

Dead End in Norvelt Study Guide

Dead End in Norvelt by Jack Gantos

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Plot Summary

"Dead End in Norvelt" by Jack Gantos is the story of a twelve-year-old who happens to have the same name as the author - Jack Gantos. The story takes place in the early 1960s and opens with Jack standing on a bench in his backyard trying to see the movie playing at the nearby drive-in. Jack is using Japanese military binoculars that his father brought home from his tour of duty as a Marine in World War II. A war movie is playing, and Jack is so enthralled that he wants to be part of it.

Jack runs and gets a Japanese rifle so he can pretend to shoot the enemies on the drive-in screen. That's where his problems begin. He fires the gun just as a bad guy emerges from the bushes and he fires. Unknown to him, the rifle was loaded. The fire power knocks him off the bench and scares his mother and neighbor, Miss Volker, almost to death. His father had always taught him gun safety and will deal with him when he comes home from his out-of-town job. In the meantime, his mother informs him that he is grounded for the summer which had just begun. He will only be able to do chores around the house and help Miss Volker, who told Mrs. Gantos that she needed his help over the summer.

There goes baseball and and a happy carefree summer! He has to give all that up to hang around with an old lady. Jack learns that Miss Volker - who is the town's medical examiner, historian and official obituary writer - needs him to type obits for her because her fingers are crippled from arthritis. Jack is not thrilled with the prospect but he learns a lot over the summer. Miss Volker doesn't treat Jack like a child. She expects him to drive her car, clean up dead rats in the cellar, break in houses - the sky is the limit with the determined Miss Volker. Miss Volker was one of the original Norvelters and made a promise to the town's founder, Eleanor Roosevelt, that she would care for the original residents and see them to their graves.

With each obit that Jack helps Miss Volker write, he learns more about the power of the written word. Since Miss Volker is the town historian, Jack also learns about the importance of history and learning from it. All the old men are dead because they worked in the mines and died of black lung at relatively young ages. So, that leaves only a handful of old ladies. When they all start to drop off during the summer, finally people begin to suspect that the women might be the victims of homicide. When an autopsy reveals that the latest victim was full of rat poison, the police know they have a mass murderer on their hands.

There are plenty of suspects - even Jack's own parents! Jack fears for a time that he might be a suspected. The most innocent person is arrested but is freed when the murderer finally confesses. Jack is also freed from his summer-long grounding, but has learned from Miss Volker that only fools ignore history.



Chapters 1 and 2

Chapters 1 and 2 Summary

Chapter 1

Jack Gantos was playing in his backyard on Norvelt Street. He had an array of Japanese military souvenirs that his dad collected while he was in the Navy on the Pacific front during World War II. He had gathered a rifle, a full ammo clip, an officer's sword, binoculars, a dented canteen and other items. His mother was afraid for him to play with the things. His father had always told him to be careful with them because they could be worth a bundle of money someday. He was watching a movie playing at the drive-in down the road through the old binoculars.

Jack's mother told him that a neighbor, Miss Volker, needed his help. Mrs. Gantos told him he could take a piece of pie for pay but no money. It wasn't right to help neighbors and expect pay. Jack's mother asked him if he was watching a war movie. It was a love movie, he told her. But it was really a war movie. His mother didn't like him watching war movies. She didn't like him to get upset because he was a nose bleeder. Whenever he was scared or surprised, his nose would bleed. When his father's truck backfired or when he fell off his uncle's pony, War Chief, his nose would gush. Even a bad dream could bring it on. He thought something must really be wrong with him. But the family was too poor to take him to the doctor to find out.

When Jack's mother went back inside, he picked up the old Japanese rifle and fired it at the drive-in screen when he saw some Japanese soldiers crawling out of the bush. When it fired, it flew out of his hands and he was upended landing hard on the bench he was standing on. His mother came running out of the house, shrieking. Jack thought he shot himself because there was blood running down his face. But it was the nose bleeding problem. She pressed a cold towel into his face and told him to hold it there. His father was going to kill him! Suddenly, an ambulance was turning into Miss Volker's driveway a few doors down. What if he shot her?!

The sound of the gunshot had frightened Miss Volker and she dropped her hearing aid down the toilet. The plumber was also the ambulance driver so he came to help her fish it out. After his nose stopped bleeding, Jack went to bed. He couldn't sleep with tissue stuffed up his nose, so he read about Pizarro's conquest of the Incas in Peru.

Chapter 2

When he woke the next morning, Jack realized that he'd been dreaming of Pizarro and his men melting down Inca golden statues. His mother reminded him he had to help Miss Volker. Jack got dressed and walked down to Miss Volker's house. He went to her back porch where he saw a box of candy sitting against the door. There was a note which he read even though he knew he shouldn't have. It was from Mr. Spizz. The note



said he was still waiting for her and that he had the patience of Job. He'd been waiting since 1912! That was fifty years ago.

Mr. Spizz was with Jack's uncle when they found the UFO. Spizz worked for the Norvelt Association for the Public Good. He lived and worked out of a tiny office in the moldy basement of the Community Center. Jack brought the candy box in. Miss Volker told him to throw the card in the trash. She apparently knew who the candy was from and wasn't impressed. She had made breakfast for him. Miss Volker had her hands down in boiling water. He couldn't figure out why she was boiling her hands. When she pulled her hands out, what looked like her skin was melting down on her arms. Jack got scared and his nose started bleeding. He fainted, and the next thing he knew she was standing over him tending to his bloody news. She explained that she coated her hands in paraffin and stuck them in hot water to ease her arthritis. Her hands weren't melting - it was the hot wax.

Jack recovered and Miss Volker explained what she needed help on. They would be writing an obituary. She showed him her crippled hands. She could no longer write with them. Miss Volker needed Jack to be her scribe. After Jack got situated at a small desk, Miss Volker dictated the obit for Emma Devers Salter. It was quite long and included her work with her prize honeybees and her brother-in-law's accident while working with explosives in a mine. Miss Slater had four children and her husband, Herman, had died twenty-three years before from black lung disease from his work in the mines. The obit included details about her memorial service.

Jack's fingers were cramped and he was happy when she stopped talking. But it was only a break. There was more to write. After a very brief rest, Miss Volker continued with the other half of the story. She spoke of the historic aspect of Mrs. Slater's death. Wat Tyler died on the same day as Mrs. Slater did. Tyler, a leader of the peasants, had been executed in England under the reign of King Richard II. Jack was writing as fast as he could. The connection between Wat and Mrs. Slater was that Eleanor Roosevelt like Wat, was a defender of the common man, and had founded the city of Norvelt.

Miss Volker had mentioned "A-38." Jack asked what it meant. She showed him a large needlepoint map that she had done of the original Norvelt. It was set up with a grid to pinpoint locations. She told Jack to take a red map pin and stick it on the house at A-38 which was where Mrs. Slater lived. There were now only eight original residents of Norvelt - including Miss Volker. She instructed Jack to type up the obit. He didn't know how to type he told her. "A trained monkey can type," (35) she said.

Miss Volker led him to an old Royal typewriter that Mrs. Roosevelt had given her with she was hired to be the chief nurse and medical examiner of Norvelt. She had to outlive the other seven remaining original town residents because she promised Mrs. Roosevelt she would see them to their grave. She instructed him on operating the typewriter. After he finished, she told him to select one of her books as payment. She needed him to help her on additional obits as necessary and she also wanted to teach him the history of the town.



Jack picked out a huge book entitled "Lost Worlds." He carried it and Mrs. Slater's obit and ran all the way to the Norvelt News where Mr. Greene, the publisher, was inking the printing press getting ready to create the next day's issue. Jack told Mr. Greene to check his spelling because it wasn't his best subject.

Chapters 1 and 2 Analysis

Chapter 1

Jack Gantos has a vivid imagination which shows that he is a creative and intelligent young boy. He has a fragile constitution because when he's upset or frightened, his nose bleeds. His imagination runs away with him when he fires the old Japanese rifle and scares everyone including his mother and neighbor. He is afraid his father will be upset that he shot the rifle because he always tells him not to play with the souvenirs he brought back from the war. Jack's father has not yet been introduced in the story but Jack seems afraid of what will happen when he finds out that he fired the old rifle. The family may be struggling financially. Jack thinks something might really be wrong with him but he they can't afford to go to the doctor because they are poor.

Chapter 2

Young Jack Gantos has been unintentionally tapped by Miss Volker to be the town's historian. Since she cannot write because of her arthritis, she had to look to young and healthy Jack to write obits for her. She is one of the eight original residents of the town left and is keeping her vow to Mrs. Roosevelt to "see them to their graves." But if she does outlive the other seven, who will see Miss Volker to her grave? The answer, it seems, Jack Gantos will be that person. She wants to tell him the history of the town which no one else fully understands. He could eventually become the town historian and will be an expert at writing obits.

Perhaps this experience will lead him into becoming a reporter or journalist. It has already been established that he is a student of history. He read about Pizarro and he chose a history book from Miss Volker's shelf in payment for writing the obit for her. There is a connection and a potential bonding between Jack and Miss Volker because of their mutual love and respect for history and potentially for writing. At a very young age, Jack has the opportunity to learn about the original town he was born in and lives in and about writing. Miss Volker also forced him to learn to use the typewriter. In a very short span of time, he is learning many new things which may very well have a great and positive impact on his future.



