

Illusion: Chronicles of Nick Study Guide

Illusion: Chronicles of Nick by Sherrilyn Kenyon

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Plot Summary

Nick Gautier wakes up on the first page of the novel in a different world – his own body is different, and everyone around him is familiar but not themselves. He's at the same school, but not in the same time period. Nick is obviously disoriented, and beginning the narrative "in medias res" puts the reader right alongside Nick in feeling confused. A slew of characters are introduced immediately, whom Nick is familiar with though they are all different in this realm, and the style assumes a certain level of reader familiarity as well. Readers who have not read previous installments of the series simply have to keep up as Nick throws out terms like "Malachai," "Charonte demon," and "demigod demonspawn."

It isn't until page 15 that readers discover the key information of what Nick was doing immediately before he woke up at the prom: he fought in a pitched battle to save his mother, during which his father had died and turned Nick into one of the most powerful demons in the universe. Nick shows no signs of grief, leading the reader to assume Nick's relationship with his father was not good. Through this writing style, the author, Sherrilyn Kenyon, sets the tone and pace from the first page. Things happen suddenly in Nick's world, and even he struggles to keep up with the onslaught of new information and ever-shifting factors. This mutual confusion draws the reader into the story alongside Nick, to puzzle out what is happening together.

The novel deals with questions concerning the nature of reality. Nick wonders if this alternate realm is his true reality, and the world in which he is demonspawn destined to destroy the entire world is perhaps an illusion, as the title suggests. As Nick says, "What is reality, anyway? Really? Was it what he knew or what he thought he knew?" (Page 49). This is a reasonable question, given the absurdity of a demon fighting demons premise of his "real" life." On the other hand, maybe Nick is dreaming and this normal reality is just a projection of his subconscious, a wish fulfillment for a simpler life. Normalcy is a key theme in Nick's life; at home he is a misfit at school, and constantly defending himself from demons. While most teenagers dream of being extraordinary, Nick understands the responsibility of having special gifts. Readers should note as the novel progresses whether Nick finds being normal preferable to being the Malachai.

The novel is set in New Orleans, and the dialogue helps add local texture to immerse the reader in the American south. Nick refers to women as "ma'am" and says to the woman who lives in Kyrian's house, "My mama don't need to know I was here" (Page 34). Readers should note if there are any other ways that New Orleans adds significance to the action of the novel, for it is a reputed supernatural hotspot.

When Nick meets Selena and Tabitha, he wonders why they are exactly the same as they are in his reality, when everyone else he has met is completely different. Selena chalks it up to a stubbornness of personality, but Nick's recurring feeling of oddness, coupled with his initial, fleeting distrust of psychics as charlatans (Selena is a psychic) are subtle hints of foreshadowing that perhaps the Devereaux sisters are not what they appear to be. Nick also has a vision of Kyrian and Amanda Devereaux and how their

futures will be entwined. He worries that his travel through time could alter the space-time continuum, and destroy people's destinies unwittingly. Readers should also stay alert to see if this is also foreshadowing something to come.



Prologue, Chapters 1 – 2

Summary

Nick wakes up to find himself in a different reality than he's used to. He is six inches shorter and blond, and possesses none of his preternatural demon powers. He is at a prom, possibly in the future but the fashion looks like the past. All of his friends are just as human as Nick is, and none of them looks the same as he's used to. Caleb and Simi are a couple, and Casey is Nick's girlfriend. Acheron Parthenopaeus, an 11,000-year-old immortal, is just an ordinary teenager in this reality. Nick learns his father (who just died in his reality) is alive and best friends with Caleb's father (though the demon Caleb doesn't have a father in Nick's reality). Even Nick's name is different. Instead of "Nicholas Ambrosius Gautier" his license reads "Nicholas Michael Burdette." Nick wonders if he has lost his mind, if someone is playing a trick on him, or if he has truly been sucked into an alternate reality.

Nick wakes up the next day and is relieved to see his own bedroom curtains. But he quickly sees nothing else in the room is familiar. His mother comes in to wake him for school, and instead of a waitress' uniform she is wearing an expensive business suit. Instead of his actual father, Nick's dad is Bubba, a lunatic conspiracy theorist and zombie killer Nick knows from his own reality. In this world, Bubba is a former professional football player. Nick's confusion worries his parents, who think he must be sick, as Nick can't find his way around their mansion-sized house. Nick sees a picture of himself from 1990, but he is younger than he should be, so Nick knows he must be in the future in this alternative reality. He soon discovers it is April 2002, 2 years in the future from his actual life. Nick hopes he is in a coma, and that the real Caleb and his girlfriend Kody are working to wake him up; he worries he is actually in a hell dimension.

The last thing Nick remembers from his world is fighting alongside Caleb, Kody, and a demonic werewolf named Zavid to free his mother, who had been kidnapped by demons. His father died in the fight, passing along his Malachai powers to Nick. Caleb and Kody had used a spell to bind those powers until Nick was more prepared to harness and use them.

Nick gets to school, where he can't remember his classes, his locker, or its combination. Caleb helps him, and Nick confides that he thinks he has amnesia. He asks about Kody, surprised to discover she doesn't exist in this realm, despite how much overlapping he sees between worlds. Caleb gets more concerned as Nick asks strange questions. Their friend Acheron (Ash for short) approaches, and Nick fleetingly senses Ash's true power before suddenly finding himself overcome with pain and a sense of being unreal. He decides to leave school to see if his boss, Kyrian (another immortal warrior who fights demons as a Dark-Hunter) exists in this realm.

