

The Ersatz Elevator Study Guide

The Ersatz Elevator by Lemony Snicket

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Plot Summary

The Ersatz Elevator begins with Violet, Klaus and Sunny Baudelaire embarking on a brand new adventure. Their path has taken them this time to 667 Dark Avenue; the same city where they were born. Although happy to return to the city they loved, their uncertain future is troubling. They soon meet their new guardians, Jerome and Esme Gigi Geniveve Squalor. Esme and Jerome are night and day to one another. Jerome is gentle with a kind heart. Esme is greedy, cruel and obsessed with popularity. Her life revolves around things that are "in" and things that are "out." In fact, her only reason for adopting The Baudelaires was that orphans were "in."

The Baudelaires new home is a spacious penthouse with hundreds of different rooms. Although they are now living in the lap of luxury, lingering concern for their missing friends, the Quagmires, hangs heavily over their heads. They cannot reconcile their own comfort with the danger that their friends are in. The thought that Mr. Poe is now in charge of finding the Quagmires is no comfort to them.

In addition to worrying about their friends, the ever-present threat of Count Olaf looms. The threat is soon realized when an auctioneer named Gunther befriends Esme in preparation for her annual "In Auction." The children recognize him immediately, but everyone else is in the dark.

Now that their hoped for safety has been shattered, Violet, Klaus and Sunny must do all they can to escape Count Olaf's clutches and rescue their friends. With him nearby, they hope their friends are nearby as well, but don't know just how right they are. When nothing seems to come of Olaf's surprise appearance, and he vanishes into apparently thin air, The Baudelaires work to uncover his plot. With their combined talents and skills they discover a passageway that leads from the penthouse down to a hidden room. Inside the room, they find their friends, Isadora and Duncan Quagmire. They try to break them out of their cage, but return to find their friends missing once again.

The Baudelaires have the responsibility to figure out how Count Olaf plans to smuggle the Quagmires out of the city and the "In Auction" seems to be their best bet. The children will have to decipher two red herrings and escape from a surprise set up for them by someone they thought they could trust. Time is running out for the Quagmires and The Baudelaires will need all of their combined resources to get their friends and themselves out of danger before it is too late.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

After escaping the clutches of Count Olaf at Prufrock Prep, The Baudelaires' guardian, Mr. Poe, has found them a new set of guardians. Violet, Klaus and Sunny will now be placed in the care of Jerome and Esme Genevieve Squalor. The Squalors live in the city in which the Baudelaire children grew up, and coming back to the city brings many memories for the children.

The children soon find that their new address, Dark Avenue, is more than just the name of the street; it is an apt description of their new environment. Dark is in, so enormous trees have been planted along the Avenue, which completely block out the sun. The Baudelaires are about to learn just how important "in" is to their new guardians.

Greeted by their new doorman, they quickly learn that elevators are out of fashion, so they must take the stairs to the penthouse. Mr. Poe informs the children that he cannot take them up to meet their new guardians. He isn't sure if they are on the forty-eighth floor or the eighty-fourth floor and he doesn't have time to climb all those stairs.

Mr. Poe was just promoted at Mulctuary Money Management to the position of Vice President in charge of Orphan Affairs. This means he will be heading the search for The Baudelaires' missing friends, Duncan and Isadora Quagmire. He has received a tip that they are on a remote mountain and will miss his helicopter if he doesn't leave immediately.

Left to climb alone in the darkness, the children begin their dreary trek upwards. They try to make the most of their situation, as their apprehension grows. The differences between anxiety and nervousness are mentioned throughout this chapter, and The Baudelaires come to the joint conclusion that they are anxious; anxious about their new guardians; anxious about the fate of the Quagmires, and they are anxious that Count Olaf will be able to track them.

Chapter 1 Analysis

After their last debacle at Prufrock Prep, The Baudelaires have high hopes that this time, their guardians will be good people and that Count Olaf will not find them. Already, it doesn't look good for the Baudelaires. They are about to be thrown into a world of in and out and their lives will soon be turned upside down.

Any happiness they may experience will be tempered by worries for their friends, Isadora and Duncan Quagmire. They are still in the clutches of Count Olaf, and with Mr. Poe in charge of finding them, the situation looks grim. As always, The Baudelaires have each other, but they are going to have to stick close to overcome the obstacles they are about to face.



The situation is mirrored by the atmosphere of Dark Avenue. Everything has been plunged into a thick gloom, much like the lives of the Baudelaire children. The address, 667 Dark Avenue, is a play on the number 666, which many consider to be an evil number. Mr. Poe's continual abandonment of the children, particularly when they need him the most, is becoming quite common. Once again, the children are left alone, and this time, they are literally in the dark.

Although the Baudelaires grew up in this city, they have never been to Dark Avenue. While their lives must have been somewhat sheltered when their parents were alive, they never met all of these guardians to whom their parents were apparently close friends or related in some way. This is odd, but the connection will not be revealed until later in the series.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

As the Baudelaires make the long trip up the seemingly endless stairs to their new home, they reminisce on their past experiences with a long line of guardians. They finally arrive at the penthouse and are greeted by one of their new guardians, Jerome Squalor, who is dressed in a pinstripe suit. The entire penthouse is pitch black, lit only by a few candles. Jerome's wife, Esme Gigi Geniveve Squalor, the city's sixth most important financial advisor, appears and the difference between the two spouses is night and day. The similarities end with their matching pinstripe suits. Jerome seems to be a kind man, who wishes they could have adopted The Baudelaires sooner. Esme, on the other hand, is preoccupied by two things, money and what is "in." The Baudelaires find out that the Squalor's didn't adopt them at first because orphans were not "in."

The phone rings and Esme announces that dark is now out and light is back in. She rushes to turn on every light in the penthouse and the children go to the window. The huge trees that obscured the sunlight on Dark Avenue are being chopped down. The Baudelaires do not miss the connection. Once something is out, it is done away with as quickly as possible. They can only hope that orphans remain in for a long time.

Chapter 2 Analysis

The Baudelaires are quick to notice their new guardians are not quite like any of their past caretakers. They are an odd couple, and two very different people. Right away, the reader is able to ascertain that Esme calls the shots in the Squalor household. If Jerome has a job, it is not mentioned, but Esme's position is. She is a powerful woman who is used to getting her way in everything, including her household.

Esme's life is made up of being rich and popular. She does not make any decisions until she knows how it will affect her social standing. The Baudelaires might have been spared their awful experiences if she had been willing to adopt them when orphans were out but that did not happen.

The cutting down of the trees on Dark Avenue foreshadows what will soon happen to The Baudelaires when orphans go out of style, or if Count Olaf manages to find them. This symbolism of the trees being killed when they are no longer of use hangs over the Baudelaire children.