Chapters 3 and 4

Chapters 3 and 4 Summary

Chapter 3

Mr. Spizz stopped by and told Mrs. Gantos that the weeds in the gutter in front of their house were too tall. Regulation weed size was only six inches - their weeds were 22 inches high. That morning at breakfast, Jack read through the newspaper. He spotted an article written by Miss Volker under the heading, "This Day in History." On June 18, 1812, she wrote about the war of 1812; Susan B. Anthony was fined on June 18, 1873, for trying to vote; and, Amelia Earhart became the first woman to fly across the Atlantic on June 18, 1928. Miss Volker had written the daily columns years ago before her hands were crippled. The newspaper just repeats the daily columns each year. After breakfast, Mrs. Gantos had Jack cut the gutter weeds down. Mr. Spizz was riding by on his huge tricycle as Jack was finishing up. Jack hollered for him but Spizz said he was too busy to stop.

Chapter 4

The next morning, when Jack got the newspaper from the front porch, he was shocked to see a \$3 fine taped to the door for obstruction of gutter water. After Jack had cut the weeds down, he piled them in a big stack in the gutter. He intended to get a sack to haul them away and chop them up for the compost. He hid the fine in the waist of his pajamas. His mother chased him back to his room until breakfast was ready where he read about the Revolutionary War and the Battle of Bunker Hill. Jack hid the fine under his mattress. He'd find a way to pay it himself. His father had returned late the night before from an out of town job. He'd hit the roof if he saw the fine.

Later, Jack was mowing the lawn with the tractor when his father came outside. He pointed to a crop of new corn that was coming up. His mother had planted it. She was going to sell it and use it for the charity dinners she cooked. His father ordered him to mow it all down. What?! His mother wouldn't like that a bit. His father told him to just do it. He wanted to keep on the good side of his father in case his mother told him about firing the rifle. Plus, his father promised that if he found an old junker of a car, he'd help him get it running.

Jack was about half-way through the cornfield when his mother ran out and ordered him to stop. What in the world was he doing?! He held his head in his hands and cried. His dad told him to mow the corn down. His father confirmed that he told Jack to do cut the corn down. He needed the area to build a bomb shelter. It would protect them from an enemy attack from the Russian Commies. The old folks depend on her food, she responded. She told Jack to dare not mow any more down.



Mr. Gantos whispered to wait ten minutes after his mother went back indoors and then mow the rest of the corn down. His father had a garage full of stuff stashed in the garage. Jack was scared to death that his mother would kill him. His nose started breathing.

Jack had heard his parents arguing the night before. Mr. Gantos wanted to save enough to move to Florida and buy a house. Mrs. Gantos wanted to stay in Norvelt and fix their house up. She disagreed when he called it a Commie town. He referred to Mrs. Roosevelt as "that rich Commie woman." (55) If she had wanted to really help the poor, she should have just given them big fat checks, Mr. Gantos said of Mrs. Roosevelt.

Jack knew his father was waiting to hear the tractor revved up again. But he was trying to stop his nose bleed and was procrastinating. He mowed down the last rows and rode the tractor immediately over to the garage. He banged on the door for his father to let him in. He wouldn't tell his mother what his dad was cooking up in the garage. But all his mother had to do was hold his chin, look him in the eye and ask him if was telling the truth. If his nose stayed dry, she knew it was the truth. If his nose bled, he was lying.

In the garage, Mr. Gantos had a small disassembled airplane lying on the floor. His plan was to build a runway in the field where the corn had been. so they could fly off and escape any time they needed to. His mother was calling for him. He asked his dad if he could borrow his baseball glove. He pulled the glove down and ran to the Roosevelt Community Center to meet his friend, Bunny Huffer.

Chapters 3 and 4 Analysis

Chapter 3

Mr. Spizz is emerging as an antagonist in the story. He was eager to slap a fine on the Gantos family and the three dollar fine was obviously another expense that would be a burden on the poor family. No wonder Miss Volker doesn't want anything to do with him.

Chapter 4

Jack's parents are being very unfair to him, especially his father. He orders Jack to mow down all of his mother's corn. That is a dilemma for Jack because he knows how much time and effort and love she had put into growing the corn. And, the corn was for poor people who were in need of food. Mr. Gantos seems very immature. He wants to mow the cornfield down so he can build a bomb shelter and runway so they can protect themselves or escape when the Commies attack.

If he was any kind of father, he would have mowed the corn down himself - not make his young son do it. He wasn't brave enough to take a stand and tell his wife what he wanted to do. He should have taken over the tractor and done the dirty deed himself. His behavior was immature and cowardly.

His mother should not have blamed Jack for the destruction of the cornfield. She should have put the blame where it belonged - at the feet of her husband!

Jack's afraid of his father. He hid the fine notice because his father would be upset by it. But his mother seems like she's the stronger force in the family. The parents have other problems. He wants to move to Florida and she wants to stay in Norvelt. He has no respect for the historic little town and puts down its founder, Mrs. Roosevelt, by referring her to as "that rich Commie woman." He sounds like he was a conspiracy theorist before his time.



Chapters 5 and 6

Chapters 5 and 6 Summary

Chapter 5

Bunny was a very short girl, but she was Jack's best friend. She liked to run and play ball like a boy. And, she had a great sense of humor. She made a lot of jokes about dead people because she'd grown up with them. Her family ran the town mortuary. Bunny was tough, smart and a real risk-taker. She even thought of bringing one of the caskets to school for show and tell. When they first met, Bunny quickly determined that Jack was afraid of dead people. She grabbed him and drug him inside the funeral parlor. She lifted the lid on a casket. Bunny grabbed Jack's hand and forced it onto the man's neck where there was no pulse. The man's neck felt like a piece of wood. Jack's knees grew wobbly. He was afraid he'd faint or that his nose would betray him. Sure enough, the blood was dripping down his nose and on to the white satin lining of the coffin. He bolted out of the room leaving a laughing Bunny behind him.

Bunny was already at the ball diamond with the rest of the team. He was late, he told her, because of the problem with his mother's corn and his father's plan to build a bomb shelter and landing strip. Bunny complimented Jack on the good job he did in helping Miss Volker write the newspaper article. Before they had a chance to start playing, Mrs. Gantos was bicycling toward Jack. He ran and so did his nose. But she caught up with him and told him he was in big trouble. Once they were home, Mrs. Gantos told him to go to his room and that he was grounded for the summer. And, he would have to quit the baseball team. The only thing she would let him do was help Miss Volker. She also told Jack that he would never set foot in that "toy" plane his father won in a card game.

Chapter 6

Mr. Gantos knew he'd gotten Jack in trouble with his mother. He conveniently got himself a job in West Virginia for a few days. When he returned, his wife made him go right to Jack's room to discipline him. Mrs. Gantos had told him about firing the old Japanese gun. Jack explained it was an accident. He hadn't known it was loaded. But, Mr. Gantos reminded him, he had taught him about gun safety. One Thanksgiving vacation, he had taken Jack hunting. His father had stressed "safety first." And that was literally what he told him - always keep the safety on a loaded rifle.

About hunting, Mr. Gantos told Jack to always remain quiet - no sneezing or coughing. Jack enjoyed hunting with his father, tracking deers in the snow and waiting quietly in a tree house for their prey. When a white-tailed deer walked into the area, Jack thought it was beautiful and that it would be wrong to kill it. He and his father were intruders into the deer's domain. His father was aiming his rifle at the deer. Jack couldn't grab the gun but he could make noise. He decided to pass some gas which the deer could hear and smell. The deer ran off to safety.



Jack assured his father that he did not know the Japanese rifle was loaded. Mr. Gantos recalled when he was in the Marines. One of the biggest problems for the soldiers was having to shoot another person. Jack recalled reading how the Minutemen shot the British in the eyes at Bunker Hill. Mr. Gantos told him it was easier on paper. He solemnly told Jack to never go to war. There were no winners. Mr. Gantos believed that Jack didn't know the gun was loaded. But he shouldn't have been playing with the gun and was still grounded for the summer.

Chapters 5 and 6 Analysis

Chapter 5

Mrs. Gantos takes revenge out on Jack for the destruction of the cornfield. Her blame and anger is misdirected. She should be angry with her husband. Another strong female character is introduced. Bunny is a short little girl but strong and brave. She is Jack's best friend. He might be drawn to her because his mother is a strong female. Jack won't be having much fun over the summer because he's grounded. The only time he can leave his house is to work for Miss Volker. But as already presented in earlier chapters, he seems bound to learn a lot from her and it should be a learning experience for him. Bunny complimented him on the article that he helped write.

Chapter 6

Mrs. Gantos gets her revenge on Jack by telling his father about Jack shooting the rifle. But she did the right thing. What Jack did was wrong and he needed his father to straighten him out. His father was the better choice between the two parents to discipline Jack about gun safety because he knew more about guns and gun safety than his mother.

