

The Dead and the Gone Study Guide

The Dead and the Gone by Susan Beth Pfeffer

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Plot Summary

"The Dead and the Gone" is a dark and frightening tale about the Earth following a catastrophe that leaves the world torn and society fragmented. It is a story of faith, hope, desperation, and sacrifice that follows one family, the Morales, through their trials and tribulations. They are led through the chaos by Alex Morales, a seventeen-year-old young man who discovers through the novel that he is stronger than he realized, and that his faith, along with his family, can survive.

"The Dead and the Gone" is the story of the Morales family's struggles following the catastrophic asteroid collision with the moon that causes massive flooding, tsunamis, earthquakes, volcanoes, and other natural disasters that leave the world completely unstable. Alex Morales is seventeen years old when the disaster happens and his mother and father are both gone at the time of the event and continue to be missing throughout the novel. Alex has two younger sisters, religious fourteen-year-old Briana, and spoiled twelve-year-old Julie, who become his wards. All three siblings are religious, but Briana takes her faith to a new level as she aspires to become a nun. Julie, on the other hand, begins the novel as a bratty child who cares little for others. Alex believes strongly in God, but struggles as his world continues to collapse around him. Through the course of the novel, Alex learns to fend for his family by any means, including stealing from the ever increasing dead with his new friend, Kevin Daley. The items they steal are sold to Harvey, a black market profiteer, in exchange for food and other items necessary to survive.

When Brianna is sent to a convent farm in the country, Alex and Julie are left to fend for themselves and learn to live with one another in harmony. Julie slowly begins to understand serving the family, and Alex feels tenderness for his sister. But when volcanic ash begins to cover the sun and fill the air, Brianna returns, having developed severe asthma. Alex is again forced to care for three, which now includes an ill sister. Using Kevin's resources combined with his own and those of his wealthy friends, Alex is able to manage for a period of time. When Kevin is killed and Brianna dies after being trapped in an elevator, Alex is near his end. However, as Alex finds throughout the novel, when he turns to his faith and the church, there is hope as Father Mulrooney and Sister Rita devise a plan to carry both Alex and Julie to safety. While "The Dead and the Gone" is not a happy novel, it is a novel about the power of family, faith, friendships, and courage. It is a lesson in humility as well as thankfulness for one's life, regardless of circumstances.



Chapter One and Chapter Two

Chapter One and Chapter Two Summary

"Dead and the Gone" is the story of one family, the Morales', as they struggle to overcome obstacles in the new world following a catastrophic asteroid collision with the moon. Amidst food shortages, plague, blackouts, earthquakes, volcanoes, and tsunamis, young Alex Morales must persevere to save his younger sisters, and himself. It is a story of hope, despair, devastation, and unrelenting faith.

In Chapter One, seventeen-year-old Alex Morales finishes his shift at the local pizza parlor and hurries home, thinking of his chances of getting into an Ivy League school, and of his school nemesis, Chris Flynn, who comes from a well to do family. On his way, Alex hears and sees several emergency vehicles and wonders what has happened. When he reaches home, this concern deepens as the power and cable are both out, and his mother has been called into her job at the hospital for a large emergency. Alex's fifteen-year-old younger sister, Briana, is worried, but prays for comfort, whereas twelve-year-old Julie merely whines about the heat. Alex, playing the father figure, advises the girls to go to bed. After his own prayers, Alex goes to sleep, thinking of the devotion of his younger sister, and the likelihood she could become a nun.

Alex is awoken by his uncle Jimmy who needs assistance clearing out the food from his bodega. As Alex and Julie ride with him to the store, he explains that an asteroid has hit the moon, causing it to come closer to the earth. As a result, tsunamis, earthquakes, volcanoes, and other major disasters are occurring on a massive basis worldwide. At the store, Julie and Alex help to load the food for Jimmy and his family. In payment, Jimmy allows them to pack multiple sacks for their own family. While Alex and Jimmy take the food to Jimmy's home, Julie is left behind at the store, and when the men return, she reports she heard gunfire in the streets. Returning home, Briana reports she thinks Papi called from Puerto Rico, but can't be sure as there was too much static on the line. After a short breakfast and shower, Carlos, the sibling's older brother calls. In the military, Carlos reports he is being shipped out, and although he doesn't know where, he knows it will be some time before he can call home again. Alex reassures his sisters that everything will be fine, but after walking to his school to find it closed, Alex wonders if he is right. When he reaches the subway, he discovers they are flooded, and as he walks home, he thinks about his mother traveling by subway to get to work the previous night. Before returning to bed, Alex prays for his family.

In Chapter Two the following morning, Alex wakes to find the power is back on. When he turns on the television, however, he is assaulted by the news of horrific loss of life, horrible conditions, and dangerous predictions for the future. Suddenly Alex is aware of the true scope of the disaster, and he begins to panic when he hears of those killed when the subways flooded. He thinks again of his mother and goes to call her, but the phones are dead. He swallows his fear by remembering he is, momentarily, responsible for his two younger sisters until his parents or Carlos return.



Unable to cope simply sitting in the apartment, Alex walks to St. Margaret's, where the family attends Mass each week. He is relieved to find it populated, and Father Franco gives several announcements about local transportation, curfew, power, school, and telephone services. Alex prays again for strength and guidance, as well as for the safe return of those lost. On returning home, Alex goes through the house to find any available cash, and goes through his father's office, as well, where he finds keys to a few other apartments along with his father's beer. On Saturday, Alex again goes to the church for the latest information. He quickly sees the bulletin board is covered in notices, one of which is a listing of the dead. He does not see his mother's name, but several other church members note they will pray for Alex and his family. He also finds schools will reopen on Tuesday, much to his relief. Not wanting to return home immediately, Alex walks to the pizza parlor and finds Joey, the owner, at the office. Joey laments he is closing, as he has no power and no food to make pizzas. He also reminds Alex that the tsunamis and earthquakes will not subside, and that New York will likely become a wasteland. He settles Alex's wages with him and the two part ways.

At Mass the following day, Julie and Briana both find their friends, and Alex is relieved they spend the day with other families. He chooses to wander the streets until he finds an open hardware store, where the clerk charges him thirty dollars for batteries, blaming supply and demand for the price hike. Back at home, he puts the batteries in the radio, and hears a hotline for those missing family members. Realizing the phones must be working, Alex calls the hospital, but is told the receptionist cannot help him. Alex calls Jimmy to see if he or his wife have heard from Mami, but they have not. Alex refuses Jimmy's offer to send the girls to he and his wife to care for, as Alex believes they will be better at home with him. Knowing he cannot put it off, Alex calls the hotline for families of the missing. He is informed there will be a bus to take family members to Yankee Stadium, where the bodies of women who are unidentified are being held. Alex reluctantly makes a reservation for the bus.

The following day, Alex again ventures to St. Margaret's, where he meets with Father Franco, and asks if the diocese knows anything about Puerto Rico. Franco calls in, and learns Puerto Rico was badly hit and communications are sketchy at best. As he leaves, he tries to pray for the souls who have perished, but finds the words have little meaning.

Chapter One and Chapter Two Analysis

Chapter One introduces the three primary characters of the novel, those of Alex, Briana, and Julie Morales. From the very beginning it is clear Alex is a responsible, bright, family oriented, faithful young man with a bright future and a bright outlook. His conversation with the patron in the pizza parlor, his job, his school choices and his thoughts about school are indicative of a highly organized, driven young adult. He is sincere and loving to his sisters and proud of his heritage. Unlike many seventeen year olds, Alex thinks little of himself, but thinks only of his family and prays to God for his strength.



It is equally clear that Julie is less self sacrificing. Julie is younger, and thus far less mature, and this shows in her actions. She cares little for others, and her attitude is one of self preservation. She loves her siblings, and her parents, but has a privileged attitude. One already can see Julie will have many challenges in her life in the future if she does not learn to change her behaviors. At the same time, her determination and strength do suggest she is a powerful force, when she needs to be.

Briana is clearly the devout sister. While Alex does pray often in this first section, he also shows he places high value in the ability of mankind. Briana, for her part, seems content to pray for God to assist. She does help the family, and cares for her sister and brother, but her faith seems more important to her than anything. This suggests a difficult time ahead for her, as well, as the earth falls apart, and her own small world begins to deteriorate.

Chapter One also introduces several concepts that are vital to the storyline. First, even in this first chapter there are suggestions that Mami and Papi are not coming home. The knowledge that tsunamis have struck all major coastlines suggests Puerto Rico would have suffered. The promise of a call from father only suggests he is still alive, but without proof, this is difficult to count on. The knowledge that the subways have flooded, combined with the knowledge that Mami took the subway and has not contacted her family, strongly suggests she is in trouble. Even Carlos' call suggests Alex and his siblings are on their own as it is clear he too is not returning any time soon. Alex's prayers at this point show him to be faithful and responsible, which strongly foreshadows Alex's continued role as responsible adult throughout the book.

Uncle Jimmy's need for assistance in this chapter also provides some back story for the novel. His account of what has happened helps explain to the reader why everyone is panicking, and why Alex and his family are in so much danger. His food provisions foreshadow the need for food later in the novel, and the gunshots Julie hears while at the bodega show that society is rapidly deteriorating. Julie's character is fleshed out a bit here, as she shows her fieriness and her determination in this section.

Chapter Two further shows the scope of the disaster as Alex listens to the radio and hears the damage, to New York and around the world. The reader now has a deeper understanding of just how much of a crisis the world is in. Yet again, Alex shows a level of calmness and responsibility as he immediately begins to organize his thoughts and feelings, in order to get a grip on himself. His decision to head to the church also again shows his strong faith, and the fact that Father Franco has information, and shares it with the congregation, solidifies the idea of the church as an extended family for Alex and the others. This is further suggested by the man later in this chapter who reminds Alex that the church congregation is family. The fact that Alex searches the listing of the dead for his mother suggests even he knows the likelihood that she has perished. Alex's quick thinking again comes into play as Alex looks for money and supplies in his parents' room and in his father's office. The finding of other apartment keys foreshadows his use of those keys later in the novel to scavenge for food and materials. Finally, Joey's comments about the likelihood that New York will even survive suggest Alex and his family may be in more danger than they realize.



The scene between the hardware store clerk and Alex is much more poignant than it initially appears. The clerk is clearly overcharging for items that people need, as a way to make a fast dollar off of people's panic. Alex does not feed into this, but does rationalize the purchase of batteries, as he needs them, regardless of cost. This exchange, combined with the closing of Joey's pizza, already suggests a new world is developing. Those with the means to obtain materials will be able to purchase them, and those without will not. Without any form of intervention, those without means to pay extravagant amounts or those without connections will soon find themselves without the means to survive. Alex is smart enough to recognize this, and buys only what he needs, but this scene foreshadows the appearance of the black market, and Harvey, later in the book.

The final scenes in Chapter Two further suggest that Alex is more aware of the chances of his mother and father's deaths than he lets on in front of his sisters. His frantic call to the hospital, combined with his arrangement for a spot on the bus to look for his mother suggest that Alex knows his mother may be deceased. Additionally, this phone call foreshadows the upcoming chapters where Alex must look through bodies to try to find his mother. In addition, the knowledge from Father Franco that Puerto Rico was badly hit suggests Alex's father, too, is likely no longer alive. Alex's faith is clearly being shaken by these events, as his prayers at the end of Chapter Two suggest he is having difficulty continuing to pray, when the world continues to deteriorate. This foreshadows his continued struggle to maintain his faith throughout the novel.



