moment of Matthias's awakening about his responsibilities comes at the same moment he realizes he isn't evil just because some people have been hurt or killed due to his actions. Matthias continues to blame himself for the injuries Alia and Percy suffered when they were getting away from the Population Police. He has come to blame himself for taking Mrs. Talbot into the danger zone in search of Percy and Alia. Matthias has taken all this as a sign that he's evil. An interesting aspect of this is seen when Matthias is in the warehouse with the commander. The commander says they throw away food that rots in the warehouse and Matthias knows that food could have been put to use rather than allowing it to rot. With that realization, Matthias recognizes the difference between his actions that inadvertently harmed some people in an effort to accomplish something positive and the actions of the commander.

Chapters 25 through 29

Chapters 25 through 29 Summary

In Chapter Twenty-five, a servant brings Matthias a tray but he declines it. She looks hungry and he suggests she eat it herself but not tell anyone. Matthias goes to the dining room and when Nina hands him a bowl of oatmeal he hands her a note asking for another meeting. They meet in the same bathroom and Matthias tells her about the warehouse filled with food. Matthias wants to come up with a plan to give it away. Nina says there are difficulties, one of them that Trey and some of the others don't trust Matthias because he's been treated almost like royalty. There's some who believe Matthias might be Tiddy's son or the commanders "long-lost grandson." While Nina knows it isn't true, she points out that the others don't know Matthias.

Nina doesn't reveal the entire plan but says the food may have been put in the warehouse to distract the rebels from carrying out their plan. She says Matthias should return to the commander's quarters and continue to stay close, listening to everything he can and trying to gather information that can be passed on.

In Chapter Twenty-six, Matthias goes back to his room but finds a second door that requires a key. He reminds himself to begin paying attention to what's going on around him because the information may become important. Matthias tries to listen to the activities of the commander's office but discovers the door is too thick. He realizes the commander is headed to his room and dashes to his bed. He's lying down when the commander enters. The commander takes his posture as grief and says Matthias shouldn't push himself too hard. He says he knows that Matthias went down to breakfast that morning. Matthias had stopped by a memorial set up for Tiddy and had put his own hat among the items placed on the spot where Tiddy had died. The commander already knows about this as well. Matthias realizes he's being watched and that the commander knows everything he does, meaning he'll have to be very careful.

Matthias thinks about the situation and knows the Population Police have thousands of soldiers and plenty of food, but that he's still going to side with the rebels who are starving in the streets. Matthias tells the commander that Tiddy had wanted him to get started taking classes and that he feels he's falling farther behind. The commander says there's time for the classes later and Matthias suggests he listen to tapes of the classes with headphones so the noise won't bother the commander. The commander says it's a good idea and promises to send for the equipment right away. When Matthias goes for lunch, he passes a note to Nina asking if she can get a listening device.

In Chapter Twenty-seven, three days pass before Nina answers Matthias's request. Matthias is in his room trying to figure out how the device works by reciting "I miss you" over and over while listening on the headphones. The commander steps in and asks if Matthias is lonely, making it obvious that Matthias's room is bugged as he'd originally

suggested to Nina. Matthias continues the charade and the commander asks if Matthias wants to talk. Matthias suggests the commander tell him about Tiddy.

The commander tells Matthias about the early days of the Population Police. Tiddy joined as a teenager and was filled with optimism. The commander says the situation was "chaotic" but that Tiddy was always making jokes to keep everyone upbeat while they were out on patrols. The commander then shows Matthias pictures of Tiddy and Matthias realizes he could hurt or even kill the commander while he's standing so close and the commander is off guard. While he's in the commander's office he manages to put the bug on the underside of the commander's desk.

In Chapter Twenty-eight, Matthias spends a great deal of time in his room listening to the conversations going on in the commander's office. One day Matthias hears a male voice saying he's ready to make a report on "Project Exchange." The soldier says the project is nearing completion and should be finished by the following week. Matthias makes a note of it and passes the information to Nina. Nina gives Matthias a note that says this is "very bad news" and that they'll now have to hurry. She encourages Matthias to continue listening.

Another day a soldier named Jason Barstow gives the commander a demonstration of "Project Authenticity," a program designed to detect false identification cards. Barstow says the program is "foolproof."