Jack shows his tender side when he recalls not wanting to kill a deer on a hunting trip with his father. He thought it was wrong. Recollections of that incident parallel with Mrs. Gantos' advice to Jack to never go to war. The Marines he was with during the war had the most difficult time when it came to shooting men. Jack and his father have a lot in common.



Chapters 7 and 8

Chapters 7 and 8 Summary

Chapter 7

One morning, Mrs. Gantos told Jack to hurry and get dressed. She was going to take him out for some fresh air. They walked a quarter mile up to Dr. Mertz's office. She hadn't made an appointment but timed their arrival for the end of his work day. Mrs. Gantos asked if she could have a word with the doctor. She asked Dr. Mertz if he could cauterize the inside of Jack's nasal passages because he'd been bleeding a lot. Mrs. Gantos couldn't afford the cost and the doctor couldn't take the canned peaches or pickles she offered in exchange for the treatment.

On the way home, Mrs. Gantos told Jack how it used to be in Norvelt. People didn't need much cash. People traded goods and services for the goods and services they needed. She vowed to save enough to get Jack's nose fixed. The only thing that Jack could trade to remove his punishment was to replant her cornfield.

Chapter 8

Jack was in the kitchen eating from a jar of pickles and reading Miss Volker's history column. On June 23, 1611, Henry Hudson was set adrift in Hudson Bay never to be seen again. One June 23, 1683, William Penn signed a peace treaty with the Lenni Lanape Indian tribe.

Miss Volker needed his help that morning. She just got word that one of the Norvelt originals might have died. A spotter for Miss Volker had noticed that Mrs. Dubicki hadn't been seen for a week. She lived at C-27 on the needlepoint map. Miss Volker told Jack that they must go over and see if they can find out what happened to her. They'd look in her window and if they couldn't see her, Jack would have to go inside. Jack was afraid he'd wind up in jail. She told him to wear a disguise. His Halloween costume from last year was the Grim Reaper. Miss Volker found the idea hilarious. She told him to go get the costume. Mrs. Dubicki would have to see the Grim Reaper sooner or later.

After he ran home and got his costume, Miss Volker gave him her car keys and told him he'd have to drive. She couldn't drive because of her hands. But he could only drive a tractor. She told him it was the same thing. Miss Volker was not patient with the new driver and kept telling him to go faster. Mrs. Dubicki might need their help. Although it was a rough ride, they made it to Mrs. Dubicki's house.

They couldn't look in the windows because all the drapes were drawn. Miss Volker told Jack to go inside. Miss Volker couldn't go inside because she was the Medical Examiner. That would really frighten the woman. Jack agreed to do it. Miss Volker promised she wouldn't tell his mother. He opened the door and called for Mrs. Dubicki. He heard a scratching noise.



Jack found Mrs. Dubicki in a back room. She was sitting in a chair with the TV on. She was either asleep or dead. Following Miss Volker's instructions, he pinched the skin on her arm. Mrs. Dubicki sat straight up scaring the life out of Jack. She saw the Jack was dressed as the Grim Reaper and she asked if he had come for her. He explained that someone had reported her dead. She was having a few heart issues and had been taking it easy. She asked the Reaper if she could have until at least July 3rd which was her grandson's birthday. Jack told her to take her time. He could come back in two weeks. She'd have all her business wrapped up by then. She offered him some tea and seemed disappointed when he said he had to leave.

All Jack wanted to do was get out of there. On the way back, his nose started bleeding. Miss Volker said she had the tools to treat it and would do so the next time he came over.

Chapters 7 and 8 Analysis

Chapter 7

Mrs. Gantos wants to help her son and get treatment for his nosebleeding problem. She is a good mother and cares about Jack. Although she hid it from Jack, she had to be crushed that she couldn't afford the treatment he needs. The only way Jack can get out of his punishment is to replant her corn. That may spark a plan in Jack's mind.

Chapter 8

It seems that Jack may have quite an adventure over the summer with Miss Volker. The first time he was there, she forced him to type. The second time, she forced him to drive her car which was a little more dangerous than typing. She also insisted that he break into the woman's house. She doesn't seem to be concerned that he could get into real trouble. If Mrs. Gantos knew what Miss Volker was having her son do, she might re-think the entire thing.

There was a humorous tone to this chapter. Jack was dressed as the Grim Reaper when he broke into Mrs. Dubicki's house. She was still alive but thought that the real Grim Reaper was paying her a visit. Strangely, she was almost glad to see the "Reaper" for a little company. She even offered him some tea.

But for all her failings, Miss Volker has Jack's welfare at heart. She was a nurse and promises him that she can treat his nosebleed problem which won't cost the family a thing.



Chapters 9 and 10

Chapters 9 and 10 Summary

Chapter 9

Mr. Gantos came and got Jack out of his room and took him outside to the ex-cornfield. He told Jack to start digging. Mr. Gantos planned to use a road to flatten the field. Jack wanted to trade places so he could get driving practice for his ventures with Miss Volker. Mr. Gantos said that future wars will be worse than past wars. Jack figured he was probably thinking of atomic bombs that could destroy all life. Mrs. Gantos came out and offered to get help from the community center. Mr. Spizz and the maintenance crew could make the job easier. Mr. Gantos didn't want any help from the Communist Center. He told Jack that he didn't want to be beholden to the Commies. They'd expect him to let them share the bomb shelter. Bunny came by and told him an unidentified man, a Hells Angels, was killed on the highway and his body was at the funeral parlor. Jack told her to go tell Mrs. Volker who would call him to take her to the funeral parlor. That way he'd get out of the digging.

Jack drove Miss Volker to the funeral home. Mr. Huffer took them to the dead man. The man was covered in tattoos, all evil and eerie images. Seeing another dead body, Jack began to get a little dizzy. Miss Volker pronounced the cause of death to be a massive skull fracture. It was the worse head injury Mr. Huffer had ever seen. The man apparently was drunk and was dancing in the street when he got hit. Jack was greatly relieved when Miss Volker said it was time to go. She told Jack to come over in the morning to write an obit for the man. Jack's nose started bleeding and made a splotch on his white shirt. Miss Volker told him to bring the shirt the next day. She had chemicals that could get the spot out.

Chapter 10

As Jack was leaving the next morning, his mother told him that after he was finished at Miss Volker's she wanted him to take some meals to the Community Center so Mr. Spizz could deliver them. His father was working on the runway, trying to flatten it out. Jack was happy to get out of another day of digging. As soon as he got to Miss Volker's, they went to the drugstore to get some items for Jack's nose treatment and some wax for her hands.

At the store, they ran right into Spizz. Miss Volker had an unpleasant confrontation with him and wound up telling him to drop dead. He responded that she was the one waiting for everyone to die so why didn't she lead the way. Miss Volker would sign his death certificate, she countered. Spizz said she couldn't even sign a death certificate with her crippled hands. Spizz told Jack that his property wasn't zoned for the landing strip his father was building. He had already reported it to the Community Council.



Miss Volker said Spizz was jealous of Jack for spending so much time with her. She had dated him when she was young. He wanted to get married but she was focused on her nursing career and kept turning him down. She made a promise that she'd marry him once all the Norvelt originals were dead. She didn't mind mixing it up with him. Kept her blood flowing. Back at Miss Volker's house, Jack was growing a little apprehensive about the treatment. Miss Volker assured him she knew exactly what she was doing. First, she told him to swab his nasal passages with some anesthetic. Miss Volker heated up a wire and told him to close his eyes as she began cauterizing his capillaries. She told him his nose would be sore and might bleed a little for a day or so. She told him to wait to tell his mother until they were sure the treatment worked. It would be a nice surprise for her. They spent the afternoon writing an obit for the Hell's Angel fellow. Jack ran the finished obit down to Mr. Green.

When Jack got home, his mother had six dinners ready for him to take to Spizz. They were marked with women's names they were to be delivered to. All the old men in town - except Spizz - had died young from black lung disease from working in the mines. Jack hurried down the Roosevelt Community Center with the meals. He ran into Bunny there. She was surprised to hear that he and Miss Volker wrote an obit for the biker. He told her that Miss Volker had warned that the Hell's Angel would bring a "death plague" into the town. Miss Volker wanted the people to be aware of the threat or they'd drop dead!

Mr. Spizz came and picked up the dinners. He warned Jack that the gutter fine had to be paid soon or it would double to six dollars.

Chapters 9 and 10 Analysis

Chapter 9

Jack is not into his father's projects especially since he wants Jack to dig out the bomb shelter, quite a challenge for a young boy. Mr. Santos shows his immaturity again by taking the easy job for himself and making his son do the manual labor. Mr. Santos doesn't want help from the town's community center. He is obviously paranoid and thinks the town workers are all "Commies." Mr. Santos is living out a fantasy which is fine. However, he is dragging his young son in and so far has given him the most difficult tasks.

Chapter 10

Apparently, Miss Volker and Spizz have a love-hate relationship. They say terrible things to each other but that's been going on for years. He wanted to marry her when they were young but she rejected him. Maybe he would be a happier person if she agreed to marry him. Jack has another worry that he keeps to himself. His father could be fined for building the landing strip and bomb shelter, a financial burden that the family doesn't need.



Even though Jack's nose will be sore, he is hopeful that Miss Volker's treatment will cure him. It would take care of a big problem for him and his parents - especially his mother who is very worried about it.