Chapter Three and Chapter Four

Chapter Three and Chapter Four Summary

In Chapter Three, Alex reports to school where he attends mass alone, not ready to sit with his friends and discuss the last few days. Alex begins to feel bitterness toward his classmates as Alex knows they feel little of the pressure and heartache he is dealing with. Most of them are wealthy, and come from families with connections, whereas his family is poor. A new priest, Father Frances Patrick Xavier Mulrooney, stands at the front, and informs the young men all resident priests have been reassigned, and he is now acting headmaster. Mulrooney is clearly strict, and a menacing figure. Mulrooney explains many of the staff has left, and it is up to the students to carry the burden of their work. Additionally, he notes the boys should assume things will get worse, and that death and deprivation lie in store for them, but they should look to early Christian martyrs for courage.

When Alex visits the headmaster later in the day, he informs him he will not be in school the following day. At first, Mulrooney protests, but when Alex tells him he will be looking for his mother in Yankee Stadium with the other deceased, he relents. On Thursday, then, Alex travels to Yankee Stadium. He is comforted by the organized manner in which the procedure is run, but is also terrified. Once the bus arrives, all participants are given menthol gel, face masks, and vomit bags. They are instructed to use the gel and mask to help with the smell. When he enters the field, he first notices the noise, with the screams and sobs of heartache and sorrow. Next, he is assaulted by the smell of rot, decay, and death. Thousands of bodies lay on the field, and the lines moves slowly past each. He finds himself envying those who find their loved ones, and he is ashamed of his feelings. As he rides back on the bus, having not found Mami, he knows he is entering a new life without preset rules, and he finds himself afraid. He begins to pray, believing that in prayer, he doesn't have to think.

In Chapter Four, Alex visits Father Franco to find out more about Puerto Rico, but the exhausted pastor has heard nothing more. Alex is also told by Franco that the bodies at the stadium are rotated every few days with new bodies, so Alex realizes that not finding Mami there is in no way a sign she is not deceased. Back at home, Alex is appalled to find his sisters refusing to do anything until he tells them where Mami and Papi are. When Julie angrily asks who died and made Alex boss, he slaps her instinctively. Julie is hurt and runs from the room with Bri, and Alex realizes he has made a large mistake. After giving them a few minutes, Alex enters their room, and they discuss their missing parents. Alex informs the girls he has looked for them both, but they should assume neither is coming back. Bri refuses to believe him, but Julie realizes he is likely right, and panics as she wonders if they will be able to survive on their own. Alex reassures them he will care for them, but notes they all need to cooperate.

At school the following day, Chris Flynn approaches Alex, and asks to talk. He informs him he is moving, but gives him his father's business card, noting that his father admires



Alex, and has asked that, if he gets into serious trouble, Alex call him for help. Chris asks if Alex is okay financially, knowing his father is away, and although touched, Alex claims he and his family are fine. Chris also informs Alex that he knows he doesn't have many close friends, and he has asked his own friend, Kevin Daley, to look out for him. He claims Kevin knows things, before anyone else, and knows how to obtain things. Alex thanks him, walks away, and in the bathroom, sobs uncontrollably, knowing that his nemesis is finally gone, and none of it matters anymore.

Chapter Three and Chapter Four Analysis

In Chapter Three, the theme of faith reemerges as Father Mulrooney reminds the students they have to know that God's plan is just that, his plan. Mulrooney's comments show that he fully expects the situation to deteriorate, but that by knowing and understanding God, he is fully prepared to give up his earthly life for the eternal one with God. Alex, too, understands this, although many of his class members seem not to. Alex's family is one of faith, and throughout the novel, Alex turns to God, believing that prayer can help him gain the strength and wisdom he needs.

Mulrooney is clearly strict, but he is also not unkind. His comments to Alex when he tells him about looking for his mother at Yankee Stadium show he is not above understanding. Mulrooney uses strength and law and rules to create an environment that he feels provides a proper structure for the children. This comes up again several times in the novel, as Mulrooney continues to battle Alex, and himself, as to whether rules help avoid chaos, or if rules can cause chaos. In this case, Mulrooney understands that Alex has to attend to family matters, and thus he eases off his pressure to attend class, regardless of the situation.

Alex's trip to Yankee Stadium is the first real view of death the reader sees in the novel and it is a frightening experience. The number of dead, combined with the graphic depiction of sights and smells, really drives home the concept that this experience is horrible, frightening, and yet necessary. Alex's own feelings of shame as he wishes to just find his mother and end his nightmarish trip show how torn he is between wanting to find out what happened to his mother, and wanting her to be alive. Even though he doesn't find her, however, Alex understands this doesn't mean she is returning. His feelings as he rides the bus home show he knows Mami is likely dead, and his prayers to avoid thought say a lot about his state of mind by this point in the novel.

In Chapter Four, the church is again shown as Alex's primary place for information as he seeks out knowledge about Puerto Rico. Alex understands that the church has a network that information can travel through, so he knows the priest can access information he himself is not privy to. The priest also knows as Alex suspects, that not finding Mami does not mean she isn't deceased, and this foreshadows the fact that she doesn't return through the rest of the book.

The scene between Alex and his sisters at home in Chapter Four is an important one, as it helps to clarify the roles of these characters in their new world. Alex has clearly



become the father figure, Briana is the mother figure, and Julie is the child. Although Alex may look up to his father, it is clear he does not wish to parent like him. His striking of his sister shows his frustration, but his guilt and shame afterward shows he is not a bad person, but is merely under a lot of stress. Julie's response is understandable, but also shows her immaturity. When the family comes together, however, it is clear they can work together, giving them a better chance of survival. Their prayers at the end of the chapter show again their faith.

Chris Flynn's departure in this chapter shows the exodus of people has begun. His family is wealthy enough to leave the city, although his father is staying behind. Chris' concern for Alex is touching, although it shames Alex a bit. Chris' father's business card foreshadows Alex's use of it later in the novel, and the knowledge that he has asked Kevin to look out for him also foreshadows Kevin's role in the upcoming chapters. Alex's sobbing at the end of this chapter indicates his realization that the world as he knows it is ending, and Chris' departure is symbolic of the new world Alex finds himself in.



Chapter Five and Chapter Six

Chapter Five and Chapter Six Summary

In Chapter Five, Bri suggests Mami hasn't called because she is in a hospital somewhere with amnesia. Alex doesn't have the heart to argue, so agrees that would be a blessed miracle. After a brief discussion about saints that Alex finds silly, he leaves the table, praying for the strength to continue caring for his sisters, even in times he doesn't care to do so. The following day, after Julie explodes about Alex's habit of constantly listening to the radio, Bri explains that Julie is bothered listening to the events of the world. Alex leaves Bri to look for headphones while he discusses Julie's fears with her.

The following day, Alex is instructed that Father Franco has asked him to come to the church as soon as he can. Although against Father Mulrooney's wishes, Alex leaves in the middle of the school day, fearing that Franco has news of his father. Once inside his office, however, Alex finds Franco does not have news of his father or mother, but instead has an opportunity for Briana. He reports there is a small convent in upstate New York that seconds as a farm who is taking in girls of faith Briana's age. Franco hopes Bri will chose to become a nun, but even if she does not, she will have food and safe boarding. After receiving instructions on what to pack, and when to have Briana at the bus Thursday, Alex leaves, both excited for Bri and fearing being left with Julie.

On Wednesday, Alex locates all the necessary paperwork for Bri, knowing as he does so that in finding the papers, he is sealing the fact he is sending Bri away. On Thursday, Alex packs a bag for her, as well, choosing not to tell her ahead of time. After picking her up from school, Alex explains as they walk to the pickup point that Bri will be working on a farm, attending religious schooling. Bri is clearly upset, but understands. Once at the pickup point, Bri quickly begins to comfort another young girl, and Alex knows she will be well cared for, and well liked. Before she leaves, Bri makes Alex promise to stay in the apartment, so she will always have a home to come back to. After a tearful goodbye, Alex returns home only to have Julie scream at him for being late. After a brief argument, Alex explains he has moved Bri to a convent, and that they will have to learn to get along. Julie admits she was just frightened of being alone, and agrees to cooperate fully, as long as Alex promises not to leave her.

In Chapter Six, Julie goes with a friend after church, leaving Alex gratefully alone. However, Uncle Jimmy stops by to inform him he and his family are moving to Tulsa, and he asks to take Bri with them. When Alex informs him Bri is no longer living there, he asks to take Julie. While Alex considers it, he knows Julie would be miserable, and he doesn't think it would be the best thing for her, so he declines. At school the following day, Mulrooney takes a count of who plans to return to school the following year, and Alex is surprised to learn only a third of the class plans to return. Kevin Daley notes he will be staying, and Alex inwardly cringes, as he believes Kevin to be a cynical weasel, but he does note he will at least have one person he knows. Alex and Julie attend a



mass for the dead exactly one month after the asteroid strike, and Alex finds he feels nothing.

On Sunday, Alex is surprised by Mr. Dunlap, a tenant who arrives at their apartment to give him his own keys and the keys to another apartment, noting that Alex is welcome to take anything he can use. Alex and Julie begin going through these apartments and two others for which they have keys, looking for food and other supplies. Although he admits it is stealing, he also believes Christ would approve. The following day, the school announces it will be open through the summer, and will serve lunch to those willing to work for it. Alex learns his job will be to check on several older residents in apartment buildings nearby, and when he picks up Julie, he learns she will be working for lunch through the summer as well, helping to garden in Central Park. Unaware her brother was also told his school would be open, Julie offers her suppers to Alex, fearing he won't get enough to eat. The following night, Alex learns Queens is being evacuated, and he knows this will be the end of any hope that Mami is still at the hospital. He is downtrodden as a result when he visits St. Margaret's, but Father Franco surprises him with information that food distribution is to start on the upcoming Friday. He explains that each person receives one bag of food. Julie, too, lightens his mood, as she loves gardening, and informs him they will be able to take home some of what the girls grow.

On Thursday, instead of heading to school after his rounds, he returns home, knowing that the hospital where his mother works is being evacuated. Alex knows it is unlikely she is there, but he waits by the phone, hoping for her to call. He is short when he picks up Julie as a result of waiting all day, and is haunted by the image in his head of his mother drowning in the subway.

Chapter Five and Chapter Six Analysis

In Chapter Five, readers again see Alex growing into a father figure. It is Alex who doesn't wish to hurt Bri by telling her Mami is likely gone, who prays for strength to care for his sisters, who even stops doing what he feels he needs to do, listen to the radio, to soothe her needs. Julie's fears are common, and Alex deals with them as a parent would, selflessly. Bri, too, adapts to the mother role, playing the middle character between Julie and Alex.

Alex continues this fatherly role as he determines what is best for Briana. This decision is difficult for Alex, but he knows it is not only best for he and Julie, but for Bri as well. He stands up to Mulrooney, is able to locate the documents needed to send Bri, handles Bri's concerns, and even sits with her strongly while they wait for the bus. All these moments, Alex knows he is the caregiver for the family, and he is doing what has to be done in order for all of them to survive. Just like a parent, he questions these decisions throughout the book, including his decision to promise Bri he and Julie would stay in the apartment. Alex uses these same skills too when Julie is furious at him for being late. Julie is not stupid, and she understands that what Alex did, he did for the safety of the family. That being said, she also understands they have to stick together in order to live.



This, along with Bri's disappearance in the novel, foreshadows Julie's transition in the novel from spoiled child to mother figure.