In Chapter Twenty-nine, Matthias asks to get into the dining hall to get a snack. The guard is about to refuse until he realizes Matthias's identity and says, "They'll do anything for you." Matthias is allowed inside. There he finds Nina and says he's found an interesting bug outside. He asks if she'll see if she can identify it. Nina acts as if she's humoring a child, says she has to hang wet towels out to dry anyway, and they go outside. Matthias tells Nina what he's heard and she is obviously worried. Matthias has realized the Population Police have all their identification cards and will soon know Matthias, Nina, and the others have fake IDs. Matthias's answer is to run away but Nina says they'll check the identification cards of everyone in the entire country, meaning it will be impossible to hide.

Chapters 25 through 29 Analysis

It will later be revealed that a group of rebels have planned to blow up the warehouse because that's where the legitimate identification papers are housed. If those documents are destroyed, using fake identification papers would become much less dangerous. Nina knows the rebels would never agree to destroy an entire warehouse of food but believes the Population Police would also know that. She immediately jumps to the possibility that the food was put there and Matthias taken to see it in order to stop their plans. This will turn out to be a needless worry.

When Matthias considers that he is close enough to injure or even kill the commander, he is struck by the realization that he is able to think evil thoughts against those who

have hurt him and his friends. These thoughts of murder are present even though Matthias has considered that the commander seems very much like a benevolent grandfather.

Matthias has a cushy situation as the commander's companion and he could ride the situation to become a full-fledged member of the Population Police with all the benefits. That is what some of the rebels believe Matthias is doing. When it becomes evident he isn't going to remain with the commander, he will be trusted again.

Chapters 30 through 36

Chapters 30 through 36 Summary

In Chapter Thirty, Nina says the Population Police have been forcing everyone to turn in their identification cards and they are all stored in the warehouse where the food is stored. The ramifications are huge for third children. It means no third child will ever be able to come out of hiding.

In Chapter Thirty-one, Matthias says he believes the commander suspects his involvement with the rebels and that must be the reason the commander bugged Matthias's room. Nina disagrees, saying many of the rooms in the headquarters are bugged.

In Chapter Thirty-two, Matthias struggles to regain control of his depression. He spends some time expecting to be arrested or to learn others are being arrested until he forces himself to get a grip. Matthias forces himself to return to listening to the commander and catches the end of a conversation about plans for an upcoming event. Matthias knows the law against third children has only been in effect for a few years and the oldest illegal children are teenagers. However, the conversation in the commander's office indicates a thirty-five-year-old man who is a casualty of the Population Police. The commander says no one will believe that man was an illegal third child. However, he says that from this point, anyone with a fake identification card will be considered an enemy. Another voice in the room says that a person with a legitimate identification card who is not a "friend" of the government can be killed anyway. They'll just say the card was fake to justify the murder. Matthias begins wishing there was a way to get the word out about the plans and comes up with an idea. The finale of the plan is a huge festival with food for the people.

In Chapter Thirty-three, Matthias suggests his plan to Nina. She sees problems with it and says it will take time to pass notes to the others to iron out the details. Matthias continues to pretend he's grieving for Tiddy. He wants to ask the commander about the upcoming event but feels it's safer not to mention it. One day Mike returns and notes that Matthias seems to be paying a great deal of attention to Nina. He puts it down to a crush. He gets a note from Nina and rushes to his room where he discovers his "weapon" in the upcoming plan is a basketball.

In Chapter Thirty-four, Matthias is upset that he's not playing a more important role in the plan. He and Nina are in a closet and he tells Nina someone else could listen to the bug but Nina disagrees, saying Matthias has the perfect cover for listening. Just then, the door is whipped open and two Population Police officers are standing there, shining their lights on Nina and Matthias.

In Chapter Thirty-five, one of the guards is Mike and he convinces the other guard Nina and Matthias are involved in a serious crush and that they shouldn't tell on them. The

second guard agrees but warns them they can't be caught together again. Mike insists they be allowed to hug each other good-bye and the guard agrees. When Matthias hugs Nina, he whispers that he has to be allowed to go along now because his actions will be suspect. As Nina pulls away, she is nodding her head slightly and Matthias takes that as a "yes."