Miss Volker is probably going to cause a real uproar in the town with her warning about an evil plague striking Norvelt. Spizz's warning that the \$3 fine will soon double to \$6 is another problem that Jack didn't need and doesn't know how to handle. Miss Volker may be able to help him but he'll have to get up the nerve to confide in her about it.



Chapters 11 and 12

Chapters 11 and 12 Summary

Chapter 11

The next morning, Jack's nose was sore but it wasn't bleeding. He read his favorite column. On June 26, 1541, Pizarro was assassinated. On June 26, 1945, the United Nations was established. He added that on June 26, 1962, the longest grounding of a boy named Jack continued. Jack decided to read about Jack Kennedy and his heroic actions during the PT-109 incident in the Solomon Islands. Even though Kennedy was injured, he managed to save his crew members. Jack asked his father if he knew John Kennedy because they were both in the Solomon Islands at the same time. He didn't but they were on the same side - the winning side. They had fought for the greatest country on earth. Jack felt proud to be an American.

The Hell's Angel's obit appeared in the paper the next morning. Miss Volker wrote that the man was a devil worshiper and issued the warning about his bringing an evil plague to Norvelt. She tied the day he died to other historic events. On June 24, 1874, the plague of St. John's Dance erupted in Germany. The plague showed up in France in 1518. People died from heart attacks, strokes and organ failures. She also tied the biker's appearance in town to the Pied Piper of Hamelin and to the Salem witches. Jack knew that the article would frighten the people.

Jack heard the sound of motorcycles. They roared into town and the noise of the cycles was earsplitting. Jack watched as they passed. One of the motorcycles looked like a torpedo. It had a casket attached to it! Jack saw Bunny running down the road after them in her pajamas. The gang had barged into her father's funeral parlor, made him pull their friend's body out of the freezer and then stole a coffin - the most expensive coffin they had.

Mr. Spizz was chasing the bikers on his big tricycle. He had a badge pinned to his shirt but he was unarmed. Spizz was out of breath and he probably didn't really want to catch up with them. Bunny whispered that Spizz was getting too old. She learned that the dead biker bought a house and he had planned to turn it into a Hells Angels clubhouse. He had vowed to take over the town and rename it Hells Angels Town. Bunny said she'd be calling a special Girl Scout meeting that night to warn the members.

Chapter 12

Mrs. Gantos applied for a part-time sewing job at the Norvelt Pants Factory to make a little extra money. Miss Volker called Jack and said she needed his help right away. She had put out poison for rats that were in her cellar. There were dead ones everywhere. When he got there, a big vase of flowers was sitting on the porch with a card. Spizz wasn't giving up. Jack didn't want to but slowly walked down the basement stairs. Miss



Volker had set out a box of chocolates and sprinkled it with rat poison. From what Jack could tell, all the rats were dead.

Miss Volker told Jack they'd sweep the rats up later, put them in a box and bury them later. But they had other work to do. She told him to put a stack of Girl Scout cookies in separate small bags and take them to the Community Center later for the old folks. In a way, she wished they'd all die so her commitment to Mrs. Roosevelt would be fulfilled. Jack reminded her that she'd have to marry Spizz then. If he was any kind of man, he'd let her off the hook on that promise. It was her hope that young people would start moving into town to begin a civic renewal.

Chapters 11 and 12 Analysis

Chapter 11

Mr. Gantos is very patriotic. Earlier he had told Jack to never go to war which was the advice of a loving father. In this chapter, he reveals his patriotic heart when he tells Jack that he was proud to have fought and that America is the greatest country on earth. Therefore, even though he doesn't want his son to go to war because it's dangerous, he supports defending his country. Those qualities have a positive impact on a young child like Jack.

Miss Volker could potentially start a panic in Norvelt with her article about an evil plague descending upon the town. Although the bikers may not be bringing on a plague, per se, they apparently will be an evil force in town since the dead biker had bought a house in Norvelt that he planned to turn into a Hell's Angels club house. It looks as though they plan to be a presence even though the biker died. It is ominous that they took his body from the freezer of the funeral parlor and blatantly stole a casket.

Chapter 12

Once again, Miss Volker expects quite a bit from her young neighbor. Asking him to clean up a bunch of rats that she poisoned seems to be quite an imposition. It is something that she should clear with his parents before expecting him to do such a dirty job. But she is a good person and she cares for him which was displayed by her attempt to cure his nosebleed problem. She definitely has civic pride which is expressed in her hope that young people move into town to bring new life to it. All things considered, she is a positive influence on the young protagonist.



Chapters 13 and 14

Chapters 13 and 14 Summary

Chapter 13

Mrs. Norbert brought home some industrial strength grease remover from the factory. She said it might remove the paint from War Chief's mane that his uncle had painted on it some time before. He was getting a lot of the paint off of War Chief's mane when his mother came in with a breakfast sandwich for him. It was Jack's 12th birthday and he liked the extra attention she always gave him on his day. Jack's dad came in and handed him a package and told him happy birthday.

Mr. Gantos stepped outside and brought in a new spade with a big bow on it. Before Jack could complain, he handed him another package. There were three cotton dish towels with Jack's name stitched on them. They had signed him up to volunteer at the Hospital in Mount Pleasant to read to patients. His last gift was a series of three tickets. One was a Get out of Jail Free ticket. It would give him 24-hours out of his room for a day. The second ticket gave him one flight on his father's plane. The last ticket was a ticket to a double feature at the Viking Drive-In. And he would be getting a weekly allowance starting with the two-dollar bill that Mr. Gantos pulled out of his wallet and gave to Jack.

Jack drove Miss Volker to church and on the way, Miss Volker told Jack that she planned to leave her car to Jack. She told him to stop taking the iron drops that his mother gave him everyday in hopes of stopping the nosebleeds. There was a condition called hemochromatosis that could develop when there was too much iron in the system. Ernest Hemingway had the condition. The condition can damage the pancreas and liver and cause severe depression.

Chapter 14

That night at home, Jack and his parents had birthday cake and ice cream and played Monopoly. Lying in bed, Jack heard motorcycle gang driving through town and then the whistle of the volunteer fire department. It woke his parents, too. Off in the distance, they could see that a building was on fire. Mr. Gantos got dressed and dashed off to help. Jack got the Japanese binoculars and saw that a house and garage were in flames. It was the house that the dead biker had bought and it was Miss Volker's sister's old house. Miss Volker had sold it to the biker! Jack was amazed that with all the commotion, he did not have a nosebleed.

Jack ran down to Miss Volker's house the next morning. There were partially burnt potted plants on the porch with a note from Spizz saying that they were all he could save. Miss Volker was upset that her sister's house was burned to the ground. They would be writing an obituary for it. She recalled how Mrs. Roosevelt stepped in to make



sure that the houses that were being built for the poor in Norvelt were real houses with separate rooms and bathrooms with tubs. Miss Volker and her sister lived there until her sister married Chester Hap. Her sister had been too old for motherhood, so they adopted a Japanese baby. Unfortunately, the government took the baby away after six months because he was of Japanese origin - an enemy of the state! The entire family was very hurt by the incident. It was a very emotional article and even brought a tear to Jack's eye. He typed it up and rushed it down to Mr. Greene.

Chapters 13 and 14 Analysis

Chapter 13

Jack's parents are poor and cannot afford elaborate gifts for their son. But they do as much as they can do. It is obvious that they love their only child and want the best for him. One gift was a gift that can keep on giving. His parents signed him up to read to the old folks at the nursing home. Jack loves to read and his parents know that his character will develop and grow by participating in these charitable acts. They are thinking about instilling good values in him and about his future as a caring and responsible adult.

Chapter 14

Losing her sister's house was as traumatic for Miss Volker as losing an old friend would have been. In fact, the house was an old friend. There were many memories that she and her family shared in the house only to have it burned down in a revengeful act by the motorcycle gang. A bit of racial bias emerges when she recounts to Jack how her sister's adopted baby was taken from the family after only six months because the baby was of Japanese heritage. One has to consider the mindset of the country during World War II to begin to understand why the government would have taken the baby away from the family. The Japanese were bitter enemies of America. They were part of the Axis powers, allies of Nazi Germany and the US was at war with them. Japan had attacked Pearl Harbor. Still, for a childless couple losing the innocent baby had to be a crushing blow.



Chapters 15 and 16

Chapters 15 and 16 Summary

Chapter 14

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Chapter 15

Jack broke in his new shovel and resumed digging out the bomb shelter. Suddenly, Mr. Spizz was standing there, taking a photograph of him. Mr. Spizz threatened to turn his father in unless he did a favor for him. He wanted Jack to run down to the hardware store and buy Spizz a can of 1080 poison. He needed to kill some vermin at the town dump. He couldn't go himself because he hurt his leg when he went after the bikers and again in the fire. Jack was grounded and couldn't leave his house. Spizz said he'd tear up the \$3 fine. Jack agreed and ran off to the store.