Esme and Jerome Squalor seem to be a composite of the worst traits of all of their previous guardians. Jerome is weak, and ruled by his fears, much like Aunt Josephine. However, he is kind to the children, and similar in many ways to their Uncle Monty. Esme, on the other hand, seems to embody the traits of Count Olaf and Vice Principle Nero. She wants adulation, attention and above all else, money.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Violet, Klaus and Sunny's new home is enormous. The penthouse has 71 bedrooms and numerous kitchens, living rooms and sitting areas. Jerome finds them each a bedroom he thinks will be well suited to them, but his choice turns out to be a double-edged sword. Violet receives the bedroom with a workbench, but tools are out, so it is useless. Klaus gets the bedroom closest to the library, but it is filled with books about fashionable things. Sunny gets a room with plenty of toys, but none of them are suitable for biting.

Still, the Baudelaires try to make the best of the situation. They realize that while they may not be very happy at their new home, at least they are not in Count Olaf's clutches like their friends, the Quagmires. They cannot stop thinking about their friends, but Esme doesn't appreciate their worries. Jerome tries to speak up for the children, but, as usual, is quickly silenced by his wife.

Esme announces that an In Auction is about to take place. Each year, she organizes this auction, which is supposed to be a charity event. However, the charity is always Esme. Even though she is the city's sixth most important financial advisor, she feels she cannot have too much money. Jerome brings up a needy family and is once again silenced. Esme presents the children with gifts she purchased for them at the In Boutique. Violet, Klaus and Sunny are disappointed however. Instead of tools for Violet, an atlas for Klaus or something bitable for Sunny, they have received enormous pinstripe suits. Esme is horrified at their current clothing and can't wait for the children to start wearing something that is in.

The Baudelaires go to try on their new suits, which are much too big. However, there is something more horrendous than ill-fitting clothes waiting for the Baudelaire's. A shadow looms over them as they struggle to put on their suits.

Chapter 3 Analysis

The Baudelaires are used to making the best of a bad situation and they realize that while they are not very happy at their new home, it really could be worse. Their needs are met, and while Esme is not a loving guardian, Jerome tries to make up for it. They feel rather spoiled at complaining about their new rooms when they realize that the Quagmires are suffering a far worse fate.

The appearance of a shadow is a literal foreshadowing of the events that are looming over the Baudelaire's. Their worst fears are about to come true and soon, they will find out they are not lucky at all. Even though their lives have been literally brighter since dark went out, the darkness that has been hanging over their minds has not been dispelled. Driven by constant worry for their companions, and the knowledge that Mr.



Poe will most likely fail in his quest to rescue them, they cannot shake the feeling of gloom.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

The shadow belongs to a man that Esme introduces as Gunther. He is supposed to be the auctioneer for the upcoming In Auction. A monocle in one eye furrows his brow and he is wearing tall leather boots. Gunther also speaks with a stilted foreign accent. However, The Baudelaires see past this elaborate disguise. Count Olaf has returned. They immediately tell Jerome and Esme that Gunther is really Count Olaf, but as usual, the adults refuse to believe them.

The children refuse to call Count Olaf by the name of Gunter and Esme becomes furious with them. Esme demands that the children apologize to Gunther and then hustles them out the door with Jerome. She needs to prepare for the In Auction and has arranged for the children to go to dinner with Jerome. Violet realizes that arguing with Esme is pointless and decides that more good can come by getting out of the apartment and figuring out what to do.

In the hallway, Jerome offers to do something to make the children feel better. They soon realize he doesn't mean that he will help them with Count Olaf. Instead, he recommends sliding down the banister to make the trip downstairs go quicker. This does little to assure the children that their new guardians will be successful in protecting them from Count Olaf. Instead, they appear to have swallowed his disguise, hook, line and sinker.

Chapter 4 Analysis

The return of Count Olaf comes as no surprise. He always seems to be at least one step ahead of the children. This time, he seems to have found a disguise that will put him way in front of the children. By utilizing a fake foreign accent, he has ensured that adults will not want to offend him. This is an interesting look at how political correctness has changed the face of our society.

Jerome has turned out to be as ineffectual as the rest of The Baudelaires previous guardians. He is hampered by his position with his wife and his own personal viewpoints. Although he tries to cheer the children up, the cheer lands on a wrong note, given their current situation.

The Baudelaires' situation is somewhat different this time. Count Olaf's disguise works, not only in the eyes of the adults in the story, but also in their minds. By their fear of breaking the social bonds of political correctness, they literally cannot see past an otherwise ridiculous disguise.

Upcoming events in the plot are eluded to through the use of irony. Esme jokes that orphans are so in, they should be included in the auction, much to the chagrin of

Jerome. However, this is a foreshadowing of part of Count Olaf's plan, in particular with the Quagmires. Little do the Baudelaires know how close to the truth Esme's joke really is.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Jerome takes The Baudelaires to the city's fish district. Esme made reservations at the Cafy Salmonella and even though Jerome hates fish, he didn't argue with her. Violet, Klaus and Sunny, soon realize that Jerome never argues with Esme. Cafy Salmonella is a theme restaurant, with waiters dressed up as large fish and a menu devoted entirely to salmon. Even the ice cubes in their water are frozen chunks of fish.

During dinner, Jerome accuses them of xenophobia, or a hatred of foreigners. The children try to explain they do not like Gunther because he is foreign, but rather because he is really Count Olaf. They do not get very far. Jerome cannot even stand arguing with the children. They finish their dinner and return to 667 Dark Avenue. The doorman greets them and lets them know that Esme has ordered him to make sure they are not allowed back up to the penthouse until her guest leaves. Since he has not come down yet, Jerome and the children will not be allowed to walk back up the stairs.

Jerome convinces him that maybe Gunther is already on the way down the stairs. The doorman acquiesces and Jerome and The Baudelaires begin the long trek up the stairs. Once they finally reach the top, Esme informs them that Gunther left hours ago. Since they didn't see him on the way up to the penthouse, and the doorman didn't see Gunther, Klaus asks Esme if Gunther took the elevator. Esme reacts strangely and tells the children that the doorman was mistaken. The elevator has been shut down and he must have missed Gunther in the lobby. The Baudelaires spend a restless night in their bedrooms.

Chapter 5 Analysis

After a wretched dinner at Cafy Salmonella, the children return to a strange situation. The doorman was ordered by Esme to keep the children away from the penthouse until Gunther left. However, it appears he left hours before the children arrived back at their new home. Something does not add up and Esme's reaction to Klaus' question is very suspicious.

The order to keep the children away from the apartment came from Esme, which is interesting. Is she involved in some way with Count Olaf, or is this just a strange coincidence? The children are left feeling as though Count Olaf may pop out from one of the many rooms in the penthouse and their feelings of safety are removed even further. Their new home has become a posh cage.