Uncle Jimmy's appearance in Chapter Six serves several purposes. First, his concerns about the future for New York indicate that even if Alex decides to stay, he and Julie may someday have to leave. Further, Jimmy's desire to take one of the children from Alex puts him in a difficult position, one that readers can see is rough for Alex. He is torn between wanting Julie to be safe, and knowing she will be happier with him. His final decision, that she should stay with him, revolves around his promise to Bri, showing that he is a man of his word.

The discovery at school that nearly two-thirds of the boys will not return the following year further underscores Uncle Jimmy's concerns about the future of New York, and in turn, the future for Alex and Julie. However, Kevin's admission he will be staying, and Alex's initial response, show Alex does not like Kevin much. When combined with the recollection of the praise Chris Flynn gave about Kevin, and the fact that Chris asked Kevin to watch out for Alex, however, this new information foreshadows the idea that Alex will come to appreciate Kevin's talents as the two grow closer.

Alex and Julie's attendance of the mass of the dead indicates a few things. First, it is becoming clear that without Bri to hold out hope, both Alex and Julie are beginning to understand that their parents are not returning. When combined with Alex's lack of feeling, it is also clear Alex is beginning to struggle under the pressure of being caregiver. He loves his parents, but at this point, he has seen so much and felt so much that he is unable to continue to feel. He still has faith, but his emotional connection to the world is beginning to deteriorate as a result of all he deals with. This foreshadows his ability to body shop with Kevin later, and do what he needs to in order to survive, as he is able to emotionally detach. This detachment allows him to scavenge the other apartments for food and materials, as well, giving he and Julie more of a fighting chance. Alex's belief that Christ would forgive him under the circumstances shows that Alex still has faith, and still looks to Christ and God for guidance, but also that he understands what Father Franco and Mulrooney have been saying, that times have changed. Moral law no longer dictates, but survival does.

Alex and Julie's summer jobs give them both and the reader, hope that they will continue to survive through the kindness of the church. Although they will work for their lunch, they also will at least be sure to eat one meal a day, five days a week. This certainly helps their food situation. Julie's own reaction to this, that she will happily sacrifice her own suppers for Alex, show again she is adapting to a new role in life. She is becoming more concerned for others, and more aware that without her family, she will likely perish. This is underlined to Alex when he learns Queens is about to be evacuated. He knows that there was a glimmer of hope that Mami simply hadn't called, but after evacuation, this hope dies. Julie and he must rely on one another. Franco's news that food delivery is soon to start does help to relieve some burden, however. The final scene in the chapter, of Alex holding out hope for that phone call from Mami, shows the part of Alex that is still wishing and praying for his mother. While he has taken on an adult role, he is still only a young man, and while he has little hope, he does clearly

have some. This foreshadows the fact that Mami does not return home as does the image Alex is left with of his mother drowning.



Chapter Seven and Chapter Eight

Chapter Seven and Chapter Eight Summary

In Chapter Seven, Alex and Julie arrive for the food distribution to find the line is several blocks long already. As time passes, the crowd begins to get more angry, and when they announce the people past a certain point need to leave as there is no more food, the crowd riots. As Alex and Julie try to escape, Alex's face is cut, and Julie is lost when Alex attempts to save a baby who is nearly trampled. To grab her, Alex pushes an old man and accidentally steps on his hand. The two finally escape, and after taking Julie to the garden, Alex himself heads to school to eat lunch. He is stopped at the door, however, by Mulrooney, who forbids him to eat as he didn't make his morning rounds.

At school on Tuesday, Alex and Mulrooney argue about Mulrooney's refusal of food. When Mulrooney points out rules are necessary, Alex counters by noting rules sometimes cause anarchy. Mulrooney agrees to think about his point, and Kevin, who overhears the conversation, is impressed. Later, Kevin gives Alex an entire canned ham, and Alex begins to see how useful Kevin really is. Friday, Alex uses a travel alarm to wake at 5 am, so he can be one of the first in the food line, and the process is much smoother. His bag of food, while not much, will provide enough for Julie to eat dinners. Later, at school, Kevin offers to stand in line with him on Friday and give Alex his bag of food, since his family doesn't need it. Back at home, Alex admits he has stopped listening to the radio as the only thing that matters is getting enough food to survive.

In Chapter Eight, Julie and Alex begin to see dead bodies on the way to Mass, and notice the air seems to taste oddly and looks gray. When Alex gets to school, he learns the sky is filled with volcanic ash that is blocking the sun. With the moon so much closer to the Earth, volcanoes have begun to erupt worldwide, causing the air to fill with ash. Kevin warns him the scientists are claiming the sky won't clear for years, meaning the crops will soon perish and the temperature will plummet.

Back at home, Alex receives two postcards, one from Carlos and one from the convent, telling the family when they can call Briana. Unfortunately, the card is late, and they were to have called last week. Angry, Alex calls the convent and demands they allow him to speak with Bri. They relent, and Alex and Julie are allowed to speak with her. Alex asks about the skies, and is disheartened to hear they, too, see gray skies from the ash and worry about what will happen to the crops.

Chapter Seven and Chapter Eight Analysis

Chapter Seven shows how rough the new world really is, but also shows that Alex is adapting to it, perhaps in spite of himself. At the food line, chaos ensues and Alex knows he has to protect his sister. He shows he is still compassionate as he attempts to save the baby, but the moment Julie is in danger, all other possible issues disappear,



and Alex is willing to do anything include harm others even accidentally, in the pursuit of saving his sister. This shows Alex again as the protector, and the adult in the situation. Although he does feel guilt about the man he steps on, and the baby he failed to save, his instinct is to save his own family first, a survival instinct that is natural in these situations.

This same new world order is shown by Father Mulrooney. Alex is clearly injured, but Mulrooney fails to even ask why before he turns him away for lunch. Mulrooney understands that in the new world, one must work for his or her way. Without this requirement, everyone is allowed free food in a world where supply is dwindling to nothing. The momentary stand off between Alex and Mulrooney foreshadows their discussion later about law and morality. When this discussion occurs, it is clear Mulrooney can see Alex's point, and Alex is able to see Mulrooney's as well. Both men have a stand in this, as Mulrooney understands the need of supply and demand, and Alex understands what the world is like outside of given order. Their agreement to think about the other's point shows they are rational, and also foreshadows Mulrooney's own breach of rules later in the novel to help Alex and Julie escape New York.

Kevin also begins to show himself as resourceful and helpful in this chapter, foreshadowing the deepening of his role in the novel. His canned ham will save Julie and Alex a week worth of supper, and Kevin likely had to go through much to retrieve it. Alex himself begins to see why Chris asked Kevin to watch out for him, and is finally beginning to appreciate him for his abilities. This continues when Kevin offers his own time as he stands in line with Alex to allow him more food, without endangering Julie. Kevin understands he is in a privileged position, and that Alex is not. He is also becoming a friend, and one who saves Alex. This foreshadows Kevin's continued assistance to Alex, but also his own story of why he does what he does.

Alex's lack of listening to the radio is alarming, in that he has stopped caring about anything other than himself and Julie. This is again understandable, and has been foreshadowed as he began distancing himself earlier in the novel. However, by not paying attention to world events, Alex is setting himself up to be surprised by new disasters, which occurs in the next few chapters. Had Alex been paying attention, he may have been able to be better prepared for what is to come. This shows the fine line between turning off emotions in order to protect oneself, and shutting down completely, thereby putting ones self at a disadvantage.

These factors are shown more clearly in Chapter Eight, as Alex learns what has been happening in the world. The new problem of volcanic ash is frightening as it seems to indicate the end of civilization, unless intervention measures are taken. The drops in temperature combined with the fears of crops foreshadows the loss of Julie's beloved garden, and the family's hope of fresh vegetables. Also, this foreshadows Briana's return home, as all farms are questionable without sun, clean water, and warm temperatures. This is further indicated when Julie and Alex actually speak with Bri, as she reports gray skies and dropping temperatures.



Chapter Nine and Chapter Ten

Chapter Nine and Chapter Ten Summary

In Chapter Nine, Alex and Julie see more dead every day, and they are startled one day to experience what seems to be an earthquake. At school, Alex learns a tsunami has hit lower Manhattan, causing massive flooding and evacuations, and he wonders how long it will be before they will be forced to leave. However, to help with food supplies, Alex does agree to go body shopping with Kevin where they steal from the decaying bodies on the street. The first body is simple, although Alex does pray for forgiveness, but the next bodies are of a father, mother, and baby, and Alex vomits. After a few more bodies, Kevin takes Alex to Harvey's, a shop where a man accepts such stolen goods and trades them for food. Kevin trades his for vodka, and explains that his mother is an alcoholic, and since his father doesn't know, Kevin is her only supplier. Alex is excited, as he knows he will now have food for Julie.

A few weeks later, in Chapter Ten, Julie is heartbroken as the near-winter temperatures kill the Central Park garden. Alex immediately seeks out Sister Rita the following day to ensure the school will still provide lunch for Julie, and while she agrees they will, she warns him to stock up on supplies as there are horrific times coming. Alex asks Father Franco if there is anywhere he can send Julie, and he notes there are no more orphanages. Alex is frightened and feels guilty, as he knows Julie is still there only because he didn't allow her to go with his uncle. On waking the following day, Alex realizes he has entire apartments full of merchandise to trade and barter, although he admits to feeling guilt about it. He equally feels guilty not telling Kevin, but he also knows guilt is now part of everyday life. Julie and Alex spend a day going through the apartments, finding any merchandise they can barter or use.

The following week, school begins again and Alex is relieved to see some of the boys have returned after the summer break, which he and his sister spent working and attending school for the food. At lunch, he and his friends discuss their summers, and a few note that their time in the country showed things were actually worse, in that it is colder, and no shipments of food arrive. Those in New York note, however, their air quality is worse, and the dead bodies left to rot on the streets are beginning to rise. Alex also learns the evacuation centers are overcrowded, crime is high, and disease is rampant. The boys decide that New York is still the best place to be, corpses and all. That night at dinner, Alex is short with Julie as he continues to try and plan how to keep her safe and alive.

Chapter Nine and Chapter Ten Analysis

Chapter Nine begins to show the depths that Alex will have to go to in order to keep his sister alive as the world crumbles. First, the new threat of tsunamis and earthquakes simply adds to the notion that the world is in very bad shape. Alex knows, however, that



while he is still able, he has to find a way to provide, and as a result, he helps Kevin body shop. This horrific process is necessary, in that it allows Alex to barter items for food and supplies. Again, Alex is able to shut off his emotions for a little while, but when the bodies are clearly a man, woman, and baby who have committed suicide, Alex shows his humanity by vomiting. Kevin, again proving himself to be resourceful and a good friend, merely helps Alex continue on, pointing out ways to deal with the situation. This is where Alex learns that Kevin has more to deal with than he initially realized. Kevin's mother is a closet alcoholic, and Kevin is supplying her with the alcohol she finds necessary at the moment. Kevin's life, then, is not perfect, as Alex kept assuming it to be. For the first time in the novel, Alex realizes that money does not mean a simple life, even if they are not in need of basic supplies, they are still dealing with issues Alex himself does not have. Chapter Nine also introduces Harvey, one of the more controversial characters in the novel. Harvey is not a negative character, in that he certainly provides a service that helps Alex and Julie to survive. On the other hand, Harvey's methods are highly illegal, and he likely takes the supplies he barter away from others. This brings to light the question in the novel of whether it is the means or the end that determines the morality of an act.