At the store, the clerk required Jack to sign a register in order to buy the poison. Jack saw that Mr. Huffer had recently bought some poison, too. The clerk noticed that Jack's nose was bleeding. Jack was sure his nose bled because of his guilt over disobeying his parents. Spizz told Jack not to mention the errand he ran for him to anyone, especially Miss Volker. Unfortunately, his mother knew he had left the house. She made him turn his "get out of jail free" ticket over to her. She was very disappointed in him for violating her trust in him. He just couldn't tell her the truth.



Chapters 15 and 16 Analysis

Chapter 15

Spizz is threatening to get Jack's father in big trouble with the town. He uses that and the promise to waive the \$3 gutter fine as leverage to get Jack to disobey his parents and leave the house. Jack has another nosebleed - his first since Miss Volker's treatment. The nosebleed was from the stress and guilt he felt from disobeying his parents. Unknown to his mother, his actions were taken to wipe out a fine that she didn't know about and to protect his father from being in serious trouble. Jack is being placed in adult-sized situations by adults and is forced to make adult-sized decisions.

Chapter 16

Mr. Greene is recognizing Jack's skills and offers him the opportunity to work in the newspaper office. He'll teach Jack how to operate the printing press. Jack is not spending his summer like other kids but at twelve years of age, he is advancing toward a possible career in writing and in the newspaper industry. So in that sense, he is having a more substantial summer than his peers. His rather tough summer of punishment could turn out to be real plus for Jack's future.



Chapters 17 and 18

Chapters 17 and 18 Summary

Chapter 17

Bunny bugged Jack about not being able to play. He asked his mother if he could have a free day to play baseball in exchange for the ticket for a free ride on his father's plane. She happily agreed. As soon as Bunny and Jack took off, they could hear the faint voice of Miss Volker calling for him. Bunny told him to ignore her but Jack couldn't. He asked Bunny to come with him to see what Miss Volker wanted.

Jack drove Miss Volker and Bunny to Mrs. Linga's house. Mr Huffer was already there, tending to the body. Mrs. Linga had apparently fallen in her house and died from complications of the fall. Miss Volker began dictating the obit while they sat in her car.

Just then, Jack's father drove by. He had a house hoisted up on a double-wide trailer behind his truck-tractor. He had been hired to move the house to Eleanor, West Virginia, another town sponsored by Mrs. Roosevelt. Miss Volker was very upset. No Norvelt homes were to be moved elsewhere! The Hells' Angels had tried to burn the house down but neighbors put the flames out before it did much damage. Bunny hitched a ride with Mr. Gantos. She was mad at Jack for wasting his time with Miss Volker instead of playing ball. Miss Volker decided she would set up a fund to protect Norvelt homes and announce it in the newspaper. Jack's nose began bleeding. Miss Volker took a flashlight from the glove box and looked up his nose. A bundle of capillaries had ruptured. She would fix it when they got home.

Chapter 18

Mrs. Gantos said she'd think about letting Jack work for Mr. Greene. He would be paid for his work, he told her. Bunny came by to ask if Jack could help her dad clean the embalming room at the funeral parlor. What she really wanted to do was borrow Miss Volker's car, drive to Pittsburgh and go to a Pirates game. Since Jack knew that wasn't a good idea, he brought Bunny inside and suggested they read. She wasn't interested. He couldn't leave his room until he could prove that he didn't know the rifle was loaded. She told him to call her when he figured that out. When Mr. Gantos returned home, he told Jack that he learned that it was Mr. Huffer who was buying up Norvelt houses and moving them to West Virginia. What plans did he have for the land in Norvelt his father wondered. Jack called Bunny to fine out but the minute she heard his voice, she hung up on him.

Chapters 17 and 18 Analysis

Chapter 17



Jack chose to help Miss Volker instead of playing ball with Bunny. It is apparent that he has taken on a sense of responsibility toward his elderly neighbor. Besides, he has a growing interest in writing and the history he is learning through his experience. Miss Volker is understandably upset to learn that houses are being moved out of Norvelt since she is the town historian. She is loyal to the spirit of Mrs. Roosevelt and vows to set up a fund to protect the homes of Norvelt.

Chapter 18

Mrs. Gantos should allow Jack to work for Mr. Greene. But she apparently doesn't realize what a good opportunity it is. The chapter is left with a cliffhanger: why is Mr. Huffer selling Norvelt houses and having them moved? What does he plan to do with the land where the houses had been?



Chapters 19 and 20

Chapters 19 and 20 Summary

Chapter 19

Bunny finally talked to Jack. He asked about her father buying and moving the houses. She agreed to meet. After his mother told him goodnight, he sneaked down in the basement and escaped through the old unused coal chute. He was wearing his Grim Reaper mask and robe. Bunny told Jack that her father planned to build a new housing development called Hufferville. The Angels had been starting fires but her father was able to put them out and keep it quiet. He didn't want to panic anyone since he'd be building new houses that he wanted to sell.

Suddenly, a car drove up near them and stopped. Jack and Bunny hid behind a hedge. A Hell's Angel gang member got out and grabbed a can of gasoline from his trunk. Bunny stood up and hollered at the guy. Jack threw a rock at the man who yelled that he was going to kill them. The kids took off running. At home, Jack ran and got his binoculars and stood on the bench as if he'd been there all along. His mother ran out when she heard the fire department whistle sounding. A house had been scorched but the flames had been put out and the house was not severely damaged.

Chapter 20

The next day Jack was hauling a wheelbarrow around the back of the house when a huge man drove up on a motorcycle in the driveway. Jack thought he was dead but the man asked where War Chief was. The man was a farrier who his mother hired to trim the pony's hooves. He used to be a Hell's Angels but got tired of the fighting and drinking. He grabbed his tools from his saddlebags and followed Jack to War Chief's stall.

Chapters 19 and 20 Analysis

Chapter 19

Everyone feels differently about Norvelt. Mr. Huffer has a secret agenda. He wants to sell and move old Norvelt houses, build a new housing development and call it Hufferville. The Hell's Angels want to burn it down. Miss Volker wants to preserve it historically. Jack's father wants to move to Florida. Jack and Bunny took a great risk by standing up to the gang member who was about to torch a house but their actions led to it being spared.

Chapter 20

Jack feared that the biker was there to kill him. But he learned that you can't judge a book by its cover and not all the Hell's Angels were bad guys. This man had tired of the violence and drinking and left the gang to a gentler life of grooming animals.



Chapters 21 and 22

Chapters 21 and 22 Summary

Chapter 21

Miss Volker asked Jack to drive over to Mertie-Jo's house. She kept the stock of Girl Scout cookies and Mrs. Volker wanted to buy more from her. Miss Volker gave him \$10 and he drove off on his first solo trip. Jack was nervous around Mertie-Jo because he liked her. He was frozen for a moment when she answered the door. Finally, he told her why he was there. Miss Volker wanted more thin mints. She could have all the cookies she had left. The family was moving to Pittsburgh so her father could get a good job. Jack was crushed by the news.

Mertie-Jo's father carried the cookies out to the car. Jack let out a scream like a little girl when he opened the trunk. There was a skeleton dressed like a woman in the trunk. Upon closer inspection, Mertie-Jo's father saw that the skeleton wasn't real. Embarrassed, he wished Mertie-Jo's father good luck in Pittsburgh and quickly left. After stacking up the cookies in the kitchen, Mr. Huffer called to tell Miss Volker that Mrs. Hamsby had died. Jack drove over to Mr. Huffer's and got the paperwork for Miss Volker. Mrs. Hamsby had apparently died of natural causes.

Miss Volker dictated the obit for Mrs. Hamsby who she really liked. It was an emotional experience for her. Mrs. Hamsby was a lover of history, too, and had saved every lost letter that ended up in the undeliverable bin at the Norvelt post office. She knew they were all part of history. She died on August 1st. On August 1, 1944, Anne Frank's letters were discovered. She was a young heroine and victim of war who can never be forgotten. Jack ran the obit down to Mr. Greene. He said someone should investigate the deaths of the old ladies.

Chapter 22

Jack's father finished putting the plane together. His mother was adamant that Jack couldn't take a ride in it. He volunteered to be his father's ground crew. His father put both hands on the wooden propellers and started the engine then got into the cockpit. Jack's job was to crawl under the plane and remove the blocks of wood from in front of the wheels. Jack rolled quickly out of the way after he removed the blocks. His father disappeared down the runway in a cloud of thick dust. Suddenly, he reappeared out of nowhere and flew at a low distance over the house. His mother was angry and scared. It was dangerous!

Jack was thrilled. He watched as his father flew over houses and threw first one then another shoe at empty houses. He was pretending to throw bombs at them. Soon his father returned and landed. Miss Volker called and asked Jack what in the world his father was doing. He made Mrs. Vinyl have quite a spell. Jack told her that his father



wanted to fly out of town and never come back. His piece of the American pie was too thin in Norvelt. But his mother wanted to stay. Miss Volker expressed the hope that his father listens to his mother.