Is this a part of Count Olaf's plan to keep the children so on guard that they miss the rest of his plot, or is it simply an act of mental terrorism that Count Olaf is so fond of? By the children's increased fears over where he is hiding, he is slowly breaking them down. If they are too worried to think straight, they may just miss his true intentions.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

As morning arrives, the children meet in Violet's room. They try to figure out what Count Olaf has planned, but are interrupted by Jerome delivering their breakfast. He had planned to spend the afternoon with the children, but Esme sends him to the beverage district. Parsley soda is now in and she wants him to buy cases of it. He tries to insist, but Esme is late for her meeting with the King of Arizona and orders him to pick up the soda. The Baudelaires are left all alone in the penthouse for the rest of the day. They decide to spend their free afternoon searching for Count Olaf.

Since the doorman didn't see him leave, they figure Count Olaf must still be somewhere in the penthouse. They agree to search the penthouse, using a trail of breadcrumbs to help them navigate the expansive and confusing space. After a long and pointless search, Violet, Klaus and Sunny end up in one of the kitchens. They decide to begin searching the other apartments in the building by listening at each door to see if Count Olaf is hiding inside. Before they leave, they grab a snack and some water to take with them for their long trip down.

After sixty-six floors of listening, they arrive at the bottom without finding Count Olaf. The doorman spots them and tells them he cannot let them return to the penthouse since the guest has not yet left. They try to explain that he did leave, but the doorman will not budge. He is busy installing ocean decorations, which are now in, throughout the lobby. The Baudelaires eat their snack as they wait for Jerome and Esme to return. As they eat, they discuss their problem with the doorman about Esme's missing guest. As he glues a starfish to the elevator door, he makes a comment that most problems have solutions and many times the solution is right under your nose. Klaus reacts strongly to this and begins to think.

Chapter 6 Analysis

The long search of the penthouse turns out to be pointless, as well as the long trip down the stairs. However, all is not for naught as Klaus appears to have caught on to something. The actions of the doorman are very curious. Somehow, Gunther is still in the building, and The Baudelaires are running out of time to figure out where he is hiding. Their hopes must now rest on Klaus, who appears to be close to solving the mystery.

The hint that gives Klaus an idea comes from the doorman himself. This leads the reader to question whether or not the doorman is involved in this plot in some way. Hints are given that there may be more to this doorman than meets the eye, and they are quite broad.



The literal statement of the doorman, that the truth is sometimes right under your nose comes as he glues the starfish to the elevator doors. Does this explain Esme's strange reaction to Klaus' question about the elevator?

A little levity is introduced in this chapter, with the reference to the King of Arizona. While the books never clearly state where the fictional city is located, this reference to Arizona seems to indicate they may not be in the United States. This allows the reader to share an inside joke with the narrator of the story and provides a much needed dose of laughter.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Violet and Sunny know that when Klaus is preoccupied with solving a problem, there is no point in interrupting him, so they let him think. Jerome and Esme finally return with several cases of parsley soda. Esme informs the doorman that Gunther did leave and orders him to let the children return to the penthouse. She asks him what kind of a doorman he is and he responds that he is really an actor.

During the long trip back up to the penthouse, Klaus is silent. Esme, however, rattles off all of the things that are in that she discovered during her meeting with the King of Arizona. She keeps this up all the way back to the penthouse. Klaus interrupts her and asks if they can go to bed. Jerome tells them that is fine, but he will need to wake them up early to get them to Veblen Hall for the In Auction at 10:30. Esme tells him that he cannot take the children since she needs him to pick up yellow paperclips, which are now in, before the auction begins. She will take the children instead.

Violet, Klaus and Sunny head for Violet's bedroom. It is obvious that Klaus is up to something and they can't wait to find out what it is. Klaus reminds them of what the doorman was doing when he said the solution to a problem is usually right under their nose. They remember that he was gluing a starfish to the elevator door, but do not make the connection. Klaus then tells them that he noticed an extra pair of elevator doors at the penthouse level. He is convinced that Count Olaf disappeared using this elevator. They sneak out of the penthouse and go to both sets of elevator doors.

After finding the extra set of doors, they figure out which one goes to the lobby and pry open the other set of doors. To their surprise, they see a long, empty shaft without any elevator equipment inside. It is an ersatz elevator. They decide to climb down the shaft and return to the apartment to find rope. Unfortunately, rope must be out, since they cannot find any. Instead, they make an ersatz rope out of ties, extension cords and curtain pulls. Violet uses her favorite knot, The Devil's Tongue, to tie all of these things together into one long rope. They get their courage up and begin the long, slow, downward climb. At the end of their journey, they find themselves in a small room that has a very large cage inside of it. Inside this cage, they are shocked to find Isadora and Duncan Quagmire.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Klaus has managed to discover a key component of Count Olaf's plan. The second elevator is a fake, and leads to a hidden room where Isadora and Duncan Quagmire are being kept. Their position contrasts with the Baudelaires relative comfort of their penthouse. Both sets of children have been kept caged, one by Count Olaf himself, and the others by the fear of the man.



The natural skills of the Baudelaire children come in handy in this chapter. Violet is able to invent a rope out of basic materials and Klaus uses his mind to unravel the threads in Count Olaf's scheme. Now that they have found their friends at last, they are very close to outwitting Count Olaf. Unfortunately, everything may not work out just as they had planned.

The connection with the term ersatz is rampant in this chapter. We have the ersatz elevator, the ersatz rope, and although it is not stated, an ersatz caring guardian in Esme. Once again, she reveals her Olaf-ian tendencies by her dislike of Sunny's capabilities, since she is an infant, her insistence that the children carry crates of soda up a long flight of stairs and her overall imperious nature. This behavior is symbolic of a connection between the two that will soon be revealed.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Isadora and Duncan have not fared well in their time in captivity. They are extremely dirty and their eyes appear haunted. It is obvious to Violet, Klaus and Sunny that their friends have been through a horrible experience. Once the Quagmires realize their friends are really there, they try to catch up on all that has happened. They have been privy to Count Olaf's scheme and inform The Baudelaires that he plans to sneak them out of town in one of the items at the In Auction. They have also been taking notes about Count Olaf's many plans and have learned more about the mysterious V.F.D.

Violet begins to think up a way to get them out of the cage, after picking the lock does not work. She decides they will have to find a way to weld the bars of the cage to release their friends. This means returning back to the penthouse to get the necessary tools for Violet's invention. The Quagmires try to tell the Baudelaires about V.F.D. but they do not take the time to listen.

Violet, Klaus and Sunny begin their long climb back up to the penthouse. Once inside, Violet instructs her siblings to find long pieces of iron and to meet her in the kitchen. She begins to heat up the oven while she waits for them to return. Klaus and Sunny come back with fireplace tongs, which are perfect for Violet's invention. She plans to use the oven to heat the tongs until they are hot enough to bend the metal bars of the Quagmires cage. It takes a long time to get the tongs to the white-hot stage, and the kitchen becomes unbearably hot. Finally, the tongs are ready.

The Baudelaires go back to the ersatz elevator and prepare to go back down. This time, however, they can each use only one hand, as they are carrying the super heated tongs with the other. It won't be easy, but to the Baudelaires, saving the Quagmires is more important.