Nick discovers many of his local hangouts don't exist in this version of New Orleans. He travels by streetcar to Kyrian's house in the Garden District, but the unfamiliar owner



tells Nick she bought the house after its previous resident, Kyrian Hunter, was murdered a quarter century ago. As Nick reels from the news, and tries to piece together the inconsistencies of this reality, he bumps into a familiar woman. He realizes it is the sister of his acquaintance Tabitha: she is Selena, a psychic. Desperate for help, Nick asks Selena to help get him home.

Nick convinces Selena that he comes from an alternate reality by reciting facts about Selena's family, as her sisters and aunts overlap between universes. Selena trusts Nick because of his sincerity, and agrees to help him find his way back to his reality. Selena is a psychic Nick has seen working in the town square, though he has never trusted such "clairvoyant" skills. Nick wonders why Selena and her sisters are the same in this realm when everyone else is different, but Selena chalks it up to stubbornness of personality.

Selena points out that if Nick is in this realm, there must be another Nick in Nick's own reality, as upset as Nick is about being transplanted. The other Nick wouldn't know what Nick was and could accidentally unleash Nick's Malachai powers and destroy the universe. Selena takes him to her aunt Erzulie's Voodoo shop where Tabitha and Tiyana work – and the site of the battle Nick was involved with in his reality the night before he woke up in this one. Nick wonders if perhaps this is his true reality and the other realm was just a dream.

Nick meets Tabitha's twin Amanda, who scoffs at the magical wares around her. Nick touches an amulet he thinks might protect him from evil, but it shatters in his hand, prompting Selena to wonder what he is. Nick doubles over in pain, unable to breathe, and his hands once again turn translucent. A voice in his head inexplicably demands to know Nick's name. Nick, who has seen flashes of the future and knows the fragility of space and time, understands his power to unravel the destiny of others, yet it is difficult to stay in control of himself when he is in such pain.

Analysis

Nick Gautier wakes up on the first page of the novel in a different world – his own body is different, and everyone around him is familiar but not themselves. He's at the same school, but not in the same time period. Nick is obviously disoriented, and beginning the narrative "in medias res" puts the reader right alongside Nick in feeling confused. A slew of characters are introduced immediately, whom Nick is familiar with though they are all different in this realm, and the style assumes a certain level of reader familiarity as well. Readers who have not read previous installments of the series simply have to keep up as Nick throws out terms like "Malachai," "Charonte demon," and "demigod demonspawn." It isn't until page 15 that readers discover the key information of what Nick was doing immediately before he woke up at the prom: he fought in a pitched battle to save his mother, during which his father had died and turned Nick into one of the most powerful demons in the universe. Nick shows no signs of grief, leading the reader to assume Nick's relationship with his father was not good.



Through this writing style of deliberate confusion, the author, Sherrilyn Kenyon, sets the tone and pace from the first page. Things happen suddenly in Nick's world, and even he struggles to keep up with the onslaught of new information and ever-shifting factors. This mutual confusion draws the reader into the story alongside Nick, to puzzle out what is happening together. The question of reality – of what is real and what is not – becomes central in this section of the novel.

Nick wonders if this alternate realm is his true reality, and the world in which he is demonspawn destined to destroy the entire world is perhaps an illusion, as the title suggests. As Nick says, "What is reality, anyway? Really? Was it what he knew or what he thought he knew?" (Page 49). The reader wonders if Nick is dreaming and this normal reality is only a projection of his subconscious, a wish fulfillment for a simpler life. Normalcy is a key theme in Nick's life, and normalcy will become an important theme in the novel herein.

At home he is a misfit at school, and constantly defending himself from demons. While most teenagers dream of being extraordinary, Nick understands the responsibility of having special gifts. For a teenage reader, he is obviously a fantasy, living as a hero who has adventures and power (his destructive side is still in the future, and Nick is a "good guy" at age 16). Readers should note as the novel progresses whether Nick finds being normal preferable to being the Malachai.

The novel is set in New Orleans, and the dialogue helps add local texture to immerse the reader in the American South. Nick refers to women as "ma'am" and says to the woman who lives in Kyrian's house, "My mama don't need to know I was here" (Page 34). Selena refers to him as "boy," a word that could have a pejorative connotation in certain contexts but here just seems almost like a term of endearment. New Orleans has long been a hotspot for supernatural activity and dark magic due to its varied and sordid history, and the novel itself involves everything from demons to demigods.

When Nick meets Selena and Tabitha, he wonders why they are exactly the same as they are in his reality, when everyone else he has met is completely different. There is a question once more about reality, and what is normal. Selena chalks it up to a stubbornness of personality, but Nick's recurring feeling of oddness, coupled with his initial, fleeting distrust of psychics as charlatans (Selena is a psychic) are subtle hints of foreshadowing that perhaps the Devereaux sisters are not what they appear to be. Nick also has a vision of Kyrian and Amanda Devereaux and how their futures will be entwined. He worries that his travel through time could alter the space-time continuum, and destroy people's destinies unwittingly. Readers should also note that this friendship foreshadows important things to come, especially in conjunction with the idea of destiny.