Chapter Ten reveals what has been previously foreshadowed: the cold temperatures and poor air quality are killing the crops. Not only does this leave Julie's heartbroken, but it causes serious concern. Without the ability to grow crops, there is no food supply. As Sister Rita points out to Alex, he must obtain as many supplies as possible, because soon, the supplies will dwindle, without any more coming in. Franco's information that there are no orphanages, foster homes, or any state agencies also shows a decline in the government to assist the population. Without governmental assistance, Alex really is the sole provider for Julie and he realizes that he has no alternative but to continue. Again, his decision to keep Julie with him haunts him, as he is aware that if Julie perishes, it will be his fault.

It is this knowledge that drives Alex to the realization that he will be able to barter the items from other apartments. Alex is bothered by this, which shows he still has a conscience, and he is still a faithful individual. The guilt he feels even when dealing with Kevin shows he is still very human, and very much a good person. Again, however, it is the instinctual nature to save his sister first that allows him to continue to act as he does, even in spite of the guilt. His poor behavior with Julie is just a symptom of the pressure he feels, and the guilt he lives under each day as he sells and barter items stolen from the dead. His realization that he is not a parent reminds readers that Alex is still only a seventeen year old young man. His reactions to things are not always perfect, just as any parent's are not.

The closing of Chapter Ten reveals how bad the country is, in comparison to New York, and shows the state of the world outside the city. It is clear from the boys' depictions that no where is safe, and even the centers set up to help are crumbling. Alex's decision to remain in New York seems to be the best decision, even if it is extremely difficult. However, the information coming in from the country is also concerning, in that it is becoming clear Bri will likely not be able to stay at the farm much longer, foreshadowing her return in the novel.



Chapter Eleven and Chapter Twelve

Chapter Eleven and Chapter Twelve Summary

In Chapter Eleven, Alex and Julie are happily surprised when they find Bri at home one day after school. However, they soon learn Bri has been returned home because she has developed adult onset asthma. The doctors have informed her to remain indoors as much as possible and to not overexert herself. Alex, while happy to see his sister, is suddenly aware she will not only require more food than what he has been providing, but also expensive, rare medication.

On the way home from school, Julie and Alex witness a man commit suicide, and although Julie is appalled when asked, she helps Alex loot the body. Alex finally explains to Julie where he has been getting his supplies, and how, and Julie offers to go with him. He refuses, not wanting her conscience as torn as his own. That day, he trades several of his hidden supplies for food, as well as takes Julie and Kevin to the food line in order to obtain enough for Bri and the rest of the family. When he allows Bri to go to Mass, he finds himself constantly thinking about how to take care of her, while she prays with happiness and pure faith. At school, Alex asks Father Mulrooney to hear his confession. When asked if he is angry at God, Alex notes he is not, but that he feels nothing, and he hates not being able to love God. Mulrooney reminds him it would take a saint to love God under the circumstances, and that he is not a saint. Mulrooney reminds him that the things he has done were not done in malice, but in protection of his family. He gently rebukes Alex, as he informs him the greatest sin he has committed is pride. He asks that Alex pray for humility and tells him to do something nice for his sisters. Alex obeys, as he genuflects at the cross, praying for forgiveness for thinking he could complete this journey without God.

Afterwards, Alex informs Bri that he plans to throw Julie a surprise birthday party. On September 30, Julie's birthday, Alex drags her unwillingly to church so Bri can set up the house. Alex thinks of Julie as a teenager, and realizes that she now seems older than Bri, as she has lost the innocence Bri manages to keep through her faith. Back at the apartment, Alex has invited Kevin, James, and Tony, so there are boys for Julie, as well as two of Julie's friends and Father Mulrooney. Alex is surprised to realize he has never invited his classmates over, as he was ashamed of his small apartment. Now, he realizes, social status matters little. The boys and girls dance, and James shocks Alex by producing a birthday cake complete with frosting. Alex knows what Kevin likely had to do to get James the mix and frosting to make, and he is more than appreciative. Tony brings paper cups, following Kevin's instructions to get them, and produces Coke. Alex wonders inwardly the loss of life this party really represents. Kevin also produces a birthday gift, and Julie is pleased to find an actual tube of lipstick. After the party, the boys each walk a girl home, and Julie thanks Alex and Bri profusely.

in Chapter Twelve, James and Tony pull Alex aside at school to discuss his living arrangements. Tony, who also has asthma, gently informs Alex that a basement



apartment is horrible for Bri, as her asthma will get worse. To his own surprise, Alex isn't angry at the boys, but thankful, as he himself knows nothing of the disease. He assures them he will find higher ground for Bri, and the following day, he informs his sisters they are moving to apartment 12B, up twelve flights, claiming he fears flooding. A few days later, as he and Kevin body shop, they talk about Kevin's mother. He notes she needs vodka like Alex needs food, and that he feels he owes her, as he was a bed wetter and she never made a big deal of it. Alex himself recalls a night he wet the bed, and the memory of his parents love nearly makes him physically ill. For the next few days, Alex's luck is bad as he struggles to provide food, with a dwindling market for the body shopping rewards, smaller food distribution bags, and no electricity. When Julie informs Alex on Friday that her school, Holy Angels, is closing, his mood does not improve. She explains she will be going to his school now, since there are so few girls, and Alex realizes he is losing his last sanctuary away from his sisters. She is apologetic, and Alex finds the strength to reassure her everything will be fine.

One day, Tony gives Alex an entire bag of cartridges for Bri's inhaler and Alex is overwhelmed. Bri, too, is thankful, but when asked to give Tony a thank you note, Alex realizes that Tony has left school as have many other students. At home, Bri still holds out hope that her parents are alive, and Julie explodes one day that she is naive. She also complains of having to do all the work since Bri is ill, and although Alex is angry with her, he agrees to do part of the chores, in an effort to spare Bri.

Chapter Eleven and Chapter Twelve Analysis

Chapter Eleven shows a pivotal point in the story for Alex and his family. With Bri's return, everyone is happy and yet everyone also knows they face entirely new challenges that may break them. Bri's disease is bad, and the doctor's warnings show she is in dire need of nearly constant supervision and care. Without medication, Bri will die. Alex understands this will tax his resources far more than anything he has done up until this point. This knowledge explains his behavior as he has Julie assist him with the dead body on the way home. He knows he has to do everything possible now, at all times, even if that means using his other sister. Julie, too, seems to understand as she offers to help him. Alex is not desperate enough to continue to use Julie to body shop, but even his one time use shows he is certainly concerned. His faith, too, is shown to be shaken as he begins to realize he no longer rejoices in his father.

This lack of faith is explained when Alex asks Mulrooney to hear his confession. Alex is not a bad person, but it is very clear his ordeal has shaken his feelings for God. But unexpectedly, Mulrooney seems to understand this, and almost defend it as normal. His point to Alex is that he is not a saint, and that his efforts, while heroic, would knock anyone down. His understanding is surprising, but also refreshing. Mulrooney, a man of God, is telling Alex that his worst crime is pride. His words finally seem to sink into Alex, as Alex's prayers show. Alex is beginning to see that he cannot walk this difficult path in spite of God, but can only do so with Him. By talking to Mulrooney, Alex is able to regain at least some of his faith.



At the same time, Alex is also able to give his sisters a night of lasting memories at the prompting of Mulrooney. However, in this case, Kevin was far more successful in helping him to complete the task. Kevin, in this section, proves himself to be not only resourceful, but also highly persuasive. Kevin is able, through his friends, to provide cups, soda, cake and frosting, music, and even a birthday gift for young Julie. There is no doubt Kevin is capable of great things, but even Alex realizes how much the party really cost, in terms of human life. The number of bodies stolen from to produce these goods is great, and the sacrifices Kevin made for the items is massive. However, all involved can see that for these young girls, this may be the last party they attend, and their only dances with young men. Even Alex realizes the sacrifices are worth their happy, alive smiles.

The party even helps Alex to learn more about his sister's illness as is shown in Chapter Twelve when James and Tony pull him aside. They are caring young men, and although the situation is awkward, it is clear it also helps Alex, as his immediate response is to move his sisters to a higher apartment. This decision is necessary for Bri's health, but it does come into play with her death later in the novel. So, too, does her relentless conviction that her parents are still alive, something Julie is beginning to find disappointing. Julie points out she has taken over the role of caregiver in this section, and she isn't particularly pleased about it. Bri is incapable of doing much, and she is more of a burden on Julie. Although no one admits this openly, her illness along with her inability to work makes her merely a person to care for, and not a productive member.

The closing of Holy Angels is even more of a concern for Alex. This is indicative of the future and foreshadows the closing of all schools eventually. Alex knows that no free lunches will be detrimental for the family, and perhaps even deadly. For now, they can cope with Julie at St. Vincent's, but the future is beginning to look dim for the Morales family, as the market for easily stolen body shopping items dwindles, and Alex's supply of higher end items such as liqueur and supplies also dwindles.



Chapter Thirteen and Chapter Fourteen

Chapter Thirteen and Chapter Fourteen Summary

On Papi's birthday on November 9th in Chapter Thirteen, the family has a special supper to appease Bri. Julie admits that she has lottery tickets she stole from the bodega, and when they look, for fun, they discover one of them is a ten thousand dollar winner. The girls begin to argue again as Briana believes they can't leave New York, in case Mami or Papi return, and Julie, exasperated, screams at her that they are dead. Bri has an asthma attack, and Alex sends Julie to her room. Alex sits with Bri, reminding her she has to keep her inhaler with her, as she forgot, and Alex had to fetch it for her as she gasped. When he then speaks with Julie, he explains that leaving isn't as simple as a ticket out. Briana, he notes, can't walk more than a few feet without needing her inhaler, and Julie isn't old enough to care for herself. In the end, Alex and Julie go to Harvey to see if they can trade the ticket for anything worthwhile.

However, when they get there, Harvey explains the ticket is worth nothing, as New York certainly won't pay for the ticket. Julie tries to argue, but Alex is willing to accept a few cans of soup and pineapple. Julie, furious, runs from the store. Once outside looking for her, Alex hears a muffled cry, and approaches carefully to see Julie being drug toward Central Park by a large man. Creeping near after removing his shoes for silence, Alex throws the pineapple at the man's head, striking him, which startles him enough to loosen his hold. Alex grabs his sister and the two run home, coughing and gasping.

In Chapter Fourteen, Alex is in despair as the food line is cancelled for holiday, and he is able to get little from Harvey. He laments he can only access four apartments, as he knows there are many more, but he has no access. The following day, Bri admits she wore down the batteries in the radio, and Alex finds himself wishing Bri would just get better, so they could leave New York. When he talks to Kevin about where he and his family will go, Kevin notes that his father doesn't care for his mother or himself, and that he doesn't know when or if they will leave. He also notes that you know who loves you by who lets you go. The following Friday, Alex receives little from the food line, and as a last resort, heads to Harvey's to trade the last of his alcohol. When he arrives, he barter them for food, and then is shocked to hear Harvey has found safe passage for Bri and Alex out of New York, in trade for Julie. Alex smiles politely but refuses, thanks him, and goes outside, where he retches violently.

On Monday morning, Alex realizes he has to do something and goes to visit Chris Flynn's father in downtown New York. Alex is surprised at the difference downtown, as people wear masks and seem to genuinely be healthy and busy in their working lives. He reaches the office, and explains that he has to get Bri and Julie out of the city, or they will soon die. Mr. Flynn explains New York is only being kept alive until the important pieces are removed, and then the government will let the city fall. Alex too, then, has to leave with his sisters in order to survive. Mr. Flynn gives Alex the three family passes he has for his own family, which allow them free housing and board in a



safe town for executives. He explains that Alex will have to produce birth certificates for all three of them, and meet the convoy at Port Authority in three weeks, but that he himself will make the reservations, claiming the Morales' as his own wards. Alex thanks him, and Mr. Flynn notes that he and his sister's lives and thanks enough.