Chapter 8 Analysis

The long awaited reunion of the friends is dampened by the need to get the Quagmires out of their cage as quickly as possible. Now that The Baudelaires know what Count Olaf is up to, they will need all of their combined skills to beat him at his own game. Violet begins thinking of an invention to release her friends, but does not take the time to listen to what the Quagmires have to say. This move is one that Violet will regret bitterly within a few hours.

The mention of V.F.D. again is mysterious. The true nature of what it means is not revealed and The Baudelaires miss a chance for an important clue that would have come in handy through the rest of the series. This is just the first of many missed opportunities to come. Again, we have the use of dramatic irony through the information the narrator provides. The reader knows this information is vital and that The



Baudelaires will soon rue their decision. This plunges them into the helpless feeling that is common to the characters in the story and creates a feeling of frustration for the reader. Even though The Baudelaires are confident in their skills, they may have grown over-confident through their continual foiling of Count Olaf's plans. Instead of taking the time to make sure they have all the information, they are sure they can solve the problem on their own.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Violet, Klaus and Sunny arrive back in the small room, only to find they are too late. Their friends are gone. Violet is incredibly frustrated that her invention did not work. Klaus reminds her she just missed her chance to use it. After remembering that Count Olaf was going to smuggle the Quagmires out of town in an item from the auction, they climb back up to the penthouse.

Klaus is picked to scour through the In Auction catalog to discern which item the Quagmires will be hidden in. There are hundreds of items and he ends up skipping many of them. He passes right by Lot #48, a large statue of a red herring, and focuses on Lot #50. This lot is a mystery box marked V.F.D.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Violet is again able to fashion an invention out of regular household items that might save her friends. However, the time it takes to get her invention ready works against her. Her opportunity has been missed and now it is up to Klaus to save the Quagmires. All they have to go on is a snippet of information that their friends will be smuggled out in an item that will be sold at the In Auction. This chapter brings in what is known as a red herring.

In addition to being a type of fish, this is also a term that refers to a ruse. A red herring works by tricking someone into thinking they have found the answer, when the real answer is concealed right under their noses. The children have not dealt with this type of plot from Count Olaf, and this time, they may be outmatched.

The red herring in the catalog is a literal and symbolic red herring. Although it is an actual statue of this type of fish, the connection is too obvious for the children. They miss the symbolism and instead, end up being taken in by the second symbolic red herring, the box marked V.F.D. The information the Quagmires could have provided them would have helped them in this situation, but they are blinded by the obvious V.F.D. box and do not stop to think it may just be a little too obvious.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Certain that Lot #50 is the hiding place for their friends, The Baudelaires decide to tell Esme all that has happened. She readily agrees to sit down and listen to their story, which is odd, to say the least. Before they are allowed to begin, she insists on finding the most comfortable couch and sips slowly on a parsley soda. After hearing the entire tale, she agrees to take the children to the Auction to put a stop to Count Olaf's plan. However, she does not appear to be upset, which is disconcerting to the children.

Leaving the apartment, Esme stops them in front of the elevators. Violet offers to carry Sunny so that the trip down will be quicker, and Klaus recommends sliding down the banisters. However, Esme has another idea. She presses the up button next the ersatz elevator and the doors open. With one movement, she sweeps the Baudelaires in front of the gaping chasm and pushes them in.

The children fall down the shaft, screaming. Their fall is suddenly broken by a large net that is stretched across the empty shaft. The Baudelaires take inventory and realize they are all alive. Esme shouts down that they may be alive but they are far from O.K. With a laugh she tells them that after the auction, she will return with Count Olaf, and that he will finally get his hands on their fortune. The Baudelaires are shocked to hear that Esme is helping their nemesis, but soon learn that she is old friends with the man. Count Olaf is Esme's old acting teacher. She leaves them to their fate, laughing horribly.

Violet, Klaus and Sunny try to figure out what to do. The walls are too slick to climb and their ersatz rope is up in the penthouse. Sunny volunteers to climb up the elevator shaft, using her teeth. Bravely, she ventures up the shaft. After she reaches the top, she throws down the rope and then jumps after it, knowing that the net will safely break her fall. Now, the children need to decide what to do. If they try to leave the penthouse, the doorman will spot them. After deciding that down is the only way to get out of the building, Violet secures the rope and Sunny chews a hole through the net for the children to climb through. At the bottom of the shaft, the empty cage and Violet's welding invention are still there. They pick up the tongs and head down a dark hallway that leads from the small room.

Chapter 10 Analysis

Esme's true nature is finally revealed in Chapter 10. The hints that the reader received all add up to her involvement with Count Olaf, but she stoops to a bigger low of throwing the children down an elevator shaft. Before, she was just a greedy woman who was preoccupied with what was in. Her association with Count Olaf has turned her into a murderous woman who thinks nothing of stealing fortunes from children.



Finally, the connection between Esme and Count Olaf's behavior is explained. She is an old friend and it is obvious that he had quite an influence on her. Their many similarities finally make sense, but right now, it is too late for the children to do anything about it. While the reader was able to pick up on these hints, the children were too entrenched in their situation to notice. This is a good illustration of how easy it is for people to miss something that is right under their nose. Again, we have the symbolism of a red herring. The children were alerted by the doorman that the solution was right under their nose, but they missed one of the answers.

Sunny's bravery comes to the rescue. She has shown bravery in the past, but in this particular book, it truly shines through. Sunny is able to get her siblings out of a terrible spot through the use of her teeth and her heart. She is truly a Baudelaire, even though she may be the size of a salami. The hallway that leads from the small room is about to lead the Baudelaires in a direction they never dreamed would happen.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

As the Baudelaires go through the hallway, they realize it is really an underground tunnel. They are able to pinpoint their location by listening to the traffic and voices coming from above. Soon, however, they hit a dead end. Klaus begins to bang on the ceiling of the tunnel and ashes fall down on the children. Thinking they are below a barbecue pit, the children continue to use their fire tongs to break through the ceiling. Succeeding, they climb out, allowing time for their eyes to adjust to the light. They realize they are in a familiar location. There is a man staring at them, who says they must be ghosts. The children ask for directions to Veblen Hall and he stutters as he gives them. The man mentions that people had said the site of the old Baudelaire mansion was haunted and now he believes it. As they look around at their surroundings, they are surprised to find they are standing in what used to be their home.

Chapter 11 Analysis

For a reason that The Baudelaires cannot explain, Esme's penthouse contains a tunnel that leads to their old home. The explanation is not given in this book, but it is a foreshadowing of a bigger picture that is being painted by the author. Many of the hints given throughout the series lead the reader to the next book, and usually more questions. The answers will not be revealed for some time, but The Baudelaires are making note of all of these strange coincidences.