Discussion Question 1

Compare and contrast the facts you know about Nick's real life and Nick's alternate reality. Is anything the same? Why do you think so many of his friends and family are similar but not identical?



Discussion Question 2

Nick's mother thinks psychics are charlatans and Nick was afraid to get too close to any in case they weren't and could read his true nature as a demon. Do you think Selena is a real psychic? Can she be trusted? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

What are the advantages and disadvantages of being "normal," according to Nick? Would you prefer to have superpowers but be made fun of as an outsider, or be normal and fit in? Why?

Vocabulary

flamboyant, paranormal, gape, preternatural, bayou, morph, reminiscent, wince, discreet, ornate, rampant, incarnation, augment, fissure, emanate, translucent, befuddle, sanctum, defile, ubiquitous, banal, lackadaisical, semblance, retort, adamant, charlatan, apropos sedate, futility, perturbed, grimace



Chapters 3 – 5

Summary

In Chapter 3, the story jumps back to Nick's reality, as his best friend Caleb reveals to Nick's girlfriend, Kody, that Nick is no longer Nick – he looks the same but doesn't know Caleb, Kody, or Zavid, the Aamon demon/Hel Hound whom Nick saved the previous night and who is now bound to Nick as his master. Kody blames Zavid, but whatever swapped Nicks also drained Zavid of his power while he slept. Kody is confused, because Nick's house is protected by the Egyptian goddess Ma'at and should be immune to attack. This Nick's fear and whining make him less of an asset than his alter-ego, and Zavid, whose powers are returning, knocks him out.

Suddenly the sun is blanked out in an unexpected eclipse, and blood rains from the sky. Kody knows these portents foreshadow the appearance of the usumgallu, seven demon generals who were unleashed by the death of Nick's father, the Malachai. The seven are being summoned together by Sarru-Dara, and when they unite they will destroy the world. Only Nick, the new Malachai, can control them, but besides being inexplicably absent, he has too little mastery of his powers to be useful. Kody estimates they have three days to find and bring Nick up to speed before the usumgallu start wreaking havoc.

Caleb suggests time travel to find Nick, a skill neither he nor Zavid has. Kody is loath to use it, as it has the potential to ruin lives and destinies. Kody wonders if Zavid's sister Zarelda might know something useful, as she was working with the Grim Reaper to destroy Nick. Zavid is shocked to hear of Zarelda's involvement, as she is dead; Zavid didn't know the Grim had resurrected her. Zavid had traded himself into Hel after Zarelda sold herself to the goddess to save a lover. Zarelda died trying to free Zavid.

Kody decides to summon Simi, a Charonte demon. Kody and Simi are related (Simi is her aunt) and have a close relationship, though that lies in the future; Simi doesn't know the bond between them, much to Kody's chagrin. Simi refuses to time travel for Kody, and suggests Kody ask Menyara (also known as the goddess Ma'at, Kody's great aunt, and Nick's godmother) to help locate Nick. Kody is afraid Menyara will recognize Kody as a being sent from the future to destroy Nick and the Malachai line. Kody knows she's wasting time, however, and teleports to Menyara's house. Before she can explain what's happened, Kody is strangled and passes out.

In Chapter 4, readers return to the alternate reality where Nick is living, just as he wakes up in the Voodoo shop to find Amanda, Tabitha, Selena, Tiyana, and Karma looking down at him. He hopes this means he is back in his own world, but he quickly realizes he isn't. Tiyana reads Nick's aura and knows he's telling the truth, and that it will be destructive for him to stay in this reality. They don't know what he is, and Nick is reluctant to tell them, but they know he has been sent to this realm either to hide or to be killed.



Karma, Tabitha, and Amanda escort Nick to Karma's house. When Nick accidentally reveals he is part demon at home, they worry that he is a threat, but Tabitha can read his aura still and knows he is telling the truth. Nick wonders why they have taken him to Karma's house, one of the most haunted in New Orleans. Karma is hoping to see if the ghosts have any information on Nick's situation. Nick finds the ghosts unsettling, but Karma shows no fear of her housemates.

Karma starts chanting, but Nick is quickly pinned to a wall by an invisible enemy. Lacking all power, Nick calls out to Kody for help, and she appears, fighting off the ghost. The Devereaux sisters are fearful of Kody's sudden appearance, but Kody takes charge, ordering Karma to get Nick to the sanctuary of St. Louis Cathedral. When Kody can't leave the house, Karma realizes she is a ghost. Nick is shocked, but Kody admits it is true; Nick as the Malachai kills Kody and her entire family in the future, a vision he once had during a moment of sharing Kody's memories. Nick can't relate to this idea of himself as a merciless demon, but he understands why Kody has been intent on killing him. Karma sends her twin sisters with him while she interrogates Kody in the house about whom and what she and Nick are.

Analysis

In this section of the novel, there is a shift in focus returning to Nick's reality to watch as his friends Caleb and Kody cope with the stranger in Nick's body. The shift in focus weaving back and forth between realities and Nick's underscores the theme of normalcy, and the idea of reality. However, by moving back and forth between worlds, Kenyon is able to show rather than tell a bit more of the action, as readers see firsthand how Kody and Caleb react, rather than simply having Kody sum the scene up for Nick when they are reunited in the alternate universe.