On Thanksgiving, Alex and his sisters attend Mass and a thanksgiving meal at the church and Alex knows that he only has to worry for an other few weeks. He is happy as he thinks of the future, and on the way home, he and the girls even play touch football with some neighborhood residents. The following Tuesday at school, however, Alex realizes his class has dropped from eighteen to five. Alex, though, is hopeful, as he again reminds himself he only has to worry for two more weeks.

Chapter Thirteen and Chapter Fourteen Analysis

Chapter Thirteen introduces several new ideas in the novel as well as rehashes some previous concepts. First, again, readers see that Briana is unable to let go of the idea that her parents are deceased. Even when faced with the possibility of escape, Bri is unwilling to even imagine her parents might have perished. While it is clear Julie and Alex know their parents are deceased, Alex is unwilling to take away this hope from Briana, as he knows it keeps her alive. This idea resurfaces later, when Alex blames Bri's death on himself. This chapter also shows the danger of Briana not being near her inhaler, as she nearly passes out, having forgotten to grab it. This foreshadows Bri's death later in the novel when she is trapped in an elevator without proper medication, and perishes.

Harvey's insistence that the lottery ticket is worth nothing shows how far gone the government really is. Although worth ten thousand dollars, even Alex realizes money is no longer the primary currency in the world. Julie's heartbreak shows she is still naive in some ways, as does her careless departure from Harvey's. She nearly pays for this with her life, and with her brother's life as well. The man who grabs Julie is symbolic of the new world, as women are used and discarded by the stronger species. Alex now understands the dangers are not only for Bri, but equally, if not more so, for strong girls like Julie.

This concept is further shown as Harvey attempts to trade passage out for Julie in Chapter Fourteen. Julie would be worth much more than ten thousand dollars in the new black market, and Harvey, with his connections, could easily make that trade for Alex. Alex shows his inner strength by never holding the possibility of the idea, but also in not attempting to harm Harvey. Alex understands that he needs Harvey for his own survival, and the survival of his sisters. He also is beginning to understand what truly holds value in the new economy. His reaction to Harvey's deal, though, shows he is still innocent enough to be sickened by even the thought of using Julie as a bartering tool.

Alex's conversation with Kevin in this chapter further shows Kevin's true plight as well. Kevin does not have an easy life, as he cares for an alcoholic mother in place of his father, who he believes cares little for either. This lack of concern on his parent's part

may foreshadow Kevin's untimely death, but his comments about people you love letting you go certainly foreshadow Alex's reaction when Kevin dies, as well as his reaction as Bri perishes later.

Alex's visit to Mr. Flynn shows his true level of desperation. Alex is willing to put aside all pride in an effort to save his sisters, and Mr. Flynn responds in kind. Mr. Flynn's offer is massive, and does give Alex hope. His warnings, however, foreshadow that if Alex does not make the convey, his ability to continue to survive will severely deteriorate. Mr. Flynn's actions show him to be a kind, caring man, and yet a realistic one, as well. His words to Alex show he values hard work and dedication, and that he values his own family, as well, unlike Kevin's parents. This goodwill feeling continues through the end of this chapter, as Alex is shown happiness and hope. The constant reminders from Alex to himself that there are only two more weeks of concern, however, forewarn the reader that something is likely to happen to stop these poor characters from making the convey.



Chapter Fifteen and Chapter Sixteen

Chapter Fifteen and Chapter Sixteen Summary

In Chapter Fifteen, on December 1st, Alex awakes to find the apartment below freezing and he realizes that the furnace has run out of heating oil. He plans around the problem, as always, and knows if they layer the blankets and use the electricity as often as possible, they can survive for a few more weeks. After standing in the food line Friday, Kevin explains he and his family have heat, as they have been moved to a designated residential unit, a type of home for essential personnel. The boys discuss what they miss the most, and while Kevin misses television, Alex notes he misses family.

On Saturday, the family is shocked to find nearly six inches of snow on the ground, and the beginnings of sleet. Alex immediately knows this makes making it to Port Authority even more difficult, but he begins working out a plan to drag Bri on a mattress, or some other form of sled. When Bri complains Sunday that Alex won't allow her to attend Mass, he points out she can't make it to church through the snow, but does promise to pray with her later. After she returns to bed, Alex puts on several layers of clothing, and begins trying to shovel as much snow as possible, and spends the time thinking of all his mistakes. He blames himself for Bri's illness, as he sent her to the convent, and for Julie's situation, as he could have sent her with relatives. He himself could then have left as well. In the snow, he gets on his knees for forgiveness, only to have Julie come searching for him, chastising him for sitting in the snow.

In Chapter Sixteen, Kevin arrives and he and Alex begin body shopping with jewelry at the top of Harvey's latest list. Kevin tells him there should be plenty of bodies, as there is a terrible flu going around. They struggle through the snow, with Alex in the lead, when he suddenly hears an odd sound. He turns around to find Kevin pinned under a fallen tree branch. Alex struggles to free him, but realizes Kevin is dead. He screams at God, to no avail, and finally breaks down, and prays for Kevin's soul. He takes his watch and crucifix to give to St. Vincent's in case his parents come for him, and takes Kevin's gun to sell, along with a diamond ring he found on another woman. Alex barter with Harvey, and asks for a sled in exchange for the gun and ring, and Harvey makes a promise to try and find something. When Alex returns in the morning, he is shocked to find Harvey has come through with a perfect sled. He takes it to his old apartment where he locates the necessary documentation for their trip. As he does, he thinks about how he is going to join the elite, having earned his way to the top through hard work, and through saving his sisters, and being a man.

In the food line on Friday morning, Alex informs Julie of Kevin's death and she responds that many of the nuns and her friends at school have also died. Alex corners Bri the following day, and explains they have to leave New York, in order to save Julie from possible harm by men who would try to take her for their own purposes. Bri struggles, wanting to wait for Mami and Papi, but Alex explains they can find Carlos once they are



relocated, and he will tell Mami and Papi, if they return. She reluctantly agrees and promises to pray for strength.

Chapter Fifteen and Chapter Sixteen Analysis

Chapter Fifteen continues the almost reluctant sense of dread that permeates the novel at this point. With the promise of freedom not far away, the Morales' lack of heat throws yet another obstacle in the way of Alex's plans. However, as always, Alex shows he is able to rise above his circumstances, sacrificing much for his sisters. His continued prayers show his faith is still providing him with strength. This strength is again tested however when the snows begin to fall. Again, at each turn, Alex's plan seems to grow into a smaller likelihood of success. Alex continues to blame himself for his sister's circumstances, and his begging of God for forgiveness shows how remorseful he is, and how deeply he blames himself. Again, however, Alex continues to plan around his circumstances, in order to save his sisters.

Chapter Sixteen brings together a few concepts from previously in the book. As Kevin is killed, Alex understands several things all at once. First, Alex recognizes he has lost his only friend, perhaps in history. Secondly, Alex's grief, although sincere, does not stop him from doing what he needs to do. His taking of Kevin's gun for bartering, and his continued body shopping do not show a lack of remorse, but simply a need for survival. Alex knows, as Kevin once said, that those who love you let you go when they need to, and Kevin would never have wanted Alex to stop on his account. Kevin's resourcefulness saved Alex and his family many times in the novel, and even his death brings about something positive for Alex. This may be morbid, but in this new world, as Alex pointed out earlier in the novel, guilt is an everyday part of life.

Harvey's ability to come through for Alex show him too as a resourceful character. Again in the novel, Harvey is not necessarily a hero, but he is very needed. Several times, Harvey's ability to barter saves Alex's life, and this appears to be one of them. However, Alex's overwhelming relief and joy, as well as his seemingly inflated pride, caution the reader that something is likely to go wrong. As Mulrooney pointed out to Alex previously in the novel, his greatest failure is often pride, and here again, reader's see Alex praising himself for saving his sisters. This, in the past, has foreshadowed tragedy.

Although very subtle, the deaths of several nuns, priests, and others at school foreshadow the use of their identities later in the novel by Alex and Julie. Additionally, the discussions in this chapter of the flu foreshadows Alex's horrific bout with the disease later in the novel. Finally, Bri's reaction to leaving, that they must wait for Mami and Papi, show she has not yet given up hope. This explains her actions in the next chapters as she dies while trying to leave them a note. Bri, regardless of what happens, holds on to her faith, and the faith that her family will be reunited. This unlimited faith is what keeps her alive and what ultimately leads to her death.



Chapter Seventeen and Chapter Eighteen

Chapter Seventeen and Chapter Eighteen Summary

In Chapter Seventeen, Alex struggles, but makes the trip dragging the sled with his sister to Port Authority. They fall several times, and are freezing, cold, and nearly unable to move from exhaustion, but they make it. However, when they arrive, they are informed there is no convey on account of a quarantine of the city. Alex realizes that in two weeks, when the next convoy runs, he will be over eighteen, too old to be claimed by Mr. Flynn as a his ward, but that he will be able to bring his sisters back, and save them. After the trip back home, Julie and Alex discover the school is also closed due to quarantine. At home, the family has one can of beans, and a container of macaroni with bugs in it, but as Julie notes, they have no power any more with which to cook. Alex decides to build a fire with magazines in one of the other apartment sinks, and cook there. Alex has kept only a half bag of sleeping pills, knowing he could use them to drug his sisters and smother them, if he had to in order for them to die in a state of grace. However, he also knows the family must have food to survive, so he attends Friday's food delivery, only to find it too has been suspended. Julie expresses her fear of dying first, and Alex promises her he will not allow that to happen. She also informs him Bri is on her final inhaler cartridge. Alex decides that he has no choice but to trade his coat and aspirin for food, but on arriving at Harvey's, he finds the man dead. Alex ransacks the store, and finds a half full box of food, enough to get them through until the next convey. He silently prays for Harvey and walks home quickly.

In Chapter Eighteen, Alex's sisters care for him as he contracts a severe case of the flu. He has several horrible daydreams and fever dreams as the girls struggle to give him aspirin and food. When he finally awakens on Thursday, Dec 23rd, he is with Julie, who explains he has been asleep and delirious for several days. He falls back asleep, and on Friday, awakens again to Julie. He continues to ask about Bri, but Julie is distant and evasive. When he awakens again, Julie finally explains Bri has been gone for over twenty four hours, as she left to go to church the day before, since there was electricity, and never returned. Alex is angry, but Julie notes she tried to stop Bri, but Bri wouldn't listen. Alex tells Julie to go look for Bri, but while she is gone, he passes out on the floor. The following day, Alex rises, better, and decides to look for Bri. Julie is determined to go with him, and the two first go to the old apartment to look for Bri. She isn't there, and although the search the neighborhood, Bri is nowhere to be found. For the next few days, Alex is ill off and on, but he realizes the 26th that Julie has to make it to the convey, She refuses, however, to go without Bri.



Chapter Seventeen and Chapter Eighteen Analysis

Chapter Seventeen is heart-wrenching, in that although readers have been hoping for success, there was an underlying sense something was going to go wrong. The story of Alex's efforts to get his sisters to the bus stop is heroic and filled with hope, but the let down he receives is so devastating, it is difficult to witness. To add to the injury, the police officer clearly believes Alex to be one of the privileged, and his words sting Alex, as he himself often thought the same of those who appeared privileged. Now, perhaps, Alex understands everyone has their own burdens. The quarantine further causes concern, as this foreshadows one of the Morales' becoming ill. Further, the knowledge Alex will not even be able to join his sisters on the next bus adds concern for their safety, and for his own, and the closing of the school seems to nearly seal their fate. Combined with their complete lack of food, or a method to heat it, the family seems nearly out of options. Alex's sleeping pills seem to become even more plausible as a solution as Briana's inhalers run short and food supplies stop. Harvey's death seems to seal the deal as readers know Alex really has no where left to turn for assistance.