Chapters 21 and 22 Analysis

Chapter 21

Mr. Greene is suspicious over the rash of deaths of the town's old ladies. Perhaps because he's an old newspaper man, he has the curiosity of a reporter. He thinks the deaths should be investigated. But who would have a motive to kill these old ladies? Miss Volker wants to be the last original resident standing and she's growing old and weary and is challenged by her arthritis. But she would never kill anyone. She can't get around and she's a nurse and had devoted her life to helping and caring for people. The Hell's Angels don't want to kill the old ladies, they want to kill everyone. Mr. Huffer does want to get rid of the old houses to make way for his new settlement. If the old ladies died, their houses would be abandoned and for sale. He did buy rat poison, too. Mr. Spizz thinks that he and Miss Volker will marry after the other old ladies are dead so he has a motive. He also just bought rat poison. Was it really for the rats?

Chapter 22

The immature Mr. Gantos is placing his son in danger by having him crawl under an idling airplane to remove the wood blocks from its wheels. Mrs. Gantos didn't put a stop to it either. Seems as though they think of their son as more mature than he is and capable. It's fine that they think he is capable but his is only twelve years old.



Chapters 23 and 24

Chapters 23 and 24 Summary

Chapter 23

Miss Volker was not able to reach Mrs. Vinyl. Jack was afraid that maybe his father did give her a heart attack when he dive-bombed the area. But Miss Volker had talked to her after that. They needed to drive over and check on her. Jack asked her about the skeleton in the trunk. It had belonged to her sister. She used it for a drawing model. Mr. Huffer was already at Miss Vinyl's and told Miss Volker that Mrs. Vinyl was dead.

Miss Volker asked Mr. Huffer how he knew she was dead. Spizz had stopped by to collect newspaper money from Mrs. Vinyl and found her. Miss Volker complained about the houses being moved to West Virginia. Times change, Mr. Huffer told her. History lasts forever, she responded. Jack and Miss Volker returned to her house and began writing the obit. The date was August 6th which was the day when the first atomic bomb was dropped on the city of Hiroshima. Jack ran the obit to Mr. Greene.

Chapter 24

Mrs. Bloodgood died. Miss Volker told Jack that Mrs. Bloodgood had a part in naming the town. The town was originally named Westmoreland Homesteads. When the new homes were originally built, a black couple named White applied for one of the houses. Mrs. Bloodgood didn't want a black family in the community and organized the white people against the black family. The White's application was rejected but Mrs. White wrote a letter to President and Mrs. Roosevelt and appealed to them. They made sure that the Whites got one of the houses. No one liked the Westmoreland name so the town held a contest to rename it. Mrs. White suggested "Norvelt" taking "nor" from Eleanor and "velt" from Roosevelt and won the contest. As far as the history of the date, the land that Norvelt was built on was the old Hurst farm. The Hurst family were slave owners. Ironically, Mrs. White was a direct descendent of some of the Hurst slaves and now lived on the land as a homeowner.

Jack finished typing up the obit and took Miss Volker's car to Mr. Greene's. On the way, he was stopped by Spizz who told Jack to turn around and take the car back to Miss Volker's house and to do his errand on foot. He heard that Mr. Greene was planning on calling the sheriff to launch an investigation. Only Mrs. Droggie was left. He told him.

Chapters 23 and 24 Analysis

Chapter 23

Everyone in Norvelt is becoming increasingly nervous about all the murders in town. Jack was afraid that his father's dive-bombing may have caused the latest death. Spizz



seems to be everywhere. His claim that he just stopped by to collect newspaper money and found her dead is suspicious. Was it a coincidence? When Miss Volker decides cause of death, no autopsies are conducted. Therefore, if they were poisoned, no one will ever know. Mr. Gantos is upset that one of Miss Volker's obits included history about World War II. He didn't need any reminders. His experience in war seems to have left a life-long mark on him.

Chapter 24

Mr. Greene is serious about launching an investigation into all the murders. Mrs. Droggie is the only old lady left other than Miss Volker. While Miss Volker will feel satisfied that she kept her commitment to Mrs. Roosevelt that she would see the original residents to their graves, surely the thought has struck her that she could be next. She is not immortal. Miss Volker has been sprinkling the chocolates that Spizz brings by with rat poison and feeding them to the vermin. She has never eaten any of the chocolates. Perhaps the candy was laced with poison.



Chapters 25 and 26

Chapters 25 and 26 Summary

Chapter 25

Mr. Greene wrote an editorial the next day announcing that an investigation into the deaths of the old ladies had been launched. Miss Volker was upset. She was going to write a letter to Greene and straighten him out. She wrote that everyone should accept the death of a few old ladies. The focus should be on keeping the town ALIVE. The history of Norvelt must be reserved.

Mrs. Gantos was afraid her dinners somehow killed the old ladies. Jack and Mr. Gantos teased her about going to jail. Mrs. Gantos had a gut feeling there was something to the murder talk. Mr. Gantos still wanted to move. He pointed out that they could sell their house to Mr. Huffer. That night in bed, Jack thought about whether the old women were murdered. Who would have killed them? Mr. Huffer? Mr. Spizz? Then he had a horrible thought. He had bought the rat poison for Spizz. There was no proof that Spizz had bought the rat poison but there was proof that he had. Would he be a murder suspect?

Chapter 26

After church on Sunday, Miss Volker gave Jack another treatment for his nose. Miss Volker got a call that Mrs. Droggie was found dead. When they left there was a box of candy sitting by the door. The note Spizz left reminded Miss Volker that they were the last two Norvelters.

When Jack and Miss Volker pulled into Mrs. Droggie's driveway, Spizz was sitting there on his tricycle with two county cops. Mr. Huffer was standing there, too. She reminded everyone that it was her jurisdiction. Miss Volker concluded that death was from natural causes. The two state troopers stepped forward after the exam and took custody of the body. A complete autopsy would be conducted. Miss Volker told them they were wasting taxpayer's money.

When they got back to Miss Volker's, they wrote her obit. She thought of an out with Spizz. The agreement was that all the original Norvelters had to die before she'd marry him which meant she had to die, too. Spizz was soon at her door and Jack was on his way to take the obit to Mr. Greene. He told Jack that they would soon know if the ladies had been murdered. He bet that it was Miss Volker who killed them. Jack took his \$2 bill out and bet that it wasn't.

Miss Volker was arrested for the murders of the old ladies. Mrs. Droggie was full of rat poison. Jack knew that she was innocent. Jack accused Spizz of being the real murderer. He brought them all meals and he made Jack buy the rat poison for him. The police were notified that Jack bought the rat poison for Miss Volker. Jack knew that Spizz was lying.



Mr. Gantos was going to fly to Florida to look for a job. He told Jack to take care of his mother while he was away. Mr. Gantos promised to meet Jack out of his mother's sight and take him for a plane ride before he left.

Chapters 25 and 26 Analysis

Chapter 25

Miss Volker is upset that the police are going to look into the deaths of the women. Perhaps she is insulted that they don't take her word on the causes of the deaths. Jack fears that even he could be a murder suspect. Spizz doesn't seem bright but perhaps he manipulated Jack into getting his rat poison for him so that his name wouldn't appear on the register.

Chapter 26

Mr. Greene launched an investigation into the suspicious deaths of the women. The official autopsy determined the exact cause of death of the latest victim, Mrs. Droggie. Miss Volker was arrested for the murder of Mrs. Droggie after the autopsy revealed that she was filled with rat poison. But Miss Volker had no motive and several other people had recently bought rat poison including Mr. Spizz. But at least the authorities know that homicide was involved in the passing of the old ladies. Jack knows that Spizz lied when he said the authorities learned that Jack had purchased rat poison for Miss Volker but not for him.



Chapters 27 and 28

Chapters 27 and 28 Summary

Chapter 27

Jack's mother went to gather some raspberries. A short time later, he heard her hollering for him. A deer that had been shot in the neck bounded out of the wooded area. Right behind the deer was his mother who told Jack to get the rifle. He saw a man in camouflage and wearing a black ski mask behind his mother pointing his rifle at the deer. He ran to get the Japanese rifle. All Jack could find was the Japanese sword. He ran and gave his mother the sword who ordered the man to leave. It was his kill, he told her. She recognized the voice. It was her crazy brother, Will. He had stolen the Japanese rifle to go hunting.

With all that commotion, Mrs. Gantos wondered why Jack's nose wasn't bleeding. He told her that Miss Volker had treated it. He was sorry that the beautiful deer had died. His mother told him not to tell his father about the incident.

Chapter 28

In the style of Miss Volker, Jack wrote an original obit for the deer. His father came home and butchered the deer. He found the bullet in the deer's neck and knew that Jack hadn't known that the Japanese gun was loaded when he fired it. Spizz called, and said that Miss Volker was tied up in her basement. Jack came and released her. Spizz had confessed to Miss Volker that he killed all the women. He wanted to get them out of the way so she would marry him. He took off in her car.

Jack helped her upstairs. She told him to call Mr. Greene to tell him that he was right about the women being murdered. Her days as medical examiner were over she concluded. She was hungry, thirsty and tired. She wanted to take a nap before they called the police.

Back at home, Mr. Gantos told Jack since he was ungrounded, he could go play baseball. First he ran the deer obit to Mr. Greene and collected his winnings on their bet. Jack got a ride in his dad's plane. They dropped water balloons on the houses below. They decided to buzz the ball field. Bunny would think it was funny. They had fun but he was afraid his mother would find out and he'd be grounded again. He thought of Miss Volker and how it wasn't smart to ignore history.