Much like a mythical phoenix, the children arise from the ashes of their old home. They are quite different children than they were when they lived there with their parents. They have been tried by literal fire and emerged much stronger. The talents they took for granted, and the strength they did know they had have been revealed to them. Like iron of the tongs in the oven in the Squalor's kitchen, they have been tested and have come out of the experience much wiser, but with many unanswered questions.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

The Baudelaires arrive at the In Auction, which is being catered by Cafy Salmonella, just as Lot #46 comes up. The children, filthy from their travel through the tunnel, are quickly spotted and almost thrown out of the building. They find Jerome and begin to wait for Lot #50. They are surprised to see Mr. Poe present at the auction. He informs the children that he has not yet found their friends, but that he is following up on a good lead. His wife asked him to stop at the auction before leaving. The doorman of the building bids on Lot #48, the statue of a large red herring. The Baudelaires are surprised to see him there, but they don't think much about it at first. The children try to convince Mr. Poe that Gunter is really Count Olaf, but as usual, their pleas fall on deaf ears.

As they persuade Jerome to bid on Lot #50, the children are spotted by Count Olaf and Esme. They decide to skip ahead to Lot #50 and end the auction. Esme remarks that she has already made enough money, which surprises Jerome. The bidding begins fast and furious on the mysterious box marked V.F.D. Jerome refuses to go any higher and the children almost lose the item. All of the sudden, a voice rings out to bid a thousand. It is none other than Sunny. They win the item and march to the stage to open the box in front of everyone. They tell Esme and Count Olaf that their plans are about to be revealed, but to their dismay, they find out that the Quagmires are not in Lot #50.

Chapter 12 Analysis

The appearance of the doorman at the In Auction is an important plot point. Up to this point in the story, hints have been given to the reader as to the real identity of this man. However, they will not be answered conclusively until the last chapter. Once again, the answer was right under The Baudelaires noses, literally. By piecing together the information the reader has received to this point however, a good guess was very possible.

Esme and Count Olaf seem to be quite self-assured as the doorman leaves with the statue of a red herring. Little do the children know that Count Olaf has played a literal joke on them. Without something extraordinary happening, the children's accusations may look groundless, not only to Mr. Poe, but to the rest of the people attending the auction.

Once again, Sunny comes to the rescue by bidding on Lot #50. Unfortunately, her bid won them an item they are not expecting. The symbolism that has been running through the entire book, leading the reader to the solution of the mystery is about to be revealed. The over-obvious V.F.D. box was not what it appeared to be, but it has a very logical explanation for its initials. This is the first time the use of V.F.D. is used in connection

with a literal red herring. Throughout the rest of the series, this trend will continue, throwing the Baudelaires off course.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Instead of the Quagmires they find a box full of Very Fine Doilies. Aghast, they attempt to figure out what Count Olaf is up to. Mr. Poe remarks that the children are obviously not doing well in their new home and Esme tells him she no longer wants the children. Count Olaf offers to adopt them, but as he walks forward to grab Violet, he slips on one of the very fine doilies. As he falls, his boots come off, revealing the tattoo on his ankle. Everyone gasps and Mr. Poe cries out that Gunther is really Count Olaf!

Esme responds that he is more than Count Olaf, he is the in-est and handsome-est man in town. Count Olaf puts his hands around her waist and they run for the exit. Chaos ensues as everyone tries to go after them, but ends up slipping on the very fine doilies. In the midst of the tangle of human bodies, The Baudelaires spot the doorman outside. He is putting the statue of the red fish in a pickup truck and they see something very odd. Instead of hands, he has two hooks. Finally, they realize the doorman is none other than one of Count Olaf's associates.

As the truck roars away with Count Olaf, Esme and the Hook-Handed Man, the children realize the Quagmires were trapped in the statue of the fish. Mr. Poe says he will call the police, but his efforts, as always, are too little, too late. Once again, Count Olaf has escaped. However, The Baudelaires immediate future is now at stake. Jerome offers to be their guardian again, but only if the children do not go after Count Olaf. They tell him they cannot abandon their friends and he ends up abandoning them instead. With a final "good luck," he walks out of their lives. The Baudelaires are without a guardian, without their friends, and without much hope. All they have to cling to is each other and their desire to rescue their friends, no matter what it takes.

Chapter 13 Analysis

The Baudelaires quickly discover that Lot #50 is the real red herring, and that their friends were concealed in the literal red herring. While they were busy focusing on the obvious selection, the box marked V.F.D., Count Olaf was able to use their preconceived notions against them. This is the second time he has used the perceptions of others to disguise not only himself, but also his true purpose.

Esme is quick to fall in with Count Olaf, leaving Jerome bewildered. He is not a strong enough person to stand up to her and does nothing to assert himself. After they escape, he is still unable to take charge and care for the children. He is happy to let other people take the risks, and is not ashamed to admit that he is not brave.

Mr. Poe fails again to apprehend Count Olaf, and now the Quagmires are in even more danger than before. Esme will make an interesting addition to Count Olaf's gang, and will be an adversary the children will have a hard time beating in the upcoming books.

The reappearance of the hook-handed man was hinted at throughout the book, and finally revealed in the last chapter.

Even though The Baudelaires may be children, they are quickly learning they are better equipped to deal with the crises that have been thrown their way. When the adults quail or give up, the children dig down and stick together. As long as they can keep this up, they will be able to continue outsmarting Count Olaf and may be able to save their friends once and for all.



Characters

Violet Baudelaire

Violet Baudelaire is the eldest of the three Baudelaire children. She is fourteen-years-old and extremely bright. Her genius lies in the ability to invent things and she spends a great deal of her time coming up with new inventions. Violet has a particular idiosyncrasy of tying up her hair when she is trying to think. The feeling of her hair on her face distracts her and prevents her from concentrating on her inventions.

Since she is the oldest Baudelaire, she feels responsible for her two younger siblings, Klaus and Sunny. Violet made a promise to her mother that she would always protect them from harm and do her best to keep them safe, and she has taken this promise very seriously. This is helpful, since all of their guardians to this point in the series have been unfit to take care of them. Her siblings look to her to take care of them, and if were not for Violet, they would most likely have already fallen into the hands of Count Olaf.

Violet's skills are used several times throughout *The Ersatz Elevator*. At times, although they may not seem to work as planned, in the end, one of her inventions proves to be very useful. Her skill at tying knots is also helpful when she uses a knot called The Devil's Tongue to create an ersatz rope. Although Jerome Squalor finds Violet a bedroom with a workbench for her inventions, tools are considered "out." There is not a single tool to be found in the enormous penthouse.

The fate of Isadora and Duncan Quagmire lies heavily on Violet throughout this book. It is almost the only thing she can think of. When she gets a chance to rescue her friends, but comes up short, she is very upset. She has formed quite an attachment to Duncan, and although they haven't spent much time together, it is obvious that if they ever do, they will be great friends.

Klaus Baudelaire

Klaus is the middle child of the three Baudelaire siblings. He is twelve-years-old, and also exceptionally bright, but in a different way from Violet. Klaus is a reader and has read a great many books for a twelve-year-old. Unfortunately for Klaus, although the Squalor's have a library, it is filled with nothing but books about things that are, were or may have been, in at one time or another. This does not make for very interesting reading, despite the comfortable nature of the library.