The world does brighten a little when Alex is able to find enough food to sustain the family through the next convoy, however. The chance is slim, but knowing Alex's character by now, there is a sense that he is capable of doing almost anything to save his sisters. His prayers for Harvey show he is still faithful and still holds out hope himself.

As is common for this book, however, this hope is soon dashed when Alex becomes ill. As foreshadowed by the quarantines, Alex's illness is severe, and Bri and Julie struggle to keep him safe and alive. They are able to manage to save him, but must work together to do so, as Alex is highly delirious. His dreams show that death surrounds his thoughts, and Julie's avoidance of conversation about Bri suggests something is wrong. By the time readers learn of her disappearance, it is clear something severe has occurred. This feeling of dread is multiplied when Bri is not found for several days, but one assumes she has been taken. Julie's refusal to make the convey only deepens the already high concern for the safety of the family.



Chapter Nineteen

Chapter Nineteen Summary

In Chapter Nineteen, on December 27th, the electricity comes on and after washing, Alex and Julie decide to again look for Bri. They reach the elevator and push the button, as Julie remarks the elevator should already be on their floor. Alex realizes the problem too late, and the elevator doors open to Bri's body. She had taken the elevator on the day she left, and when the electricity went off, she was stuck. Alex points out she died in a peaceful state of grace, They wrap her body in a quilt, and take her to the old apartment. Alex leaves Julie alone with Bri for several minutes, and finds a note from Bri to Mami and Papi. Alex suddenly realizes Bri died because she came to the old apartment first after going to the church, to leave a note for her long deceased parents. Alex realizes his sole job is now to save Julie from the same fate.

Back in their own apartment, Julie sobs in grief as Alex tries to plan a way to save his remaining sister. He heads to St. Margaret's, but finds it closed. Not knowing where else to go, he heads to St. Vincent's to the chapel to pray. Once there, he finds Sister Rita, who hears his story of Bri's death, and immediately takes him to see Father Mulrooney. After Alex pours his heart out to the priest, including admitting his own guilt in his sister's death, Mulrooney is silent, but Sister Rita reminds him that without faith, Bri would have perished long ago. Mulrooney tells Alex to wipe his tears and they have to figure out a plan. Sister Rita explains that there is a bus arriving to take the last of the faithful from the city. Mulrooney points out that Alex can pretend to be Mr. Kim, a now deceased seminarian, and Julie can be Sister Joanne, another deceased member of the church. When Alex points out that such behavior is breaking the rules, Mulrooney quotes Alex from earlier, noting that sometimes rules don't work. He explains what they are allowed to bring, and that they are to arrive at the church the following day. The following day after packing, the two set off to the church with Julie noting all she needs is Alex.

Chapter Nineteen Analysis

The final chapter of the story brings to an end the life of one of the characters, Briana, but also gives readers hope for Alex and Julie. At the opening of the chapter, when Julie and Alex find Briana in the elevator, it is clear her death is a sacrifice, of sorts. Alex's note of her peaceful death does help to alleviate Julie's pain, as does her knowledge that Briana did not suffer in death, and no longer has to suffer in life. In addition, whether one admits it or not, Briana's death makes life easier for the other siblings. Their decision to leave her body in the old apartment shows their love and respect for her, and also allows Alex to find the note.

Briana's note to her family shows that, until the end, Bri held out hope. Her faith in God kept her alive, as did her faith that her family was not dead. Alex is unable to see this, however, and instead Alex blames himself for her death. As he has throughout the



novel, Alex blames his sister's decisions on his own lack of ability to sway her mind. This guilt, however, does drive Alex to church, which leads to his eventual saving, so in a way, his guilt is his own salvation.

Father Mulrooney in this final chapter shows not only that he is kind and merciful, but that he is capable of learning from students. Earlier in the novel, Mulrooney and Alex argued about law, and whether rules were always meant to be followed. As Mulrooney and Sister Rita plan to lie in order to help Alex and Julie escape, they both show they understand that, in this world, the rules have changed. They know that these individuals are firm in their faith, despite all they have been through, and that they are deserving of assistance. Once again, faith has allowed the Morales family to survive and it is as a result of their faith, and the church, that they are able to leave New York. In addition, their closing comments to one another about needing only one another show their bond as a family. Throughout the novel, this family bond and Alex's unwillingness to fail his family have saved them. It is only natural that in the end, this family bond will keep these characters together and safe.



Characters

Alex Morales

Alex Morales is the main character of the novel. As a seventeen-year-old man, Alex is quickly thrown into the role of sole provider for his two younger sisters when an asteroid hits the moon and his mother and father remain missing in the chaos that follows. Alex is a bright young man, and very capable and responsible. He has to work for everything he achieves as his parents are not wealthy, unlike many of the other children who attend his prestigious Catholic school. Alex maintains a job, helps his family, and participates in school activities. He knows the value of hard work, which gives him a leg up on many of his classmates as the crisis worsens. At the same time, Alex is also very religious, and some of his actions following the disaster tend to go against his religious teachings. Yet Alex provides for his family in any way possible, showing he understands that his family comes before all else.

Alex is a kind and tender person, which makes many of his actions more difficult for him to bear. He provides for his family by robbing from the dead, and selling the merchandise for food and other supplies. Standing in a food line, he is forced to ignore harming an old man and a child in an effort to save his sister. He feels completely responsible for everything that happens in the book, including his sister's illness, and their constant plight. Alex is continuously questioning the role his decisions play in the negative moments of his sisters' lives. Even the priests who try to explain he is taking too much responsibility are ignored as Alex continues to belittle himself.

It is in fact, Alex's need for penance that drives him to the school when Briana dies, and his feelings of inadequacy that actually lead to his and Julie's rescue. When Alex explains the situation to Father Mulrooney and Sister Rita, they are able to convince Alex that he and his sister can be safe, and that his actions have not led to their demise, but rather to their safety. Alex is a hero in the book, although his humility and righteousness will never allow him to see it.

Julie Morales

Julie Morales is the youngest of the Morales children and by far, the most spoiled. At the beginning of the novel, it is clear that Julie believes herself to be above almost everything and is a very selfish young woman who is babied by the rest of her family. She is a good person, but often demands things her own way. She and Alex clash often, in part due to Alex's role as a father figure in his father's absence, and Julie's inability to see him as such. Briana, their sister, often plays the buffer between them. When Briana goes away, however, Julie and Alex are on their own, and it takes the two of them some time to figure out how to be civil with one another. Julie begins to transform as she realizes the importance of family during this crisis, and Alex begins to soften, realizing Julie is a strong, vibrant, wonderful twelve year old girl. Julie takes over laundry and



cooking, and Alex continues to try to provide for his sister. Julie also begins working in the community garden, and comes to love the idea of providing for herself, and for those around her. Even when Briana dies, Julie takes it in stride, understanding that they must continue forward in order to survive. By the end of the novel, Julie has matured into a considerate and helpful young woman. While she is certainly still a strong and demanding character, this is tempered by her love for her brother and her realization that family is vital to her existence.

Briana Morales

Briana Morales is the middle child of the Morales family and the oldest girl. Briana is a sweet, kind, and caring young woman who is extremely devout. Her religious faith keeps her strong in the novel and keeps her hopeful even when others would have lost their faith. Briana is the buffer between young Julie and older brother Alex, and her role is to help keep the peace in the household. It is clear Briana cooks, cleans, and does many of the household chores, as she is vital in the beginning of the novel when the Morales' are first figuring out how to survive in the new world. When Briana is sent off to a farm in the country, she is very understanding, but clearly longs to come home. When she does, however, it is clear she is very very ill. From the moment she returns home, it is questionable as to whether Briana can stay alive long enough to be rescued, and as the ash in the air worsens, so does her asthma. Alex does all he can to save her, and Briana repeatedly returns to her faith for comfort and guidance. She continues to believe her parents are alive and it is this belief that eventually leads her to her death as she becomes trapped in an elevator after going to the basement apartment to leave a note for her parents. Briana's death is a blessing, in a way, because Alex no longer has to care for her and can focus on saving himself and Julie. In addition, Briana did not die of starvation or at the hands of someone evil, but instead merely passed away, still maintaining her faith. Briana, too, is a martyr in the novel, having given everything she had to save her siblings, and it is her death that leads Alex to St. Vincent's, where Mulrooney and Sister Rita help him to save Julie. If Briana had not died, it is possible that all three of the Morales children would have perished.

Kevin Daley

Kevin Daley is a young, bright, and innovative young man who uses his intelligence to manipulate the world around him. Kevin is a caring individual, who hides his true feelings under a veneer of humor and a carefree attitude. Looking at Kevin, one would think merely that his life was privileged, but once Alex gets to know him, he realizes quickly Kevin's life is much more difficult than it first appears. His father works hard for his family, but in doing so, he has completely lost a connection with them. Kevin doesn't believe his father even cares much for he and his mother. His mother too has her struggles, as she battles alcoholism throughout the book. Kevin, it is clear, is left to his own devices. He befriends Alex as a favor to Chris, but it is apparent that the two quickly become friends. Kevin does an amazing amount for Alex and his family from stealing food for them to teaching Alex how to body shop for food to standing in food



lines with Alex, just to hand over his portion. Kevin also obtains medicine for Briana, and even obtains a birthday cake, complete with frosting, for Julie's birthday, even though Alex knows that the price of such a small thing was likely very high. In the end, Kevin is killed by a falling tree branch, and Alex realizes he is the only friend Alex has ever had. His circumstances make it impossible to grieve for the young man, although he does pray for his soul. Kevin is an out of place martyr in the story, but he certainly helps keep Alex and his family alive.

Harvey

Harvey is the owner of a tailor and alteration shop prior to the catastrophe. In the wake of the disaster, Harvey sees an opportunity for profit, and begins running a black market type of exchange service, where people bring in goods and items, and Harvey exchanges them for food and other supplies. Harvey cares little where the items come from, as long as they are quality merchandise other individuals will pay for. Harvey is not a bad person, but is an opportunist, and when he saw a deal that could allow him to profit, he took it. It is true Harvey profits from the death of others, but he also provides food and medicine and clean water in exchange. When the government fails, individuals like Harvey succeed, allowing families like the Morales' to stay alive, and allowing people like Kevin's mother to hide their addictions. Harvey eventually dies in the novel, leaving a lasting gift to Alex as he rummages through his store and finds a supply of food. Harvey's kind is necessary in the novel, but his death does signify a change in the novel, as it is clear Alex and his family must do something or they will starve.

Father Francis Patrick Xavier Mulrooney

Father Francis Patrick Xavier Mulrooney is the new priest at St. Vincent de Paul school where Alex attends. Mulrooney is called into active service when many of the priests and instructors at the school leave town. Mulrooney is an old school priest, in that he is very upright, proper, and has a certain way of thinking and doing things that is difficult to change. From the beginning, Mulrooney is hard on Alex, but not because he does not like Alex. Mulrooney believes in hard work, dedication, and devout devotion, and believes Alex is capable of great things. The two do argue on occasion, but over the course of the novel Mulrooney shows he is a good man by learning from Alex, just as Alex learns from him. Mulrooney helps Alex at the end of the novel, by allowing him to use another priest's papers to escape with his sister. This shows Mulrooney has learned that not all rule breaking is negative, just as Alex once told him. Mulrooney, although strict and set in his ways, is a very good man.