Chapters 27 and 28 Analysis

Chapter 27



Mrs. Gantos' crazy brother had stolen the Japanese rifle to use for hunting deer. Finally, Jack has proof that he didn't know the gun was loaded since his uncle had been using the rifle without anyone knowing it. Jack will finally be freed from his summer-long grounding.

Chapter 28

After Spizz confessed to Miss Volker that he was the murderer, he apparently cared too much for her to kill her. Instead, he took off in her car and was on the lam. He showed that he still cared for Miss Volker by calling Jack and telling him to go free her.

Against his mother's orders, Jack takes a ride in his father's plane. He had fun on the crazy ride with his father but he was worried. If his mother found out, he'd be grounded again. He learned from Miss Volker that history is important.



Characters

Jack Gantos

Jack Gantos is twelve years old and lived with his mother and father in a small town called Norvelt, located in Pennsylvania. Jack had just begun his summer break from school when he made a very unwise move. One night, he was watching the war movie playing at the near-by drive-in screen. He became so enthralled that he decided to be part of it. He grabbed an old Japanese military rifle and when an enemy emerged from behind a bush, he fired. He didn't know the gun was loaded. The fire power knocked him off the bench he was standing on. His mother was scared to death but her fear quickly turned into anger. Jack was grounded for the entire summer.

The only time Jack would be allowed to leave his house was to help his elderly neighbor, Miss Volker, who had requested his assistance. Miss Volker was the town's medical examiner, historian and official obituary writer. Her hands had become crippled with arthritis and she could not use the typewriter any longer. She needed Jack to type up her obits, which she would dictate to him.

Jack loved history and therefore had a lot in common with Miss Volker, despite their age difference. Jack became a loyal assistant to Miss Volker over the summer and began to feel a responsibility and loyalty to her. He learned a lot, got into many scrapes that he could never have imagined and even found himself right in the middle of a murder mystery. Jack had quite a summer and one that he would not have had playing baseball and hanging out with his friends.

Miss Volker

Miss Volker is Jack Gantos' elderly neighbor. They live in a small town in Pennsylvania named Norvelt. Miss Volker is a determined and principled woman who began as the town nurse and evolved into becoming its medical examiner, historian and official obituary writer. As a young woman, Miss Volker was hired by no less than Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt to be the town nurse. Mrs. Roosevelt had founded the small town which consisted of low-incoming housing for the poor. Miss Volker made a commitment to Mrs. Roosevelt that she would see the original residents of Norvelt through to their graves. She took that vow to heart and even as an elderly woman struck with debilitating arthritis, she would not renege on her promise.

Due to her crippled hands, Miss Volker could no longer type. She recruited her young neighbor, Jack Gantos, to help her write obituaries for the town newspaper. She taught him the fundamentals of typing on her old Royal typewriter and dictated the lengthy obituaries that were part biographical and part historical as he took notes. As medical examiner, Miss Volker was right on the scene when one of the original Norvelters, all old ladies like herself, passed away. Due to their advanced ages, she deemed the cause of



death in most of the cases to be from natural causes. When someone grew suspicious about the frequency of these deaths, an official autopsy showed that the latest victim had died from rat poisoning.

Miss Volker was erroneously arrested for murder but her high spiritedness remained in tact. Once the real murderer confessed, she returned undaunted to her life of dedication to her town and to its residents.

Mr. Gantos

Mr. Gantos is a truck driver who works out of town most of the time. He is afraid of a Russian Commie attack and builds a runway and bomb shelter in preparation for what he thinks is an inevitable event.

Mrs. Gantos

Mrs. Gantos is very upset with Jack when he fires a loaded rifle. His punishment is being grounded for the entire summer. She also becomes very upset when Jack mows down her cornfield.

Mr. Spizz

Mr. Spizz runs the Roosevelt Community Center. He is a strange fellow who rides a large tricycle. He has a crush on Miss Volker, and is always leaving candy and flowers on her porch.

Mr. Greene

Mrs. Greene is the publisher of Norvelt's town newspaper. He becomes suspicious of the many deaths of the town's old ladies and his editorial sparks an investigation into them.

Eleanor Roosevelt

Eleanor Roosevelt was the founder of Norvelt, a low-income community. It was her belief that every family had a right to a nice and comfortable house. And it was on that belief that she designed Norvelt and other towns like it.

Bunny Huffer

Bunny Huffer was Jack's best friend. She was a small, short girl but she was bold and mighty. She played baseball on an even par with the best of the boys.



Mr. Huffer

Bunny's father, Mr. Huffer, runs the town's mortuary. He is buying and moving old Norvelt homes so that he could build new houses in a development that he planned to call, "Hufferville."

Mrs. White

Mrs. White and her family were the only black people among the original residents of Norvelt. The white families tried to stop the White family from moving in, but Mrs. Roosevelt saw that her application was approved. Mrs. White won a contest to name the town.



Objects/Places

Norvelt, Pennsylvania

The story of "Dead End in Norvelt" takes place in Norvelt, Pennsylvania. It was a small town that consisted of low-income housing and was founded by Eleanor Roosevelt who believed that every family was entitled to an attractive, comfortable home.

Mr. Gantos' War Souvenirs

Mr. Gantos served in the Marines during World War II. He was stationed in the Pacific and brought home Japanese military souvenirs including a rifle, a sword and binoculars.

Roosevelt Community Center

Mr. Spizz ran the Roosevelt Community Center which was charged with helping the people of Norvelt in many ways including delivering meals to the needy and elderly.

Rat Poison

Vermin were a problem in Norvelt and a number of residents purchased rat poison in an effort to control the rat and mice population. Rat poison also figured in the deaths of some of the elderly residents.

Chocolates and Flowers

Mr. Spizz often left chocolates and flowers on Miss Volker's porch in hopes of wooing her. She had promised to marry him once all the original residents had died off.

Mrs. Gantos' Cornfield

Mrs. Gantos raised corn on a small area of the Gantos property. Mr. Gantos made Jack mow the cornfield down so he could use the space for his purposes.

Mr. Gantos' Airplane

Mr. Gantos won an old airplane in a card game. He was determined to get it running so that he and his family could escape when the Russian Commies attacked.



The Gantos Landing Strip

Mr. Gantos used his wife's mowed down cornfield to build a landing strip for his plane and a bomb shelter in preparation for an attack by the Russians which he thought was inevitable.

Hufferville

The old ladies that died were immediately taken to Huffer Mortuary. Mr. Huffer was buying up old Norvelt homes and moving them out of town in hopes of constructing a new home development that he planned to call Hufferville.

Norvelt Newspaper

Jack and Miss Volker wrote obituaries for the Norvelt Newspaper. Miss Volker also wrote a daily column for the newspaper which was entitled, "This Day in History."



Themes

Loyalty

A strong theme that emerges in "Dead End in Norvelt" is a sense of loyalty that ranges from young Jack Gantos' loyalty to each of his parents, who at times pit him against each other to his loyalty to a new-found and unexpected friend. For an eleven-year-old, Jack is put in some adult-sized situations by none other than his parents. The cowardly Mr. Gantos orders Jack to mow down his mother's cornfield so he can build a landing strip for his plane. Jack wants to obey his father but knows that his mother will be crushed. He respects both of his parents but his father had placed him in an impossible situation. Although he's a smart kid and knows that his father was not fair to him, his loyalty to his father stays in tact. Jack has a wisdom and understanding beyond his young years. Although he doesn't vocalize it, he realizes that his father is immature and has done his best in a life that was not easy or privileged by any stretch of the imagination.

Of course, Jack is just as loyal to his mother. He respects her decision to ground him for the entire summer although he thinks that the punishment is excessive and unfair. When certain things occur, Mrs. Gantos tells Jack to not dare tell his father. He always respects her wishes even though he may privately question them.

Jack learns a new kind of loyalty through his association with his elderly relative, Miss Volker. There is no one more loyal to the town of Norvelt and its history than Miss Volker. Understanding that Miss Volker is disabled and immobilized by old age and arthritis, Jack develops a protective attitude and responsibility toward her. When he has the chance to be excused from his summer-long grounding for one day to play baseball, his loyalty to his elderly neighbor causes him to abandon his day of fun on behalf of Miss Volker who needs him.

Commitment

A sense of commitment is a major theme that emerges from "Dead End in Norvelt". The young protagonist, Jack Gantos, is first introduced as a typical eleven-year-old whose main commitment in life is playing baseball and having as much as the law allows on his summer break. But Jack meets a bump along that road when his carefree life intersects with an elderly neighbor who demonstrates to him what true commitment is. Through her own life and values, Miss Volker teaches Jack that keeping one's word is an important to the one who makes the promise as it is to those who one makes the promise to.

Miss Volker was one of the original residents of the small town of Norvelt, Pennsylvania. Norvelt was a town that was established by Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt. It was a town designed with nice houses for people who were poor or down on their luck. Mrs.



Roosevelt was the living embodiment of life-long commitment to those less fortunate than she. It was her belief that everyone should have a nice house to be proud of. It was Mrs. Roosevelt who hired Miss Volker as the head nurse for the town. At that time a young woman, Miss Volker promised Mrs. Roosevelt that she would care for the original Norvelters and "see them through to their graves."