This shift in perspectives and dimensions is also significant because it corroborates the reality of Nick's situation. If Nick questions the very nature of his reality in the opening chapters, knowing Kody and Caleb have experienced the loss of Nick from the other reality, and the presence of a stranger in his body, would seem to indicate that these events are really happening and are not an illusion.

By Chapter 3, readers can safely accept at least this much about this universe: that there exist multiple realities, infinite strands of time and space where people make the same or different decisions, which interact with other people's same or different decisions, and leads them to a unique set of circumstances. If Nick had simply summoned Kody and she had told him about the stranger in his body, readers might still wonder if Nick was making it all up. But the authorial choice to show Kody and Caleb acting independently of Nick, without Nick's awareness, mitigates the possibility of either reality as simply an illusion. As such, the choices that people make are important because they seem to have tremendous consequences for those involved – the idea that free will may outweigh the concept of destiny or fate.



Kody has the power to time travel but is reluctant to use it. Like Nick, she worries that “One misstep in time and the entire fabric of the universe could unravel. Even the gods tended to avoid time travel, and woe to any who willfully tampered with the time sequence. It was the most forbidden of all actions” (Page 67). Given the amount of time devoted to these fears about disrupting the course of events because of time travel, readers can reasonably expect there to at least be a threat to someone’s future because of the breaches in the space-time continuum.

Discussion Question 1

What are the advantages and disadvantages of having a third person, multi-perspective narrator? How would the novel be different if it were told from Nick’s first person perspective?

Discussion Question 2

What are the dangers of time travel? Why is Kody reluctant to do it, despite the fact that she has already come from the future?

Discussion Question 3

What is the “illusion” in the title of the novel? What feelings does the author hope to evoke by naming the book “illusion”? Is it an effective title? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

dire, defiant, nefarious, fraught, portent, sentient, daunt, ascertain, repercussion, feral, necromancer, wry, commune, scoff, recurve, derail, stationary, virile, primal, scrutiny, portent, nonchalant, dichotomy, blatant, eccentricity, aghast, malevolent, palpable, splay, sear, speculation



Chapters 6 – 7

Summary

After Nick, Tabitha, and Amanda leave, Kody reassures Karma she has nothing to fear (in the future, Karma and her family are close with Kody's family, and fight together against the Malachai). To gain Karma's trust, Kody tells her she is an Arel, a race of guardians who protected the world from destructive forces like the Malachai. Kody was chosen after her death to become an Arel, rather than being born one. Karma doesn't understand why Kody is trying to save Nick, who killed her, and Kody herself has a hard time understanding, as Nick also killed her entire family. Kody knows what Nick can become, but she cannot blindly kill the sweet, innocent teenager he currently is, and she's hoping to stop him from his fate. She also fears killing him because she will inherit the Malachai's powers, and she doesn't want to be evil.

Karma doesn't trust Kody, and demands that Kody show her true form. Kody hesitates, but feels she knows Karma, so she shows her white winged and armored form. Having proven herself, Kody asked to be released from Karma's house, but she and Karma are joined by another demonspawn with whom Kody is familiar: Thorn. Thorn will be close to Kody in the future, but doesn't recognize her in this realm. Karma tells Thorn that Kody is an Arel and protector of the Malachai, and Thorn threatens Kody. Kody realizes that these entities aren't her allies in this universe as they are in others, and she has made an error by revealing so much about herself and Nick to them. She realizes the danger Nick is in, and that the Devereaux sisters will unleash his Malachai powers to destroy this world.

Nick senses something is not right as Amanda and Tabitha bring him back to Erzulie's shop rather than to the cathedral. He wonders if he should trust this instinct, or if it will make him look crazy. He realizes these sisters are not the same as those he knew in his realm. He bolts, running toward the cathedral. Nick makes it into the cathedral and mocks the twin sisters who can't follow him inside. But before he gets comfortable, a police officer appears to arrest him for shoplifting at Erzulie's Voodoo shop.

Nick refuses to go with the policeman, and is relieved when a familiar priest named Father Jeffrey intervenes, assuring the cop that Nick is good. He offers to call Nick's parents to help sort things out, irking the policeman but buying Nick time. Kody finally appears with a demon called Savitar, who freezes the priest and cop so Nick can escape. Nick is surprised to find his "father," Bubba, driving the getaway car. Bubba fights demons in this realm as in Nick's own. Savitar is someone from Nick's future, whom he hasn't met yet in his realm; Nick once met his future self, Ambrose, and learned that Savitar will one day be important to him.

Nick is baffled by this turn of events, and his confusion is not mitigated when Kody tells him about Thorn, his "sakkan," the general charged with leading the Malachai's armies, but who intends now to try to steal the Malachai's powers for his own purposes. Thorn



was relatively friendly in Nick's own world, but Savitar points out that everyone has free will, and this realm is manifesting the many different choices people can make. Kody tells Nick how she came to fight against him in the future, after Nick as the Malachai lost control of himself and killed her entire family. She admits she was supposed to kill Nick the first day she met him, but he was so young and innocent she couldn't do it. Kody knows Nick's destiny as destroyer is still intact because if his future behavior changed, she would no longer be in his world as a ghost.