In Chapter Thirty-six, Matthias goes outdoors with a basketball and pretends to be trying to play. He asks the guards if anyone will play with him but most say they are busy. One spins the ball on his finger, a feat that amazes Matthias. Then they call for Chester. He steps outside and shows off with the basketball, handling it with ease. When Chester steps back inside his control booth, he shouts that the monitors are down. Just then they're alerted that a squirrel has chewed through a wire and the problem will be fixed momentarily. Matthias's next move is to throw the ball outside the perimeter, making it look like an accident. He rushes toward the ball but kicks it farther so that it's out of sight. He follows and when he's out of sight, rushes through the woods as had been previously planned. He finds a car waiting and is shocked to discover Mike is at the wheel.

Chapters 30 through 36 Analysis

There's an interesting conversation between Nina and Matthias while they are outside after Matthias reveals the information about Project Authenticity. Nina says that Trey has called their situation "irony." She points out that the Population Police were faced with a choice after the droughts and famines left the country in such a desperate situation - to kill the third children of each family or let a greater segment of the population starve. Now the rebels are faced with the same decision. If they blow up the warehouse they will be destroying a great deal of food that could be used to feed many people. If they don't, the identification cards will be tested and many third children who are hiding by using fake identification cards will be killed.

Matthias's background is revealed through his thoughts as he's living in the Population Police headquarters. Matthias is a third child. His parents abandoned him as a baby, fearful of their treatment at the hands of the Population Police. When Matthias is thinking about all the people he wants to avenge, his list includes Percy, Alia, Mrs. Talbot, the seventeen rebels killed at the shack, and his parents. There's no doubt being abandoned has impacted Matthias. At one point he says he can't make sense of the earliest actions in his life - his parents' decision to abandon him - and uses that as a marker of his inability to make sense of anything else.

Chapters 37 through 41

Chapters 37 through 41 Summary

In Chapter Thirty-seven, Mike assures Matthias that he's on Matthias's side and points out that he'd helped Matthias and Nina the previous night. Matthias admits that's true but is still uneasy. Mike instructs Matthias to look at a flyer that's part of their plan. The flyer indicates there is a threat against the government and urges everyone to go to the warehouse at a specific time to do their duty to the government. Mike takes Matthias to a Population Police station. Mike pretends to be an officer and demands the soldiers rush to do his bidding. He says there has been a threat against the warehouse and the only option is to empty the warehouse in order to save all the food. The soldiers are to take the flyers to every house in the area in order to accomplish this. When someone suggests they just catch the rebels, Mike says it's too late for that. When someone else goes to call for backup, Matthias learns Mike has cut the telephone connection. Mike manages to look completely horrified and says the rebels must have cut their communication. The soldiers rush to do as Mike commanded.

Mike and Matthias arrive at the warehouse and gain entry with no problem. Mike knocks the only guard unconscious. Mike plans to wait for the others to arrive to collect the food but Matthias rushes out, finds people sleeping in the streets nearby, and urges them to the warehouse.

In Chapter Thirty-eight, people begin to arrive and Matthias initially has trouble making people understand they can take as much food as they can carry. Then the others begin to arrive and carry the food away as directed. The flyers say the people are to keep the food safe for the government and return it at a specified time. When the shelves are mostly empty, Mike tells Matthias the commander is on his way. Matthias yells for everyone to leave the warehouse and Mike yells the building is about to explode. Matthias believes it's just a way to get people to hurry out but remembers the identification cards in the warehouse and realizes the warehouse might actually blow up. Suddenly Matthias remembers the guard Mike had knocked unconscious and rushes back, tugging the man to safety just as the building explodes.

In Chapter Thirty-nine, Matthias regains consciousness in a huge room. He and Mike are alone. Matthias slips back into sleep. When he wakes another time, Mike says the Population Police believe Mike and Matthias really did uncover a plot to blow up the warehouse and really were trying to save the food. Mike says there are also stories of how Matthias saved the commander's life by dragging the guard out and pushing him into the commander just as the building exploded. He says some people are saying they saw Tiddy helping Matthias. Then Mike says most of the people who took food returned it, making Matthias sad. Mike says he plans to go back to Population Police headquarters in a few days. Matthias says he has something to do first.