He is very close with his two sisters, even though he did not like Sunny at first. Once he got to know her, however, they became as thick as thieves. He does his best to watch out for his sister and keep her safe. Klaus became close friends with Isadora and Duncan Quagmire in the previous book, *The Austere Academy*. He has a particular attachment to Isadora, due most likely to her love of words and poetry.



Klaus' skills as a researcher come into play as The Baudelaires rush to find out where Count Olaf has hidden the Quagmires. He is forced to go through an entire auction catalog to find the lot number of the object they believe has become the prison of their friends. Like Violet, his efforts to free their friends turn out unexpectedly. Although The Baudelaires are always one step ahead of their own chase with Count Olaf, they cannot seem to get ahead when it comes to helping their friends.

Sunny Baudelaire

Sunny is the youngest of the Baudelaire children, and is described as an infant. She is compared several times to small objects, such as shoes and salami's. Unlike many infants however, Sunny has four teeth that are very well developed and quite sharp. Her favorite past time is biting things and she prefers to find objects that are very hard. Sunny's talents with her teeth are very useful at various times throughout the story. They also mesh well with the talents of her siblings, making them a very good team.

Her particular idiosyncrasy is her method of speech. Since she is only an infant, she has not yet learned to talk. This doesn't mean she doesn't try, and her siblings usually understand her. She is somewhat disappointed in her new home. Although her guardians have supplied her with numerous toys, they are all meant for children her age. Which of course, means they are soft and not very useful for biting. Sunny's bravery becomes her best asset in this book, as she performs tasks that would be impossible to anyone else but Sunny Baudelaire. She proves her worth as a member of the Baudelaire family and goes above and beyond her age and size.

Mr. Poe

Mr. Poe is a family friend of the Baudelaires and is the banker in charge of finding the children a proper home and looking after their monetary affairs. He is normally seen with a handkerchief due to his persistent cough. Mr. Poe does not seem to be an adult that focuses well on what children try to tell him. He underestimates the intelligence of The Baudelaires and tends to write them off as hysterical children, even when they are right.

He is pretty much an ineffectual executor, and seems to be endangering the three children through his inaction. While he does not mean to cause them harm, invariably, his actions do just that. Mr. Poe has been promoted to the Vice President in Charge of Orphan Affairs at his bank, and as such, is tasked with tracking down the Quagmires.

Unfortunately, he bungles his chances to find and save the children, almost as badly as he has bungled the lives of the Baudelaires. Once again, Mr. Poe appears only briefly in The Ersatz Elevator. He arrives at the In Auction, but true to form, is unable to stop Count Olaf from running off with the Quagmires.



Count Olaf/Gunter

Count Olaf is a tall, thin man, with shiny eyes and a uni-brow. He is described as being predatory in nature, similar to a bird of prey. On his left ankle is the tattoo of an eye. The vision of this tattoo haunts the Baudelaire children.

In *The Ersatz Elevator*, Count Olaf disguises himself as an auctioneer named Gunther. He has no problem making friends with Esme Squalor and fooling the adults in the story once again as to his true identity. He wears a monocle to disguise his uni-brow, tall boots to disguise his tattoo and he speaks with a foreign accent to disguise his true identity. His friendship with Esme Squalor is revealed near the end of the story when the reader learns that he was her acting teacher several years ago. She willingly assists him in his plan to kidnap not only the Baudelaires, but also the Quagmires, and ends up leaving her husband for Olaf.

The use of a foreign accent by Count Olaf was very clever. He is able to turn The Baudelaires suspicions around on them since everyone thinks they just don't like him because he is foreign. By manipulating people's sensitivities, he ensures he can continue hiding beneath his disguise successfully.

Jerome Squalor

Jerome is married to Esme Squalor, but is no match for her. He is a nice man, but one that will not stand up to bullying. He does not like to argue, and will agree with someone, even if it is at his own expense. He is a person who does not like to rock the boat, even if it means that something wrong, illegal or distasteful will occur due to his inaction. It is obvious he cares about the Baudelaire children very much, but his personality prevents him from taking care of them properly.

We learn that Jerome knew The Baudelaires mother, and even went on a hiking expedition with her years ago. Unfortunately, that is all we find out about their connection, other than the fact she always told him he wasn't brave enough. Her words are proven true by the end of the book when he abandons the children instead of helping them.

Esme Gigi Geniveve Squalor

Esme Squalor is a woman who has two main concerns: Money and popularity. Her life revolves exclusively around these two things. Her acceptance of the Baudelaire children is due to the fact that orphans are "in," leaving the Baudelaires to wonder what will happen to them if orphans suddenly go out of style. Her job is the sixth most important financial advisor in the city, but the reader is not told where she works. She is a greedy woman, who holds charity auctions, where she is the sole beneficiary. When her husband mentions a needy family who could benefit, she rudely puts him back in his place.



Esme and Jerome live in an exclusive neighborhood in an enormous penthouse. As the reader learns towards the end of the book, there is a secret passageway, which leads from this penthouse to where the Baudelaire mansion was located, before it burned to the ground. This connection is odd, particularly since they only moved into the penthouse recently. She takes an active role in helping Count Olaf kidnap the Baudelaire children and continue hiding the Quagmires. She pushes the children down an elevator shaft, laughing above them. Esme is wicked, but she is not quite done. Her last cruel gesture in *The Ersatz Elevator* is to run away with Count Olaf, abandoning Jerome.

The Doorman

The Doorman at 667 Dark Avenue is strange. He wears a long overcoat that completely covers his hands, and never seems to sleep. He is constantly on duty in the building. His jobs include making sure that the Baudelaire children do not leave the building, under orders from Esme Squalor. Briefly, he mentions that he used to be an actor, which plants a seed that he may be involved with Count Olaf. This turns out to be true as The Baudelaires discover that he is really the hook-handed man, one of Count Olaf's associates.

Isadora Quagmire

Isadora is one of three triplets. Her hair is dark and she has wide-set eyes. Like her brother, she carries a notebook around with her everywhere. Her notebook is black and tucked into the pocket of her sweater that looks just like her brother's sweater. Isadora writes couplets, and dreams of being a poet. She is very intelligent and gets along very well with Klaus. Even though one of their brothers is dead, Isadora insists on referring to Duncan and herself as triplets.

The Quagmires lost their parents and their brother in a fire, just like the Baudelaire's. They are also heirs to a large fortune, and the similarities between the children are very interesting. When The Baudelaires finally find Isadora and her brother at the bottom of an ersatz elevator shaft, they are overjoyed. Both children attempt to reveal to The Baudelaires some important information that will help them find out about the mysterious V.F.D. but The Baudelaires are certain they will rescue them and do not stay to listen to the information. This proves to be a mistake as Count Olaf successfully kidnaps the Quagmires once again, spiriting them out of the city in the statue of a giant fish.