Nick learns that Bubba and Savitar have been fighting Daimons ever since Nick and his mother were attacked when Nick was a baby. Nick's mother refuses to acknowledge the paranormal universe. Lightning strikes the car and thousands of winged demons beset them. Bubba and Kody rush Nick to a convent while Savitar distracts the demons, but they can't make it into the church before Nick is attacked by the hell monkeys.

Analysis

Keen readers will note an underlying Christian tone to Kenyon's novel. Despite the prevalence of mythology of all origins, and despite the tendencies of the characters to use Dog instead of God as an oath, Nick places great value in his faith. He was clearly raised Catholic, and he still believes in the power of his faith. He goes to St. Louis Cathedral as a sanctuary, a holy ground where no evil can touch him. He crosses himself with holy water for extra protection. He feels genuine guilt for swearing within the church, as he clearly respects what it stands for. He sometimes prays to God to assist him in his struggles.

The idea of good and evil is further explored in Nick's time at St. Louis. Hiding out in a sacred place such a cathedral also raises interesting questions about the nature of good and evil. The Devereaux sisters don't follow him inside, and it seems as though they can't physically enter. Yet Nick himself is a demon and he has no problem gaining access to the church. Despite the negative semiotics of the word "demon," in Nick's reality, it does not automatically indicate the presence of evil. Both good and evil derive from action, rather than an inherent state of being.

This is directly related to one of the main themes of the novel, explicated at length by the demon Savitar (who is also an ally of Nick's despite his theoretical nature): destiny and free will. Nick is destined to destroy the universe when he fully grows into his powers as the Ambrose Malachai. Kody is under express orders to kill Nick because of this impending annihilation. Nick must be killed in order to prevent catastrophe. Yet Kody believes in free will and as a teenager, Nick is making only good choices. He knows what his fate has been predicted to be, and he is determined to fight it.

It would seem apparent that at some point an outside force will act on Nick and he will make a choice to be evil, but it is impossible to predict the path that will lead him there. Because he has free will, there is a chance he will make a different choice at that crisis moment. The tension of the entire series hinges on whether Nick will give in to his nature and his destiny, or will he rise above what is expected of him.



On a more universal level, Nick's story would resonate with its teenage audience, who often feel pigeonholed into a certain stereotype by their classmates. Even the way a person looks can affect how they are treated (and thus how they act), and Nick manifests this problem literally by having lost six inches of his height, and his eye and hair color. Teens can only change the way they look marginally, but once they create an image of themselves for others, it becomes difficult to be anything else. Teenagers always have the option to break out of their expected role, but it often seems disruptive and frightening to do so. Nick is a metaphor for that teenage struggle, to act as one truly wants, or to give in to the pressure of expectation. Teens may either act of their own free will, or can conform to the expectations of others.

Over a quarter of the way through the novel, Nick and the universe as a whole are under a number of threats: the Devereaux sisters and Thorn in one reality, and the usumgallu uprising in another. The reader wonders who is behind everything, or if there are multiple concrete antagonists behind what is occurring. It is unclear who separated Nick from his body and why. The action is nonstop, episodic, and tends toward the building of an ultimate showdown. Heroes are defined in large part by their enemies, and Nick's enemies are numerous and multifaceted. Despite his demonic nature, Nick is determined not to conform to what others believe he will be capable of, trusting in faith and in himself to do what is right. Perhaps because Nick himself is demonic in nature, he is given a unique perspective in dealing with evil threats.

Discussion Question 1

Describe the complicated relationship between Nick and Kody. Why does she want to kill him? Why hasn't she done it yet?

Discussion Question 2

What are the usumgallu? What is the threat they present to Nick's reality? How does this threat create further conflict for the novel?

Discussion Question 3

Compare the ideas of destiny and free will. Are they mutually exclusive, or can they coexist? Do you think the future is predestined? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

esoteric, celestial, dormant, indefatigable, allay, iridescent, acerbic, voracious, incongruous, apprehensive, severity, reactive, volatile, pedestrian, malice, euphoric, disdain, tantamount, rabid, berth, repugnant, nocturnal



Chapters 8 – 10

Summary

Nick's mother unexpectedly rescues him from the hell monkeys, and they all safely enter the convent. Cherise's wrath turns on Nick himself for cutting school and almost getting arrested. Both Nick and Bubba are shocked that Cherise knows about the demon world and about Bubba's vigilante fighting. They return the surprise by explaining that Nick isn't technically her son. Nick learns that Kody escaped Karma by betting their lives on Savitar (a Chthonian demon, and her godfather at home) whom she summoned in hopes that he was on their "side" as he was in their reality. Nick watches Kody hug a clearly uncomfortable Savitar and wonders about Kody's relationship with him, frustrated by the number of secrets Kody keeps.

No one knows how to swap the Nicks back without knowing who swapped them in the first place, and why. They rule out Thorn, who was surprised to hear Nick was the Malachai. Kody tries to summon Simi from their reality, but her powers are blocked. Nick has a brainstorm: since they are in a church, they can requisition the holy water and mix it with his blood, creating a volatile demon-destroying substance. Nick and Kody prepare the supplies, but when Nick gets outside and flings the mixture at the hell-monkeys it has no effect. Kody realizes too late that the Malachai's blood is in the body of Nick still in the other reality, and Nick's blood in this body has no magic qualities. Despite Kody's and Savitar's efforts to protect him, Nick is carried off by the demons.