In Chapter Forty, Matthias and Mike arrive at Mr. Talbot's house. Matthias intends to apologize for causing Mrs. Talbot's death but he finds Mrs. Talbot, Percy, and Alia in the house and learns they'd believed he was killed. In Chapter Forty-one, Matthias learns Tiddy's story of burning everything in the area was a lie, and that they'd actually only burned the little shack. Matthias learns that Mr. Talbot knows Mike though by a different name. Mike asks if Matthias is going with him back to Population Police headquarters. Matthias says he wants to stay with Percy and Alia for now but that he'll be willing to help again later.

Chapters 37 through 41 Analysis

Matthias is immediately uneasy with the plan to hand out food to the people. He had imagined it would be easy. He planned to simply find people, give them the food, and know that some people had been fed. However, the flyer is part of an intricate plan that barely resembles Matthias's plan. He's upset that the plan has become so convoluted. It seems possible that Matthias is just unhappy with the complexity of the plan and with the fact that it can't be accomplished as easily as he'd planned. Mike points out that people who are told they should go to a Population Police warehouse and steal food from the Population Police would be too afraid to show up. Those same people, told their government needs them to go get the food, would rush to do so.

Matthias continues to battle with his conscience as the story comes to an end. He judges Mike, thinking about the fact that Mike had left the guard to die and that Mike said he wouldn't have been sad if the commander had been killed in the explosion. Despite the fact these same people would have killed Matthias if they knew he was a third child, Matthias believes killing them would be wrong.

Characters

Matthias

Matthias is a boy who is one of several taken into custody by the Population Police, an entity charged with arresting third children of families because they are illegal. He doesn't know his parents and was left rather than facing the Population Police. Matthias takes over the leadership role of the three friends. He is the oldest of the three and believes he is about thirteen, several years older than Percy and Alia. This sense of responsibility makes Matthias feel guilty when Alia and Percy are injured. Matthias is resourceful and takes the blame when his actions sometimes cause harm to others, even though he is taking action in impossible situations. Matthias struggles with the teachings of a former guardian, Samuel, who was religious and taught non-violence. Matthias is angry that Samuel put himself in harm's way and was killed but eventually comes to realize that Samuel couldn't stand idly by while the Population Police were killing innocent children. Matthias hates the Population Police and all they stand for but becomes accepted as an officer-in-training. When a guard is about to be killed, he steps in and saves the man's life. When Matthias and Mike are talking after the bombing of a warehouse, Mike says he wouldn't have been upset if the Population Police commander had died. Matthias wonders if he can trust Mike because of this attitude. When Matthias learns that Percy and Alia are alive and well, he's faced with a request to return to the Population Police to continue his work. He argues that he's only a kid himself, though he realizes he's much more capable than Percy and Alia.

Tiddy

An officer with the Population Police, Tiddy is very close to the commander. When he is caught up in a gunfight between Population Police and rebels, Tiddy is the only officer who manages to escape and he does so with Matthias's help. Tiddy returns to the base, promising Matthias he'll be accepted as a Population Police officer-in-training. At the base, Tiddy goes directly to the commander with the story of the dozens of rebels who had him pinned down until Matthias stepped in and saved him. The story is greatly exaggerated and Matthias calls him on it, asking why he'd told that story. Tiddy responds that Matthias can't be sure there weren't that many rebels in the opposing force. Tiddy is self-confident to the point of arrogance but is so well liked that people overlook his arrogant attitude. Tiddy's introduction of Matthias to the commander puts Matthias in a position to be accepted by the commander after Tiddy's death. Tiddy dies of poisoning and Matthias is struck by his death but not to the degree others believe. Over the coming weeks, Matthias often blames his grief over Tiddy's death for his brooding attitude though he is actually grieving over Percy and Alia, who he believes is dead at the hands of the Population Police.

Alia

Alia is a young girl who is in the school with Matthias and Percy when they are taken by the Population Police. She escapes with Matthias and Percy but is injured and Matthias believes she's died. She is actually rescued by Mrs. Talbot and is with her when Matthias returns to the Talbot house.

Percy

Percy is a young boy who is very close to Matthias when Matthias manages to escape from the Population Police. Percy is injured during a shootout between the Population Police and the rebels but survives after being taken in by Mrs. Talbot.

Nina

A girl who is working at the Population Police headquarters, Nina is assigned to the kitchen but is really working for the rebel forces. Nina serves as a go-between for several rebels including Matthias and Mike. Nina may have escaped the Population Police headquarters when Matthias and Mike left but her fate is not revealed in this book.