Chris Flynn

Chris Flynn is a bright, wealthy young man who attends St. Vincent de Paul school with Alex Morales. Chris is Alex's primary competition for everything, in that he and Alex battle for class president, debate [resident, editor of the paper, and other primary roles



in the school. Chris is from a well to do family, whereas Alex's family is not well off. However, Chris sees Alex as a challenge to him, something Chris doesn't have many of in life. Chris seems to respect Alex for being able to push him and drive him in a way others cannot. When he leaves town, Chris not only gives Alex his father as a point of contact in emergencies, but also helps to protect him by pointing him in the direction of his own friend, Kevin Daley. Kevin is highly resourceful and becomes a true blessing to Alex and his family. Chris' attempts to help keep Alex safe show he is a kind and caring young man.

Father Franco

Father Franco is a priest at St. Margaret's, where the Morales children all attend religious services. Father Franco is a caring man, who is wonderfully helpful to his congregation as he attempts to help them in any way, and helps them to find information by using his diocese throughout the United States and the world. While he is unable to help Alex find his father or mother, he is able to secure a place for Briana on a farm, which helps to feed her. Although the work on the farm leads to the asthma that contributes to Briana's death, Franco's efforts were intended to be beneficial to the family. Further, it is Father Franco who plays the role of informant to the congregation, telling them when to evacuate and giving them information on electricity and food. It is clear that this role takes a toll on Father, as he appears to age quickly in the novel.

Sister Rita

Sister Rita is one of the nuns helping the girls of Holy Angels care for their garden in Central Park. The garden is designed to provide the girls an opportunity to work for their lunches, while helping themselves provide food for their families. It is also Sister Rita who comforts Julie following her frightening ordeal in the food line, and Sister Rita who helps Julie and Alex escape from New York at the end of the novel. Sister Rita clearly loves her students and is willing to go outside the rules to help them as she believes they are worthy of saving.

Carlos

Carlos Morales is the oldest of the Morales children. Carlos is away at the time of the disaster, serving in the military. He is clearly a hero figure to the other siblings, but in the novel, he is only heard from once, at the beginning of the tale. His unit is being deployed, and although he doesn't know where, he does know they are being told to call home, and that things will not improve for quite some time. Carlos loves his family and plays a role in the novel even in his absence as his unheard but felt guidance often helps Alex think of where to turn next for help.



Mami and Papi

Mami and Papi are the Morales children's parents. Mami went to work at a hospital in Queens on the night of the asteroid collision and likely drowned in the subway tunnels. Papi went to Puerto Rico to his mother's funeral a few days before the asteroid, and although the family thinks they heard from him, he has not been heard from since the day of the disaster, and is believed to have been killed in the tsunamis. Both parents clearly loved their children, as their children are caring, honest, decent children.

Uncle Jimmy

Uncle Jimmy is Alex's uncle, who owns a bodega. Uncle Jimmy is prone to selfishness, as is shown in his request for Briana to travel with he and his family, in order to help his wife care for their young children. At the same time, however, it is Jimmy who saves the children by giving them food from his shop, showing he can also be kind and caring. He clearly loves his nieces and nephews, but he definitely also uses them to his advantage. When he leaves, it is not intended to abandon his extended family, but is simply a move to save his own immediate family.

Mr. Flynn

Mr. Flynn is the father of Chris Flynn, Alex's' primary competition at school. When Chris leaves town, his father tells him to inform Alex that if he needs something substantial, he should contact him. When Alex is desperate, he does just that, and Mr. Flynn makes arrangements for Alex and his sisters to be evacuated from New York. Unfortunately, due to quarantine, the plan doesn't work, but Mr. Flynn does show a large amount of compassion and care in his attempts to help Alex and his family.



Objects/Places

New York, New York

New York is where "Dead and the Gone" is based and where Alex Morales and his family are living when the moon is hit by an asteroid.

St. Vincent de Paul Academy

St. Vincent de Paul Academy is the religious institution where Alex Morales attends school.

St. Margaret's

St. Margaret's is the church that the Morales attend.

St. John of God Hospital

St. John of God Hospital is the hospital where Alex's mother works. She is on her way to work when she is presumably killed by flooding in the subway.

Milagro del Mar

Milagro del Mar, Puerto Rico is the village to which Alex's father traveled for his mother's funeral, immediately prior to the catastrophe.

Holy Angels

Holy Angels is the religious school that Briana and Julie Morales attend.

Notburga Farms

Notburga Farms is the farm where Alex sends Briana to work and receive religious study where she unfortunately develops asthma that eventually takes her life.

Saint Ursula College

Saint Ursula College is the college attended by religious leaders that Sister Rita and Father Mulrooney help Alex and Julie escape to so that they have a chance of surviving.



Designated Residential Unit

A Designated Residential Unit is a living area designed for safety for those in society deemed essential personnel for the city.

Yankee Stadium

Yankee Stadium is a baseball stadium where Alex goes to view the dead bodies of unclaimed women, hoping to find his mother.

Harvey's Tailoring and Alterations

Harvey's Tailoring and Alterations is the store out of which Harvey runs a black market after the catastrophe.



Themes

Religious Faith

One of the major themes in the novel is that of religious faith. The entire Morales family is religious and all the Morales children attend Catholic school. Based on their involvement with the church, it is a fair assumption their high level of faith has been passed to them from religious parents. This faith becomes not only a huge benefit to the family throughout the novel, but also a difficult thing to maintain in a difficult world.

Alex uses his faith throughout the novel to get him through difficult times. From the very moment that Alex hears about the problems happening in the world, he immediately prays for the safety of his family and for the entire population, even before he allows himself to sleep. He also prays for strength as he knows he will have a responsibility to help keep his family safe and alive, and he does this even before he realizes his parents are not returning. This shows prayer is not merely a desperate cry for help to Alex, but a daily act of reverence. When in need of help, Alex immediately heads to the church, knowing he can find assistance there. His prayers for wisdom and his thanks to God, even during this trying time, also shows his devotion. At no time is Alex ever angry with God, even when he is forced to harm an old man and ignore a baby in favor of his sister. He laments only that he is failing to love God, not that he hates him. Alex's faith is undeterred, even in the harshest of times. He pleads with God not to relieve him of his burdens, but for humility. He goes to God for comfort when Kevin is killed, asking him to spare Kevin's soul, and he goes to God again when Briana dies, thanking Christ for the pain Briana was spared. In each trying and miserable moment, Alex continues his faith in God.

It is this faith that eventually saves both Alex and Julie. When Briana dies, Alex has nowhere left to turn. As a result, he goes to the one place he knows will be open, the chapel at his school. It is here Alex goes to mourn Briana, and it is the people of the school, and of his faith, that save him. Father Mulrooney and Sister Rita help Alex to save Julie, as well as himself, and even break rules doing it. Through the novel Alex keeps his faith, and in return, it is, in part, his faith that saves he and his sister.

Briana's faith is also unwavering in the story, although her outcome is different. Briana is perhaps too devout, believing in miracles far beyond when others would have stopped. Bri continues to believe her family is still alive through the grace of God until the very end, and it is this belief that eventually ends her life. Briana's faith allows her to believe Mami and Papi will return, and she holds out hope for this as a way to resolve the faithlessness she believes Alex and Julie are leaning toward. However, in the end, Briana dies with grace, even though her death is not ideal. She is spared further suffering, and does not die at the hands of another, but merely perishes, still clinging to her faith.



Although their faith lead to different outcomes, the faith of the Morales siblings does shine through the entire novel as their saving grace. One person, Alex, uses his faith for strength and wisdom, while Briana uses her faith for comfort and salvation. In both cases, however, faith brings these characters courage and hope that they otherwise would have lost.

Importance of Family

The importance of family is another vital theme within the novel. From the beginning, it is clear the Morales family is close, if not always understanding of one another. Extended family such as uncles are clearly common figures, and it is easy to see they all care deeply for one another. When Alex learns of the disasters that plague the Earth, his immediate concern is not for himself, but for his family. His prayers are directed at keeping his family safe, and at finding his mother and father.

When Alex's uncle needs help moving food, he not only turns to Alex and his family for help, but also gives them quite a bit of his own food. In addition, he checks on them several times, and even offers to take one of the girls with he and his wife. Although this offer is certainly also in his best interest, it still shows that Uncle Jimmy is concerned about his family, as well as his extended family.

Alex, throughout the novel, focuses on the well being of his sisters. At times, his sense of responsibility overwhelms him, but he never complains of his duty, he merely worries over it. Alex does almost everything to save his family, including things completely against his nature, such as stealing from the dead and hurting others. Alex is not a mean person, but when forced to choose between saving a baby from being trampled and saving his sister, there is no choice, he saves his sister. He even hurts an old man in his attempt, showing his sole concern is for his family. Alex suffers through food lines, trades on the black market, and wears himself to near exhaustion, all to save his family.

Briana, too, shows her family is vital to her. Although given food and board on a farm, she still dreamed of nothing but returning to her family, regardless of circumstance. Briana sacrifices her own health on several occasions to save her siblings, showing her devotion to them. In addition, her constant belief that Mami and Papi will return, even despite the impossible odds, shows the value she places on their lives. In the end, it is this importance of family that kills Briana, as she is trapped in an elevator after writing a note to her parents. It is clear Briana valued family above all else, including her own life.

Even Julie shows she comes to value the importance of family. In the beginning of the novel, Julie is very selfish, and undoubtedly cares more about herself than others. Over time, however, this changes as Julie sees what her brother and sister sacrifice for the family, and Julie matures. She too begins to care more about her sister and brother than about her own feelings. When Alex is ill, Julie sacrifices her own health. She even forgoes looking for Briana, knowing she cannot leave her brother alone. By the end, Julie realizes that she needs her brother as much as he needs her.

Courage

Courage is another major theme in the novel as courage is shown in many different ways. Briana, faithful to God and to her family, shows courage several times throughout the book. She is courageous when she leaves the family to live on the farm, knowing she is helping her family have enough food to survive. Once Briana returns home, ill, she is courageous each day, in that she continues to live, and be a part of the family, and to help, in spite of her debilitating illness. In the end, Briana has a vast amount of courage, in that she dies peacefully, knowing she is free of concern. Whether or not Briana died purposefully, in an effort to save her siblings, is questionable, but regardless, Briana died with a great amount of courage.

Julie, too, shows courage several times throughout the novel. It is Julie who takes on helping in the garden in order to fend for herself at lunch. It is also Julie who continues to adapt and grow throughout the novel, showing she is courageous enough to learn to live in the new world. Julie is independent, but she is also a hard worker. She has the courage in the book to stand up to Alex on occasion, but also to admit when she needs assistance.

Alex also shows vast courage in the novel. Now the man of the house at only seventeen, Alex shows courage every day in every thing he does. His courage comes through as he learns to trade on the black market, steal from the dead, risk his life in food lines, ask his church and pastors for help, and even travel to Yankee Stadium to try and identify his deceased mother. He is courageous enough to send Briana to a farm to be well cared for and equally courageous enough to make decisions that could cause Julie more harm than good. It is Alex's courage, in particular, that allows Julie and Briana to live as long as they do, and that allow Alex and Julie to escape. Without Alex's courage, the family would have all perished.