Kody fears that Nick is finally in the hands of his enemies. She wonders if this is the beginning of the chain of events that leads to the death of her own family, centuries in the future, at the hands of future Nick, the Ambrose Malachai. She remembers the moment when she was recruited to destroy Nick before he became the Malachai; she was handpicked by the leaders of the Arelim, who exist in a dimension outside of human space and time. These leaders are Sraosha, Suriyel, and Adidiron. Kody had been confused by their request, feeling like she had let everyone down by not killing the Malachai in her own time, allowing him to kill her family and herself. But the Arelim were impressed that even at the young age of 19, Kody had kept the Malachai at bay for three years, only succumbing to him when she lost control of her emotions. Kody resisted the Arelim leaders, but Adidiron forced her to look at the world in which the Malachai rules, where even gods were caged and tortured. Kody finally agreed to their challenge, to go back in time to destroy the Malachai. In the present, as she watches Nick taken away by demons, Kody wonders if she has failed again to finish him.

Meanwhile, Nick wakes up in a windowless cell with the young Ash who was a fellow student at this realm's prom. Ash is cryptic about where Nick is, and soon disappears as Acheron enters the room: Nick is so confused to see the Acheron from his own world that he breaks into uncontrollable laughter. Acheron demands to know why Thorn wants Nick, but Nick is unwilling to tell anyone else who he really is until he knows which side they are on. He plays dumb, only admitting that Thorn thinks Nick is the Malachai.



Acheron is just as baffled by Nick's fearless nonchalance. He tests Nick by pitting him against an Aamon demon (hell monkey).

Nick holds his own until Acheron's granddaughter, the schoolgirl Simi in this realm, begs Acheron to stop tormenting her classmate. Acheron grudgingly acquiesces; he tastes Nick's blood and recognizes that Nick is a powerless human being. Acheron returns Nick to his cell, where Nick is visited by the grandson Ash. Ash explains that his and Simi's parents (a human and a goddess) were killed a long time ago, making Acheron overprotective of them. Acheron discovered that Nick was wanted by Thorn, and also a classmate of his grandchildren. He assumed Nick might be a threat to Ash and Simi, so he intercepted Nick.

Nick sleeps and dreams he is in Caleb's mansion in the middle of a battle. Caleb and Zavid are fighting off a host of demons. Nick sees his alter-ego, the other Nick in his own body, and he is embarrassed by the way that Nick cowers from the fight rather than facing it head on. Nick is touched by Caleb's determination to protect his body. Zavid thinks binding Nick's powers was a mistake, but Caleb explains that Nick was unable to control those powers because he was raised in an environment of normal, human love; Nick didn't have years of honing his magical skills. As Caleb and Zavid are attacked by a fresh barrage of demons, Nick is frustrated that he can't help. He is suddenly surprised by the ghost of Zavid's sister Zarelda, who died after being betrayed by someone she loved. Zarelda assumes the Malachai's own generals must have separated Nick from his body in order to kill him. Zarelda begs Nick to help Zavid, who sacrificed himself in order to save Zarelda from hell. She tells Nick to use his powers, claiming they are a part of his soul and not his body, and they are always with him.

Analysis

Interestingly, in the Illusion, Nick and his half-demon DNA prove to be unfailingly good, and forever striving to do the right thing. This again raises the question of free will and destiny. Evidence in favor of free will being superior to destiny is stacking up. Likewise, the lines between good and evil seem to be clearly delineated. For example, there are nine Devereaux sisters in total, and they all blend together in an amalgam of "witch." These evil women are committed to doing away with Nick until Nick is able to outdo them, a small victory for good over multifaceted evil. Nick, owing to his free will, fights evil rather than becomes a part of it.

Kody and Cherise, on the other hand, fall into a category that transcends goodness. Kody is resurrected after her death as an Arel, a race known as guardians. Crucially, Kody, a woman, is not a warrior. Every action she takes is aimed at protecting Nick; she may be his girlfriend but her maternal instinct to keep him safe muddies the waters of that relationship. In the future, Nick will kill Kody and her entire family, yet he is too charismatic and good for her to kill him. She doesn't even show anger toward him. Kody is an ideal representation of patient goodness.



Nick's mother, Cherise, falls into this same category. Nick ruminates on his mother, thinking "he hated how he'd been conceived. The misery he'd caused his real mother because she dared to keep him when any sane woman would have given him up for adoption and walked away without ever looking back. She deserved to be like the Cherise in this world. Treasured and loved" (Page 180). There is a strong implication here that Nick's father Adarian raped Cherise in order to conceive Nick. Rather than having an abortion, Nick's mother gave birth and loved her son as if he had been created with love, sacrificing any of her own aspirations to take care of a child she hadn't sought in the first place.

Cherise not only represents a manifestation of goodness, but also speaks to the theme of free will and fate. Rather than accepting her rape-caused pregnancy as crippling, Cherise decides to embrace it freely, letting something good come from something horrendous. In the battle of good and evil, women come to play crucial roles – either as good or evil. The women who are good make selfless, noble sacrifices that demonstrate their courage and heroism, and make them indispensable to the plot.