Mike

A member of the Population Police who is friends with Tiddy, Mike is actually working against the Population Police and is seeking to sabotage their efforts. Mike is an integral part of the plot to blow up the warehouse but his presence is put down by the Population Police as an effort to save the warehouse from the rebel attack.

Mrs. Talbot

Mrs. Talbot is the woman who goes with Matthias to save Percy and Alia at the rebel hideout. She is inside the house when Matthias becomes caught up in the gunfight between the rebels and the Population Police, and she manages to save the children, returning them all home to safety.

The commander

The head of the Population Police headquarters, the commander is grieved over Tiddy's death and believes Matthias feels the same. The commander is instantly bonded with Matthias because of their connections with Tiddy and has Matthias sleep in the room adjacent to his office. He takes Matthias to the warehouse where Matthias discovers all the food is stored.

Mr. Talbot

A man who pretends to be on the side of the Population Police but who is really a rebel, Mr. Talbot is friends with Mike and believes the population rule and the actions of the government are wrong. Mr. Talbot fears for his wife when she plans to rescue Percy and Alia but gives in when she insists she's going to go.

Jason Barstow

Jason Barstow is the member of the Population Police who announces to the commander that Project Authenticity is ready to launch.



Objects/Places

The Population Police

The Population Police is an entity charged with eliminating the third children of each family based on a law that makes more than two children illegal.

The Famine

The famine prompted the population law.

Niedler School

Percy, Matthias, and Alia are at the Niedler School when the Population Police take them into custody.

The Warehouse

The commander takes Matthias to the warehouse, where there is a great deal of food and most of the identification cards are stored there.

The Cafeteria or Dining Hall

Matthias first sees Nina in the cafeteria or dining hall at the Population Police headquarters.

The secret room under the shack

Matthias leaves Percy and Alia in the secret room under the shack after finding a safe with hundreds of fake identification cards.

The front bathroom

Nina and Matthias meet to talk in the front bathroom the first time at Population Police headquarters.

Project Authenticity

A program of the Population Police designed to detect fake identification cards is called Project Authenticity.

The basketball

The "weapon" Matthias uses in his role in the escape plan is a basketball.

The nail

Matthias uses a nail to cause a flat on the truck when he, Percy, and Alia are taken from their school.

Themes

Good Versus Evil

The idea of "good versus evil" has some gray areas in this story and Matthias himself struggles with these almost continually. An important aspect of this theme is seen when Matthias first arrives at Population Police headquarters. He wants to know why Nina, Lee, Trey, and the others working for the rebel cause haven't taken some action by this time. Matthias is so caught up in the need to do something that he suggests Nina poison the food she's dishing out in the dining hall and that one of the others could cut the brake lines in a car. When Nina points out this would be indiscriminate killing, Matthias rethinks his thought process. Matthias grew up with a religious man named Samuel who taught Matthias that killing is wrong. Because of this, Matthias runs back into a warehouse that's about to be blown up in an effort to rescue a guard. He does manage to save the man and saves the commander in the process. When he is talking with Mike about the situation, Mike says he wouldn't have been upset if the commander had been killed. Matthias isn't certain he can trust Mike because of this attitude. An interesting aspect of this is that Matthias doesn't want to kill the commander even though the commander is responsible for killing innocent children and for enforcing laws that tear families apart.

Government Propaganda

The government attempts to control a great many aspects of everyday life, ostensibly with the best intentions. This is seen when Tiddy touts the role of the Population Police to Matthias. Tiddy recalls the droughts that caused the famines which resulted in too little food for the country's population. As Tiddy tells it, the government's rule to limit families to only two children was an effort to keep a check on the population to alleviate the food shortages. The explanation seems reasonable and Matthias has to remind himself the Population Police are brutally murdering children just like Matthias. Another example of the propaganda is seen when Mike is telling Matthias about the rewards awaiting the Population Police once the rebellion has been quelled. Mike is actually a member of the rebellion so obviously doesn't believe the propaganda but he relates what he's been told on the subject. The government is promising the members of the Population Police nice houses and easy lives once they've done their duty to the government by fighting the rebels. This is typical of socialist governments that seek to offer rewards that will actually never come to fruition. Another example of this theme is seen in the fact that the Population Police are not allowed to mention rebels or a rebellion because the mere mention would mean there are those who are rebelling against the government. An effort to spread propaganda is seen when the Population Police kill the seventeen rebels and put a sign on the pile of bodies indicating they were enemies of the government. Officials also spread the story that the rebels fought among themselves and killed each other.