Duncan Quagmire

Duncan is identical to his sister in every way; except that his notebook is dark green. They dress alike and look alike and share many of the same interests. He is also intelligent and dreams one day of running his own publishing company.



Even though he has been kept in a cage with his sister after Count Olaf kidnapped them, he has managed to take notes which reveal more about Count Olaf's plans and the V.F.D. Unfortunately, he is not able to share this information with The Baudelaires before Count Olaf takes them out of the city. It is mentioned that both Quagmire's have haunted eyes in this book. The things they have seen and experienced are not mentioned, but the reader is left to imagine what horrible things Count Olaf has done to these children after kidnapping them from Prufrock Preparatory School.



Objects/Places

667 Dark Avenue

The address of the Baudelaires new home, it is an apartment building in an exclusive neighborhood. Huge trees temporarily line the street until dark goes out of style and light comes in. They are quickly chopped down.

Squalor Penthouse

Esme and Jerome's residence and the temporary home of the Baudelaires, this is an enormous penthouse with hundreds of rooms. It is impossible for The Baudelaires to find anything in the cavernous space and they frequently become lost.

Stairwell

Since elevators are "out," all of the residents of 667 Dark Avenue take the stairs, no matter how high up their apartments are. There is a banister that goes all the way to the bottom floor, which Jerome frequently slides down.

The In Boutique

A store where Esme Squalor shops. They only carry "in" items. Esme purchases the children their own pinstripes suits at this store.

The Fish District

In the Baudelaires' hometown, everything is divided into districts. The fish district is where the fish market and fish-themed restaurants are located. The streets are slippery and everything smells of fish.

Cafy Salmonella

A restaurant in the Fish District, which has only salmon on the menu. The waiters wear salmon costumes, and everything from the ice-cubes to desert has salmon in it. This is one of Jerome's least favorite restaurants, but he does not argue when Esme sends him there. This cafy also caters the event at the In Auction.



The Lobby

The lobby at 667 Dark Avenue is where the Baudelaires are forced to wait for the Squalor's after the doorman will not let them return to their apartment. Klaus receives an important clue while waiting in the lobby.

The Ersatz Elevator

An extra elevator door at the penthouse reveals an ersatz elevator that is actually a passageway to a secret room at the bottom. The room holds a cage where the Quagmires are being held, and leads to a tunnel that ends up at where the Baudelaires' mansion used to be.

Veblen Hall

The location of the In Auction, it is a very old building, with large, ornate doors.

Red Herring

A large statue that is the temporary prison of the Quagmires as Count Olaf spirits them out of town, it is lot number #48 at the In Auction, which is won by the Doorman. This is also a play on words, as a red herring is also known as a ploy to take your attention away from something else.

Lot #50

Lot #50 is titled V.F.D. and The Baudelaires are sure that the large box is holding their friends. They are disappointed to find out that it is actually the red herring, and full of only very fine doilies.



Themes

Popularity

Esme Squalor is obsessed with things that are "in." Her entire life and as such, the life of her husband revolve around being popular. From the descriptions of the other residents of 667 Dark Avenue, this particular obsession is widespread. The Baudelaires are only adopted when it becomes popular to have orphans. As The Baudelaires quickly learn things go "in" and "out" very quickly. This leaves them wondering what will happen if orphans go out of style.

The absurdity of trends is mentioned several times. Trees are chopped down when dark becomes "out," people dress in identical pin-stripe suits, and everyone is forced to walk down a long flight of stairs simply because elevators are "out." This illustrates the lengths that people are willing to go, and the personal inconveniences they will put up with, just to be popular.

Jerome is an example of someone who is caught up in the middle of this obsession, but not really a part of it. His character could not care less about popularity, but through his relationship with Esme, he is forced into it. Although he is a caring individual, his unwillingness to rock the boat leaves him mindlessly following trends that mean nothing to him. Popularity is something that has always been prevalent in society. There will always be an "in-crowd" and an "out-crowd." Many times, the people in the "out-crowd" will make sacrifices just to get in with the right crowd, even at great personal cost. Even though this is absurd, it has happened throughout history and this trend will most likely continue.

Greed

From our first introduction with Count Olaf, we learned just how greedy he was. Now, a new character is introduced who may actually outstrip his greediness. Esme Squalor is the sixth most important financial advisor in the city and most likely a multi-millionaire. She lives in the lap of luxury in a penthouse with hundreds of rooms. All of this is still not enough for Esme. The proceeds of her charity auctions go directly to her, despite suggestions that there are other people who need the money more than she does. She throws away her husband, her home and her position to follow Count Olaf and steal not only the fortune of the Baudelaire family, but the Quagmire fortune as well.

Money is so important to Esme that she is willing to risk everything to obtain even more of it. In reality, her personal wealth is vast, but she is not satisfied with this. She still wants more and will not stop at any lengths to get it. This contrasts sharply with Count Olaf who is not rich. He is almost as greedy as Esme, and they make quite a pair.

Greed is coupled with their laziness. Instead of working for the money they want, they prefer to steal it from children whose parents have died. The connection between The



Baudelaires and the Quagmires will be explained later, but at this point of the series, the reader is left to wonder how two sets of families could go through the same ordeal and leave huge fortunes behind.

Deception

As always, the theme of deception is close to the surface in this series. Count Olaf is usually the culprit of most of the deception, but in this story, even inanimate objects are deceptive. The first instance of deception begins with Count Olaf. He has disguised himself as Gunther, an auctioneer. In addition to using a monocle and leather boots to cover up his distinguishable characteristics, he adds a fake accent. The reaction by the adults when the children challenge his identity is to say that they are xenophobic. Basically, this is a nice way of saying that the children are racist. We frequently hear of the "race card," and this is an example of how it can be played to nefarious ends. By posing as a foreigner, Olaf has guaranteed that adults will not question who he is to avoid offending him.

The elevator is, as the title suggests, ersatz. It is merely a facade for a secret passageway that leads to a small room and then to the old Baudelaire mansion. This passageway is used by Olaf not only to hide the Quagmire children, but also to leave the Squalor penthouse without being spotted. There are other instances of deception, but these are subtler. Jerome is presented as an example of an ersatz guardian. He claims to care for the children, but his emotions for them do not run deeper than his cowardice. He is unable to give the children the support they need and prefers to stifle his own feelings to avoid rocking the boat.

The use of a statue of a red herring and an actual red herring are coupled together to create a final deception. This deception unfortunately works. By missing the connection between the fish statue and the box marked V.F.D., the Baudelaires miss their chance to rescue their friends. The box marked V.F.D. is actually the red herring.

Bravery

The bravery of the Baudelaire children is always obvious throughout this series. They have enough bravery for more than three adults. Their situation has presented them with many opportunities to practice their bravery. They are not afraid to climb a dark stairway to an unknown destination, nor are they afraid to reveal the true identity of Count Olaf. They are also not afraid of scaling down a fake elevator shaft in an attempt to rescue their friends. Sunny, as an infant, cannot be expected to be brave, but she nearly outdoes her siblings by not only climbing up the elevator shaft using only her teeth, but by jumping down the same shaft later on.