Kody's remembered conversation with the Arelim leaders Sraosha, Suriyel, and Adidiron in which they recruit her to go back in time to kill the Malachai demon introduces a new wrinkle to the theme of good versus evil. She questions if it is advisable to kill the Malachai, because evil is necessary for the balance of the universe. They reassure her that another evil will rise, but hopefully a lesser one, which will allow for an actual ebb and flow between good and evil, rather than the tipped scale they will get with the Malachai who ends the world. Readers can consider whether evil is necessary to make good meaningful, and if this role is significant enough to justify it.

In Chapter 8, the narrative voice switches from Nick's mind to Kody's and back, without the benefit of a chapter or section break. This adds a sustained sense of surrealism and continues to lend to the effect of Illusion. Readers are given an intimate glimpse into Kody's perspective – on Nick. Nick is at the center of this universe unequivocally, and readers only enter other characters' thoughts in order to see how they feel about Nick. This happens again in Chapter 10, when Nick travels back to his own dimension in a dream, in which he listens in on a conversation between Caleb and Zavid about Nick. This intense focus on the protagonist reinforces Nick's importance to the continuation of the universe, as well as the fact that Nick is trustworthy, even if he is a demon.

Discussion Question 1

Compare and contrast Nick's other Cherise in the alternate realm to what Nick says about Cherise in his own world. Is Cherise an ideal of motherhood? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Describe Nick's feelings about using holy water against the demons. How does this scene reinforce or undermine the novel's attitude towards Christianity? Do you think the novel espouses Christianity despite its mythology? Why or why not?



Discussion Question 3

Who is Zarelda? Why does she enter the narrative at this point? What is her most important message for Nick? Does knowing ghosts exist lower the stakes of potential life or death scenarios? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

frenetic, droll, Liability, extenuate, reprimand, surly, affluent, austere, cleave, evade, corroborate, discern, obstinate, enmity, interloper, negate, appease, pertinent



Chapters 11 – 12

Summary

Acheron continues to wonder why Thorn seeks Nick, when Acheron has proven definitively that Nick is human. Acheron's granddaughter Simi appears, bleeding from an attack in the house. Acheron has no healing powers in this reality because he is the Harbinger, but Nick is too stubborn to watch the teenager die. He remembers a chant his godmother Menyara used to say when he was sick as a child, and he repeats it over Simi until his hands begin to glow with heat that pours into Simi. Nick has never previously had healing powers, but Simi's wounds disappear. Acheron leaves to check on Ash and whatever is invading his house. He soon teleports Nick, Simi, and Ash into his study, announcing that the Arelim also want Nick. Nick has never heard of that race, and has no idea why they want him. Acheron sends his grandchildren into hiding with his Charonte demon Xirena.

Acheron demands to know everything about Nick, but Nick makes Acheron promise he will not hand Nick over to Nick's enemies, or hurt any of Nick's friends; Nick knows breaking such a promise would literally kill Acheron. Nick admits he is the Malachai, separated from his body in a different realm. Nick explains that his friends bound his powers to keep him from hurting anyone, and that he was raised with love by his human mother. Nick is antithetical to all Acheron's ideas of the Malachai. Acheron wants to grant Nick a reprieve because he saved Simi, but he can't help but feel Nick as the Malachai is still a threat to his family.

Nick is afraid he is about to die as Acheron teleports them into the battle within his home, demanding to know of the Arelim leader Ameretat, and why he wants Nick at all. Ameretat briefly gets his hands on Nick, but Acheron saves him and teleports him out of harm's way. Acheron decides to try to push Nick back into his own reality, but Nick refuses to go without Kody. Acheron is getting irked by Nick's demands when he gets a call from Savitar, and teleports Nick to the Burdette mansion where Kody, Savitar, Bubba, Cherise and Mark (Bubba's friend and vigilante partner) are gathered. Kody tenses when she sees Acheron, and Nick wonders what kind of relationship she had with Acheron in the future. Kody evades his questions. Nick also senses that there is bad blood between Acheron and Savitar.

Acheron wants to send Nick and Kody back to their dimension immediately, but Savitar argues that it can't be that easy, since Nick's body and soul are separated. Nick wonders if the Arelim have the power to have separated him. Kody knows Ameretat from the Arelim own dimension and knows that though he is brutal, he could not act without the consent of his superiors. Kody wonders if the Arelim have changed tactics since she has failed to kill the Malachai thus far; she believes they may have split Nick in order to weaken him enough to kill. Kody decides she will go to the Arelim realm to see if she can find out how they split Nick.



Acheron takes Kody to his home for her to teleport, so she can't accidentally lead the Arelim back to Nick. At Acheron's, Kody admits to Acheron that he is the twin brother of her father, Styxx. She didn't know him well in her mortal life, but knows her father tried to rescue Acheron from a long imprisonment, though Styxx died before he achieved that goal. Acheron is surprised to hear this, as he and Styxx were enemies in this realm, where Acheron's wife Artemis killed Styxx centuries before. Kody finds all these permutations of reality painful and confusing and she escapes into the Arelim world, which exists outside human time and space. She summons her contact, Sraosha, who appears immediately. Sraosha rebukes her for failing to kill Nick, and Kody senses something is off about him. She notices the marks of a recent fight in the Arelim great hall. Sraosha is joined by Ameretat, and they announce Kody is being decommissioned, accusing her of refusing to follow orders. Kody knows they intend to execute her.