As Miss Volker grew elderly and riddled with arthritis, most people would have given her a pass on a commitment made decades before but Miss Volker remained dedicated to the original residents and to her vow to Eleanor Roosevelt. Miss Volker took on the mantle of town historian as well as medical examiner. She was just as devoted to keeping the spirit and history of Norvelt alive as she was to the care of its now elderly original residents. When she learned that some of the original old houses were being moved out of town to make way for more modern homes, she made immediate plans to establish a fund to keep the old houses of Norvelt in tact.

Miss Volker wasn't living in the past. Rather, she was living up to a commitment she made to a benevolent person and to an ideal that should never end.

The Importance of History

The author's love of history shines through in many ways in this story. Historical information and events are intertwined throughout the book and in a variety of ways. The young protagonist, Jack, is an avid reader. He is naturally attracted to history perhaps partly because his father was part of a historic event. Mr. Gantos served as a Marine during World War II. He was part of the Pacific Front and fought in Japan. Jack loves the souvenirs that his father brought home from Japan - a military rifle, binoculars and even a dented canteen.

Jack reads about the Revolutionary War and about Francisco Pizarro and his conquest of the Incas in Peru. He gets lost in the story of President John Kennedy and the PT-109. He is enthralled with the heroic young man who later became the US President. The PT-109 incident took place in the Solomon Islands which was where Mr. Gantos served. Jack asks his father if he knew John Kennedy because they served together. His father said he didn't know most of the soldiers he served with but one thing was for sure, they all served on the winning side and defended the greatest country on earth.

When Jack is thrown together with the town historian, neighbor Miss Volker, his love and appreciation for history is only bolstered by the detailed stories she weaves into the obituaries she writes. For example, Mrs. Hamsby died on August 1st and on the same day in 1944, Anne Frank's letters were discovered. Mrs. Hamsby had been a lover of history, too, and had saved every lost letter that ended up in the undeliverable pin at the Norvelt post office. She knew they were all part of history - the day and the importance of letters connected the two people through time. Another murder victim died on the same day that Antony and Cleopatra died 2,000 years before. Miss Volker described Antony as ungallant for not falling on his sword for his love.

Jack learns about the power of the written word and the importance of history and not ignoring it during an unusual though eventful summer break during which he hung out with an elderly arthritic neighbor. In many ways it was much more rewarding than playing baseball everyday.

Style

Point of View

"Dead End in Norvelt" by Jack Gantos is told in the first person from the perspective of the story's young protagonist, also named Jack Gantos. The author and the protagonist having the same name would make one tend to believe that some of the story is based on real events in the author's life, while others are surely from his creative imagination. Writing the story from the point of view of the eleven-year-old child gives the readers insight into how a youngster deals with some very adult situations with which he is burdened.

Jack Gantos is a well-known writer and the author of the "Joey Pigza" series, the Jack Henry collection and many other works. Jack Gantos is the recipient of the 2010 ALAN award for his outstanding achievements in adolescent literature. Gantos is also a former winner of the Newbery Honor and was a national Book Award Finalist.

The readers can be assured that though "Dead End in Norvelt" is a work of fiction, the town itself is a real location. Norvelt, Pennsylvania, was where Jack was born and raised.

Setting

"Dead End in Norvelt" takes place, quite appropriately, in Norvelt, Pennsylvania. The story takes place in the early 1960s. The town was founded decades before by Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt. It was her belief that everyone should be entitled to a nice home to live in. She designed this town and others like it with attractive, appealing homes intended for the poor and down on their luck.

As the story unfolds in the 1960s, only a handful of the original Norvelters are alive and they are only the old women. The men had died off at much earlier ages because they had worked in mines and developed deadly black lung. The original name of the town was Westmoreland Homesteads but no one liked the name. Mrs. Roosevelt held a contest for a new name. One of the residents, Mrs. White, combined "nor" from "Eleanor" and "velt" from "Roosevelt" and won the competition.

The current residents aren't as enthralled with the town as the original homeowners were. Mr. Gantos wants to leave town and move to Florida. Another man is leaving town for a better job in Pittsburgh. Mr. Huffer who operates the town's mortuary wants to move the old houses out and build new ones.

The young protagonist, Jack Gantos, lives next door to Miss Volker who is the town medical examiner, historian and official obituary writer. She recruits him to help her during his summer break. Jack learns to see what he had viewed as a small dreary town as an important part of history thanks to his association with Miss Volker.



Language and Meaning

"Dead End in Norvelt" by Jack Gantos is written as a serious story, but is peppered with a light comedic touch throughout. The story takes place in the early 1960s in a small town in Pennsylvania called Norvelt. Some racism is evoked about the Japanese with the use of a few politically incorrect terms. But these terms were probably totally acceptable in the 1960s. The evidence of the Red Scare that existed during that era is found in references to Russian Commies, bomb shelters and a reference to Eleanor Roosevelt as a rich Commie lady.

There is an interesting account of how the town, of Norvelt which was founded by Mrs. Roosevelt got its name. The community was originally named, "Westmoreland Homesteads," a name which no one liked. Mrs. Roosevelt held a contest among the residents and Mrs. White won with the suggestion of taking "nor" from "Eleanor" and "velt" from "Roosevelt."

There is some interesting irony regarding Mrs. White, one of the original residents of Norvelt. The community was designed by Mrs. Roosevelt for low-income families. Her belief was that every family had a right to a nice and comfortable home. Mrs. White applied for a home but was rejected when the other homeowners campaigned against her because she was black. She wrote a letter to President and Mrs. Roosevelt appealing her rejection and they saw to it that her application was approved and she was able to secure one of the houses for her family. The original owner of the land used for the community was the Hurst family who were slave owners. Ironically, Mrs. White was a descendent of some of the slaves owned by the Hurst family but had become a landowner of a portion of that same land.

The title itself, "Dead End in Norvelt" has a double meaning. Many of the families felt there was no promise of a bright future in Norvelt and therefore that it was a "dead end." Some of the residents of the town were murdered which brought new meaning to the term, "dead end."

Structure

"Dead End in Norvelt" by Jack Gantos is separated into twenty-eight chapters over its 348 pages. The story covers a time span of approximately three months. It takes place in the summer when the young protagonist, Jack Gantos, is on school break. The story begins with Jack firing a loaded rifle. He didn't know it was loaded but he could have killed someone so Jack is grounded for the summer. All he will be allowed to do is chores around the house and help an elderly neighbor, Miss Volker, who asked for his assistance.

The character arc of the protagonist begins with a naïve youngster who just wants to play baseball. Once he is forced to help his neighbor who is the town's medical examiner, historian and official obituary writer, Jack develops a sense of responsibility toward elderly people and toward the history of the town and of history in general.



Already an avid reader, he gains an understanding of the power of the written word from his experience.

Miss Volker, as a life-long historian, writes the obituaries couched in the historical events that occurred on that day but in different years. By inserting historical events, the book becomes much more than the tale of a grounded kid who helps out an arthritic neighbor who can no longer type or drive a car. Jack turns twelve during the story, but by its end he has a respect for history from his association with Miss Volker that many people don't gain in a lifetime.



Quotes

"Helping others is a far greater reward than doing it for money." (Chapter 1, page 5)

"Something had to be wrong with me, but one really good advantage about being dirt-poor is that you can't afford to go to the doctor and get bad news." (Chapter 1, page 9)

"I guess you could say the obits are the honey to attract readers." (Chapter 2, page 32)

"Don't ever go to war. Even if you win, the battle is never over inside you." Chapter 6, page 87)

"Be suspicious of history that is written by the conquerors." (Chapter 7, page 90)

"You should be euthanized like a garden pest." (Chapter 10, page 135)

"Miss Volker cares, and she said he has brought a death plague into this town and that people better beware or they'll drop dead." (Chapter 10, page 145)

"'We always got three gifts,' Mom explained. 'they were good, better, and best. A good gift was always something useful, so your dad and I each got you something useful.'" (Chapter 13, page 174)

"But maybe what Mom said is right - burning something down is the most terrifying thing you can do because burning a house down to the ground is the same as putting a person six feet under." (Chapter 14, page 190)

"As my dad says, 'You have to die sometime, so why not while you are having fun?'" (Chapter 18, page 237)

"When the sun goes down each day it turns its back on the present and steps into the past, but it is never dead. History is a for of nature, like the mountains and sea and sky." (Chapter 21, page 259)

"On the morning of August 17, Jack Gantos was released from being grounded by his parents. But stay tuned because on August 18 he might be grounded all over again - unless his remembers his history!" (Chapter 28, page 341)



Topics for Discussion

What part does history play in the story "Dead End in Norvelt?"

What role did Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt play in this story?

How did Norvelt get its name? Who named it?

Jack was just a twelve-year-old boy. How did adults exploit him? What tasks was he given that were inappropriate for a young boy?

How did the author structure the plot to throw suspicion on various characters about the deaths of the old ladies?

Why was Mr. Green's role important? What talents and abilities did he see in Jack and what opportunity did he offer him?

What valuable lessons did Jack learn from Miss Volker? Why did she take such an interest in him?