Style

Point of View

The point of view in the novel is that of third person. The novel does, however, focus solely on Alex Morales and thus reports only events which occur to and around him. This point of view is reliable as shown by the fact that the narrator knows Alex's spoken as well as unspoken thoughts, emotions, fears, and those of other characters. This point of view is vital to the novel, since so much of the novel happens without dialog, as Alex is forced to think and contemplate about his situation, and his faith. One of the most important themes in the novel is faith, and the power of the family, and these themes would not be as clear without a third person perspective. Further, the overall development of the three Morales children would not be as dramatic without a third person perspective.

The story is told by a mix of dialogue and narration, and is effective in keeping the reader solely focused on Alex and the world around him. Alex's conversations with himself, his actions, and his thoughts in various situations would not be possible for the reader to understand if the narration did not lend to exposing these moments. Giving such a narrow focus allows the reader to gain a broad understanding of Alex and his sisters, which wouldn't be possible if another type of narration was used.

Setting

The setting of the novel is very focused in New York, New York. Alex Morales and his family live in New York and thus the story focuses on many places within New York City itself. There is brief mention of Milagro del Mar, a small village in Puerto Rico where Alex's father went immediately prior to the moon disaster for his mother's funeral, but the story never takes place there.

In New York, the story begins in Joey's Pizza, the pizza parlor where he works. Shortly thereafter, Alex and his sister are asked to help Uncle Jimmy clear out his bodega to prepare for looters. Within his neighborhood, St. Vincent de Paul Academy, the school Alex attends, St. Margaret's, the church that the Morales family attends, and Holy Angels, the school that Morales girls attend, are all places of interest in the novel. The schools, for example, are vital to the novel, in that they provide structure, food, and stability for the Morales family in a time where these are lacking elsewhere. It is Holy Angels that decides to build the garden in Central Park, and St. Vincent de Paul Academy who helps their students work for lunch. St. Margaret's is the institution which helps Briana to Notburga Farms in the country, where she is housed and fed for part of the novel. St. John of God Hospital is the hospital Isabella Morales, the mother, attempts to go to in the beginning of the novel, but it is believed she is killed on the way there by flooding in the subway system. Harvey's Tailoring and Alterations is the store where Harvey runs his black market throughout the novel, which helps Apex provide for



his family, while Yankee Stadium is where Alex goes to attempt to identify the deceased body of his mother. Finally, it is Saint Ursula College where Alex and Julie eventually escape to at the end of the novel.

With such a close focus in setting, the story really allows the reader to focus on Alex and his family, and to imagine this situation occurring in almost any large, coastal big city. That being said, there are areas of the novel which also focus on New York as a major city, which the government is keeping alive only until all vital pieces are moved out. This allows there to be an underlying feel of conspiracy to the book that helps the reader understand there is more going on than what is being reported by the narrator.

Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is extremely informal, as it is written in the perspective of a seventeen year old modern New York boy. The sentence structure is modern, with use of common slang and using not always proper English, making it simple to read, while still engaging. The language style adds to the novel, as it portrays Alex's world more clearly, and more understandably, through words and concepts common to a young man of his age.

There are times in the novel, however, that the language shifts to a more formal style, and this is often when an official of the church is speaking. Throughout the novel, there are many priests, nuns, and other formal members of the church who speak to Alex and the other characters, and they often use more sophisticated language. This helps to differentiate characters, as well as show social status. In addition, this also helps to portray the church leaders as not only adults, but role models for Alex. By differentiating even their speech patterns, the author shows a clear distinction between Alex and the adults in the novel, furthering the concept that Alex is still a young man.

There is also a subtle difference in speech between Briana and Julie that is fundamentally important in the novel. Briana speaks much the same as Julie, but there is a tone difference that is vital. Whereas Briana tends to speak softly and gently, without anger, Julie often speaks in anger and frustration. This helps to show these two characters as fundamentally different, even with the same background and class. This is important as it helps to develop each character.

Structure

The novel is made up of nineteen chapters, each of unequal length. Each chapter is named only by number, but each chapter is further broken apart by date entries, as the book is written in journal form. This system helps to not only show the amount of time that is passing, but also helps break up the story. The chapters are fairly short, with a combination of description, dialog, and inner thoughts of Alex, the main character.

The plot of the novel is straightforward, without much back story to contend with. The novel focuses on Alex Morales and his family, and how their faith gives them courage

enough to survive, or to die, in the post apocalyptic new world, following an asteroid strike to the moon. Alex is left to protect and guide his two younger sisters, as his parents are missing, and presumed dead. Alex must not only do things against his faith, but must also rely heavily on that faith to give him enough hope to carry forward. The novel follows Alex and his family through several trials, and eventual heartbreak, until he is finally able to help himself and his sister escape New York.

The pace of the novel is quick and the structure makes it easy and pleasant to read. The plot, although dark and at times devastating, is none the less highly engaging and extremely realistic. Some material may be unsuitable for a younger audience, but in all, the novel is a powerful and riveting story of faith, courage, and hope.



Quotes

"Some big thing hit the moon last night, a planet or a comet or something. And it knocked the moon out of whack. It's closer to Earth now. Tidal waves. Flooding, blackouts, panic" (Chapter 1, p. 9).

"Bed looked very inviting. But first he got down on his knees, made the sign of the cross, and prayed for the safety of his sisters, and then for the safety of his country and the world. God show us mercy, he prayed. And give me strength. Only then did he allow himself to escape into sleep" (Chapter 1, p. 19).

"He told himself repeatedly that it had been Papi who'd called, that Bri couldn't be wrong, that it was just a matter of time before Papi made his way back home. But he couldn't shake the image of the tiny seaside town being swept away, Papi screaming as twenty-foot tidal waves carried him to certain death." (Chapter 2, p. 33).

"It was a scene unlike any Alex could have imagined. If he looked up, it was Yankee Stadium, filled with empty seats. But if he looked at eye level, it was hell" (Chapter 3, p. 62).

"As long as he prayed, he didn't have to think. He didn't have to remember. He didn't have to decide. He didn't have to acknowledge he was entering a world where no one had laid out the rules for him to follow, a world where there might not be any rules left for any of them to follow" (Chapter 3, p. 65).

"What if we die? Alex asked himself. What if we starve to death, and something happens and Papi and Mami and Carlos and Bri all come back, only to find our dead bodies?" (Chapter 6, p. 108).

"I'm not asking you to pity me. I pity me enough for the two of us. But when one of your students asks you for food, you shouldn't say no and feel righteous about it. That's not what Christ would have done, and you know it" (Chapter 7, p. 133).

"Still, he felt guilty body shopping with his friend that morning. But guilt was as much a part of his life as cold, hunger, and grief" (Chapter 10, p. 168).

"The National Guard is supposed to police the place, but they're stretched too thin, and if you wander off looking for food, the townspeople shoot to kill. No showers, no toilets, and now people are freezing to death." (Chapter 10, pg. 174).

"As Julie and Alex walked home from school, they saw a man leap from a seventh-story window, falling to the sidewalk about twenty feet from them. Alex grabbed his sister, feeling her thin body shake under her winter coat. "Hurry", he said, pulling her along as he raced to the body. "You get his shoes, and I'll look for his wallet and his watch" (Chapter 11, p. 180).



"Alex thought about all the prayers he had said in the past four months and how few had been granted. But why should God or even the Blessed Virgin listen to his prayers, he asked himself, when a can of tuna fish was more important to him than the suffering of Christ" (Chapter 11, p. 182).

"Pray that you may accept the fact you're only seventeen and cannot understand all that is happening. Offer Christ your gratitude that you and your sisters have lived to see this day. But you must mean the words. God will know it if you don't. He can forgive anger, but He has no love for hypocrisy" (Chapter 11, p. 185).

"Alex couldn't believe it either. He wondered how many pairs of shoes it had cost Kevin to get the cake mix and icing, and he appreciated how his friend has set things up so no one would think of the loss of life that simple, under baked cake had cost" (Chapter 11, p. 191).

"He doesn't care...Not about Mom. not about me. if he did, he would have made us leave months ago. That's how you know if people really love you. The ones who do let you go" (Chapter 14, p. 223).

"They were the important people, he realized, the ones with connections, the ones whose families were safe. Everything about them was cleaner, even their face masks. And they still had flesh on their bodies; not a single one was a walking skeleton. Alex wondered what it must be like, not to be hungry and dirty and scared. Although if they were sane, they were scared" (Chapter 14, p. 227).

"So they're keeping New York alive a little longer. But as soon as they can, they'll pull the plug and let the city die. It will anyway. It's an island, Alex, and islands can't survive in this world, not anymore. Get out while you can" (Chapter 14, p. 231).

"Humility, he reminded himself. Gos wasn't singling him out. If he placed his faith in Christ and used whatever brain cells he had left, the solution would come to him. because somewhere there was a solution. There had to be. There had to" (Chapter 15, p. 243).

While he'd traded practically everything he'd found in the medicine cabinets, he'd kept a half dozen prescription sleeping pills, so if he ever had to, he could drug Bri and Julie and smother them while they were sleeping. He was sure they'd be in a state of grace when they died and that was what mattered" (Chapter 17, p. 270).

"Alex stroked Bri's hair and prayed for strength. He told himself it was better this way. Bri hadn't died at the hands of another, her body carelessly discarded after it had served it's purpose. The moon had killed her, not man. He made the sign of the cross and thanked Christ for what Bri had been spared" (Chapter 19, p. 297).



Topics for Discussion

Religious faith is a major theme within the novel. How does Alex use his faith to help him get through tough times? How does Briana use her faith? What about Julie? Do you think these characters would be able to survive in the novel without their faith? What does this say about Briana's death? Why was Alex so concerned that his sisters die in a state of grace?

It is unclear in the novel as to the fate of Mami and Papi. Do you think Alex would have been better off if he had found his mother's body at Yankee Stadium? Why or why not? What did the lack of hard evidence do for the family? How do you think this affected Alex, Briana, and Julie? Do you think the ending of the novel, specifically Briana's death, would have changed if Mami or Papi had been found, either alive or dead? What does this say about hope?

Alex decides to send Briana away to the convent farm, but decides not to send Julie with his own family members. Explain this decision. Why do you think Alex made the decisions he made? Do you think he was wrong, or right in those decisions? Do you think those decisions played a role in Briana's death as Alex believes they do? Why or why not?

One of the questions in the novel is the two sided argument of anarchy and rules. This theme is mentioned specifically on page 133, as Alex and Father Mulrooney debate the role of rules and anarchy in "the worst of times." What is Alex's take on the position? What is Father Mulrooney's? What do you think, that rules can help avoid anarchy, that rules cause anarchy, or both? Explain your answer in detail and use examples from the book to support your opinion.

One of the activities Alex does to help his sisters survive is "body shopping". What is "body shopping"? Do you think Alex has a difficult time doing this, as a result of his faith? Why or why not? Do you think Alex is right or wrong in his actions? Would you do the same thing in those circumstances? Why or why not?

Describe Harvey's role in the new world order. Is Harvey a good person, or a bad person? Is his role necessary? Why or why not? In one case, he attempts to talk Alex into trading Julie for a passage out of New York for Briana and himself. Does this necessarily make him evil? Why or why not? Would you deal with someone like Harvey in the same circumstances? Why?

Compare Alex's relationships with Julie and Briana at the beginning of the novel to those toward the end of the novel. What does this shift say about Julie in the novel? About Briana? Why is this shift important to the novel?

Courage is another major theme in the novel. How does Alex show his courage? Briana? Carlos? Julie? Father Mulrooney? What do these differences in display of

courage say about these characters? If you were in the situation, what signs of courage do you think you would show? What would your weaknesses be?