Doing one's duty

Matthias easily passes himself off as a youngster wanting to join the Population Police because of the call issued by the government. This government says it's the duty of each family to have at least one family member serve the Population Police. This service is passed off as a duty and many rush to volunteer. Their motivations are probably not what the government intended. The government wants these people to be willing to serve the government's needs but is promising punishment to families that do not conform. Some of the people who volunteer are probably seeking to serve their government but most probably join because they have a duty to their families. Another example of this theme is seen as the story comes to a close. Mike has taken Matthias back to Mr. Talbot's house where Matthias learns that Percy and Alia are alive and well. Mike reveals his plan to return to the Population Police headquarters in order to continue working for the rebel cause. He calls on Matthias to join him but Matthias asks to be allowed to stay with Percy and Alia. Matthias initially points out that he's just a child and shouldn't be called on to perform the tasks he's being asked to perform. It's quickly pointed out that everyone has a duty to fight the corrupt government in an effort to liberate the people and to bring an end to the corruption.



Style

Point of View

The story is written in third person from Matthias's perspective. The point of view is limited to Matthias's perspective which is appropriate to the story and subject. The limitation is also necessary in order to maintain the suspense. The most important example of this is seen in Matthias's belief that Percy and Alia are dead following Tiddy's story of burning everything in the region. Matthias lives with his grief - which is assumed to be grief over Tiddy's death - until he escapes the Population Police headquarters. Another example is seen when Matthias escapes the Population Police headquarters and finds Mike waiting for him. Matthias remains uneasy and that is relayed to the reader. The reader is unaware of Mike's true intentions at that point, keeping the suspense going. The fact that the story is in third person is slightly more limited than typical. For example, the reader is not aware of Matthias's background until his past impacts the present. Matthias was abandoned as a baby because his parents feared retaliation from the Population Police but the reader isn't aware of this until that impacts Matthias's thoughts and actions in the story. The use of third person sometimes means the reader isn't aware of the thoughts of the various characters. This isn't entirely true in this story and Matthias's fears and thoughts are related to the reader through his thoughts, actions, and words.

Setting

The story is set in a fictional time and place. Neither the place nor the time setting is important because of the fictional events that have impacted the people and places. There have been droughts and famines that prompted the establishment of the Population Police and the law against third children. A typical clue related to time setting is the technology available. In this case, there are phones and cars but seems to be little other technology commonly used by the characters in the book. The technology - or in this case, the lack of - is not a real clue because the country probably changed dramatically over the course of the events. There may have been technology items that became unavailable for some reason during the droughts and famines. The dialogue seems to indicate the speakers are American and live in modern times. There are several specific settings in the story. These include the Population Police headquarters, the shack with the secret room, the warehouse, and Mr. Talbot's house. Within these settings are several distinct settings where events occur, including the commander's office, the "front bathroom," and the dining hall. All are described only in vague terms but the lack of detail such as wall color is not really important. The reader with an active imagination will be able to envision the various settings.

Language and Meaning

The story is written in an easy-to-read format with action that flows quickly. There are several chapters of the book that end with foreshadowing intended to build suspense. One of these is seen at the end of Chapter Five. Percy is scouting ahead and Matthias hears a gunshot. He knows there's trouble but doesn't know until later that Percy has been shot. Another example of this is seen in chapter which ends when Matthias sees a man in a tree. The sighting of the man in the tree might not be that important but it is presented in a way meant to build suspense. The author is successful at this and does build suspense at several points throughout the story. Though the conclusion isn't seen until near the end of the book, there is another point of foreshadowing seen as Matthias arrives at the Population Police headquarters for the first time. As they drive through the gate, Matthias realizes it would be very difficult to escape. It takes planning but Matthias will later accomplish this escape. The reader with an average vocabulary will likely find only a few unfamiliar words. The book is aimed at younger readers and the characters, dialogue, and words are acceptable for the story and the audience. The book is part of a series but can be understood as a stand-alone book. There are some characters mentioned that are more important in other books of the series but the readers who do not know these characters will not be lost with the action of this story.