The adults in the story are another matter. Jerome is a coward and freely admits it. Even The Baudelaire's mother told him this. This connection is interesting and her comment to him years ago will be further proved by the end of the story. Instead of standing up to his wife, or to Count Olaf, he prefers to let the children go to yet another



guardian. Even though he loves the children, he cannot overcome his fears or his innate nature.

Although some may interpret Esme's actions as brave, she is in fact, as big as a coward as Count Olaf. They prefer to steal from children instead of earning money the hard way. Like Jerome, they take the easy way out. There is not much to boast about when you're stealing from children, but Esme and Olaf seem to be able to find pride in their actions.

Mr. Poe is not portrayed as a coward directly, but his actions portray him as one. Whenever he is needed, or has a chance to stop Count Olaf, he finds a way to get out his responsibility. Count Olaf has now managed to escape six times since the series began.



Style

Point of View

The Ersatz Elevator is told in a third person narrative. As in the first books of the series, the author often uses asides to the reader, encouraging them to stop reading throughout the book. The author's habit of breaking into the narrative to reveal upcoming plot twists to be continued, but not as acutely as in previous stories. We are given subtle hints and clues that lead you to believe that some characters are not who they claim to be.

The book begins with a discussion on how you can usually tell what a book will contain after reading the first sentence. Several different examples are given, ending with the sentence that in fact begins this book. This point is brought up again, later in the book, with one final plea to stop reading. In the place of the usual dramatic irony, we are provided with small clues that, when added up, give an idea of how the story will unfold. This is a departure from the previous books in this series.

Setting

The story is set back in the Baudelaires' hometown. Their new home is just a few blocks from where their mansion once stood. The city is full of interesting districts, but The Baudelaires only get to visit the Fish District in this story. Their new home is the penthouse at 667 Dark Avenue. Most of the story takes place in this building, as The Baudelaires either climb up the enormous stairway to their new home, or sit in the lobby waiting for their guardians to return.

The penthouse is vast, with hundreds of rooms. Violet is given a room with a workbench, but without any tools. Klaus gets the room closest to the library, but the books are only about fashionable things. Sunny gets a room next to her siblings, but it is filled with things she cannot bite. There are several kitchens, bathrooms and sitting areas in the penthouse. The Baudelaires frequently get lost, trying to find their way back to their bedrooms or other locations in the house.

At the entrance to the penthouse are two sets of elevator doors. One is an ersatz elevator that leads to a secret room and passageway and the other goes to the actual elevator, which is not used because it is not fashionable. The Baudelaires learn that 667 Dark Avenue has a very dark secret, but they don't have time to figure it out. The passageway at the bottom of the ersatz elevator leads to what used to be their old house.

Language and Meaning

The names of locations in this series typically describe something bleak or hopeless. However, this book's title, *The Ersatz Elevator*, refers instead to an important plot point



of the book. Esme Gigi Geniveve Squalor is as pretentious as her name sounds. She is only considered with anything fashionable and the words she uses revolve around this passion of hers.

The book focuses on meanings of words, and word plays. For example, a red herring typically refers not to a fish, but a way to mislead people. The statue of a red herring is not actually a red herring, but the location of the Quagmire children. This play on words is customary in this series.

At the end of the story, the author goes through all of the things or people that were ersatz. The elevator was ersatz, Jerome is an ersatz guardian, and Esme was an ersatz wife and foster mother. The only people who are not ersatz are The Baudelaires and their friends, the Quagmires.

Structure

The book is divided into thirteen chapters, like the preceding books in this series. Each chapter has at least one drawing from the illustrator, Brett Helquist, which add a unique element to the story. Frequent asides are given throughout the book, as the author discusses the plot with the reader. You are given the feeling of being in the same position with Lemony Snicket as he tells the tale. Since he knows the ending of the story, you are allowed glimpses into what will happen ahead of time.

The ending of the book is typical of the books in this series. You are left to wonder what will happen to the Baudelaire children and their new friends, the Quagmires. The chapters are kept brief, and often end up in the air, to appeal to the age group that is most likely to read these stories. They would work well for selecting chapters to read aloud, as each one stands on its own, and frequently ends with a cliffhanger.



Quotes

"Dark is in, huh?" Mr. Poe said. "Wait until I tell my wife. In the meantime, would you show us where the elevator is?" Chapter 1, page 13.

"I can't remember," he said. "I think it's forty-eight, but it might be eighty-four." Chapter 1, page 15.

"Just thing," Violet said, panting from her long walk up the stairs, "if elevators were in we would have arrived at the Squalor penthouse in just a few minutes." Chapter 2, page 25.

"I'm Esme Gigi Geniveve Squalor, the city's sixth most important financial advisor," she announced grandly. "Even though I am unbelievably wealthy, you may call me Esme." Chapter 2, page 28.

"Goodness, Sunny," Violet said. "I thought you were a lump in the carpet. Here, we'd better just tie one of the sleeves of the suit around you." Chapter 3, page 56.

"I see you are not fluent in the English language either, please," Count Olaf said, continuing to fake a different way of talking. "Where is the mother and father?" Chapter 4, page 62.

"You're not listening," Esme said. "Parsley soda is in now. You'll have to go out right now and buy a few crates of it." Chapter 6, page 96.

"Oh!" Violet cried suddenly. "Hansel and Gretel means Hansel and Gretel - you know, those two dim-witted children in that fairy tale." Chapter 6, page 101.

"Yelliverc!" Sunny said, which meant that, "That second elevator is almost completely useless!" Chapter 7, page 125.

"Look, Duncan," Isadora said, "she's thinking up an invention! We'll be out of here in no time!" Chapter 8, page 146.

"Dwestall," Sunny said sadly, which meant "All the research in the world can't help Duncan and Isadora now." Chapter 9, page 165.

"Your former acting teacher?" Violet asked in horror. "You mean you've known Gunther's true identity the entire time?" Chapter 10, page 187.



Topics for Discussion

In the beginning of the story, the author makes the distinction between being nervous and being anxious. How would you describe these emotions and how they differ?

Esme Squalor is preoccupied with things that are "in." How does this reflect her personality and more importantly, her personality flaws?

Jerome prefers not to argue with anyone. How does this keep him from being happy and why do you think he chooses this course of action?

Jerome and Esme are two very different people. Can you illustrate their differences and what makes them inappropriate guardians for the Baudelaires?

Count Olaf's biggest disguise is hiding behind a foreign facade. Why do you think this was so effective and how does it reflect today's society?

The term red herring means two distinctly different things in this story. What is a typical "red herring" and why is it so important to the story?

The passageway from the ersatz elevator leads to the old Baudelaire mansion. Do you think that there is any significance to this and why?