Structure

The book is divided into forty-one chapters. The majority of the chapters are three to eight pages in length. The book opens with Matthias and Percy being awakened in the middle of the night along with a group of children at the Neidler School. The two boys are immediately looking for Alia. The reader doesn't know the identity of the three main characters at this point - Matthias, Percy, and Alia. Over the coming chapters, Matthias has memories and thoughts of previous events that offers history of the three characters so the reader can catch up. It should be noted the book is one of a series. While the reader who has already read others of this series will already know the three characters when the story opens, the reader without this knowledge will soon catch up. By Chapter Fourteen, Matthias has left the injured Percy and Alia at the shack and returned with help. By Chapter Eighteen, Matthias has arrived at Population Police headquarters and soon discovers Nina's presence. In Chapter Twenty-two, Tiddy has died and Matthias is being accepted into the commander's confidence. In Chapter Thirty-seven, Matthias discovers Mike is working for the rebellion and the two set out together to try to steal a great deal of food from a government warehouse. In Chapter Forty-one, Matthias comes to terms with his situation, having learned that Percy, Alia, and Mrs. Talbot are not dead, and pleads for the opportunity to remain with them for awhile before returning to the fight. The chapters are titled by number only. There is a thumbnail drawing in the upper outer corner of each title page. The thumbnails are all the same and are a miniature version of the cover.

Quotes

"They were like a brother and sister who, by some strange accident, happened not to have the same parents."

Chapter 1, Page 9

"When times were bad, they always recited all the good things they could think of."

Chapter 4, Page 25

"But he'd had Samuel to protect him then - Samuel to protect him, and Percy and Alia to cuddle with at night. His life had been cozy in the midst of death and horror."

Chapter 9, Page 49

"After Tiddy drove in past a guardhouse, a line of guards closed in across the road as quickly as a prison door slamming shut."

Chapter 16, Page 85

"There was no room for any hope now."

Chapter 21, Page 110

"We all have - we've either lost someone we loved or left someone behind or been through some terrible experience. Or maybe all of those."

Chapter 25, Page 133

"He says we've got to make the same decision that the Government faced all those years ago, after the droughts and famines. Protect third children and take the chance that other people will starve, or let the Population Police kill third children and make sure that other people live."

Chapter 31, Page 157

"He couldn't understand their jaunty tones, their high spirits. They were talking about killing people."

Chapter 32, Page 160

"You know they never had the chance to eat all the food they ever wanted, to wear nice clothes, to be treated like ... like some sort of precious toy. Like I'm being treated now. But they didn't ever have to act like an evil man is their best friend, either, or pretend to be grieving for a killer."

Chapter 34, Page 170

"I didn't want anyone to die. But what if the commander's death had meant that a lot of other people got to live?"

Chapter 39, Page 199

"And watching Tiddy die, right after he'd described the fire - that had seemed to confirm all Matthias's worst fears, make him believe the world was full of death and despair and

there was no reason for hope."
Chapter 41, Page 208

Topics for Discussion

Describe Matthias. What are his strengths and weaknesses? Compare him to Tiddy. How are the two similar? How are they different?

How do Percy, Alia, and Matthias wind up at the old shack? What is the role of each in getting them there together? What happens to each of them prior to their arrival at the shack? What happens to each after their arrival?

Describe Matthias's role at the Population Police headquarters. How does he end up there? Why does he remain there? How does he escape? Some people wonder whether he'll come to accept his role as "pet" of the commander. Why are they concerned about that? Could it have happened? Why or why not?

The book's conclusion is open-ended, meaning the reader has to fill in what they believe might have happened. What do you think happened? Support your answers with information about the characters and events from the book.

Describe the commander. What kind of person is he? What kind of commander is he? Compare the kind of person he seems to be while he is spending time with Matthias to the kind of person Matthias knows him to be in his professional capacity.

What is the Population Police? How did they come into being? What is their role in the lives of ordinary citizens?

Who is Alia? Percy? Jason Barstow? Nina? Trey? Mrs. Talbot? How does each impact Matthias's life? Which are positive characters? Why?