Analysis

In the previous section, Zarelda appears out of nowhere to implore Nick to help her brother Zavid. She alludes to an elaborate backstory of love, betrayal, hell, and fraternal sacrifice, but one of the novel's frustrations is the introduction of ideas that only scratch the surface of a greater narrative. Here, the theme of love becomes important to the course of the plot. Love can prove to be an immensely important and sustaining thing, or it can be destructive and harmful. Love and betrayal often go hand-in-hand, as is the case with the backstory.

Kody gives an elaborate summary of where her own family would be at this point in human history, including a cryptic reference to her brother Urion, head general of the Spathi Daimons, only to immediately conclude no one related to her can help them anyway. Savitar alludes (again cryptically) to The Harbinger, and readers later learn that Acheron is The Harbinger, but at no time is this reference explained. (This may be due to importance in other novels of the series, but this is not known in the present novel.) Savitar also claims all the Charonte demons are dead in the alternate reality, yet Kody is shocked to discover that Acheron still has one, but this demon Xirena enters and exits the story in less than two pages.

Interdimensional travel is especially important in this section of the novel, bringing up the theme of normalcy once more. What is real or normal in one dimension may not be real or normal in another dimension. Indeed, it is difficult for Nick to at first come to accept that interdimensional travel is possible because on Earth, interdimensional travel has not been proven. Complicating normalcy is the fact that Nick's body and soul are separated, which calls into question reality and normality in existence and travel between dimensions.

Consideration of these subjects leads Nick to once more consider questions that relate to free will and fate. For example, Nick wonders if it is the Arelim who have separated his body and soul, for they appear to have immense powers. The Arelim are clearly following a set plan, or determined course of action from which they may have deviated. If so, the Arelim are not fated to follow one path in their own endeavors, but may freely



adapt to changing circumstances. If so, this lends more credence to the idea that Nick is not necessarily fated to his own destiny as a creature of evil.

Discussion Question 1

What is Nick's attitude toward the alternate reality Acheron, a powerful and ancient warrior? Does this endear him or alienate him from Acheron? Why? How does Nick ultimately earn Acheron's respect?

Discussion Question 2

Describe Kody's relationship with Acheron in the future. Is it useful for the reader to have this information about the relationship? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the importance of family to various characters in the novel. How does it motivate characters such as Nick, Kody, Acheron, Bubba, Thorn, Ameretat, and the Devereaux sisters?

Vocabulary

incredulous, elongate, benevolent, earnest, gallant, acquiesce, constrict, obtuse, discard, reprieve, derisive, compulsion, besiege, attune, nuance, transmutation, forge, sterile, circumspect, thwart, girth, insubordination



Chapters 13 – 15

Summary

Kody's power to teleport malfunctions, and she barely escapes Ameretat and Sraosha on foot. She is intercepted by Suriyel, who promises her no harm. He takes her to a small room where Adidiron and a group of battle-weary Arelim hide. They explain that Sraosha and Ameretat decided to kill the Malachai in order to bring about Sada, a utopian world where only good exists. Unfortunately, an all-good reality would be unbalanced, and would lead to the destruction of the universe. Sraosha and Ameretat reason that it would be a gentler way for the universe to end than to wait for Ambrose Malachai to destroy it. By binding Nick's powers, Kody gave the Arelim the perfect opportunity to kill him while he's too weak to protect himself.

Kody blames herself, but Suriyel tells her it was written in the prophetic text (the Mashuan) that the last Malachai would destroy the race of the Arelim, so this civil war amongst them isn't entirely unexpected. Suriyel is fighting against his fellow Arelim because he saw that Adarian Malachai, Nick's father, truly loved Nick's mother in his own way. He understands that Nick is even more of an anomaly because of Cherise's love, but is skeptical that Nick's destructive destiny may be changed. The Arelim realize it is better to take that risk than ruin the universe's balance with the Sada, so they agree to protect Nick from the rogue Arelim as best they can.

Kody questions how they can reunite Nick's body and soul in his own reality. The Arelim don't believe it's possible without the Magus Stone, a sun-shaped medallion that was a peace offering between the primal gods Rezar and Braith. The last person to have it was Kody's mother, but no one knows where it is now; they assume Sraosha found it. Kody once again kicks herself, knowing the magic would not have worked on Nick if he'd had his powers. Kody requests that Suriyel bring Simi into the Arelim dimension, as she might be able to find the sparkly medallion. The Arelim agree to look for the stone as Kody teleports back to Acheron's house. Kody sums up what she has learned for Acheron. As they try to work out a plan of action, they are attacked.

Meanwhile, Nick and the others are preparing for battle at the Burdette mansion. They watch on TV as the entire city of New Orleans is hijacked by demons. Nick feels guilty that so many innocent people are being hurt because of him. He considers what Zarelda told him about his powers, but no matter what he does he cannot tap into them. Cherise is sent into the basement bomb shelter as the demons (accompanied by the Devereaux sisters) start their siege of the Burdette house. Nick is touched by Savitar's willingness to fight to the end alongside him, though they've never met. Savitar rushes out into the mob to distract as many demons as he can.

Bubba throws Nick into a fortified closet, keeping him away from the battle, but Thorn breaks down the door. Nick refuses to be intimidated, but Thorn doesn't buy Nick's bravado. Before Thorn can do any damage, the Simi from Nick's reality appears,



breathing fire on Nick's enemies as she immediately enters the fray. Close on her heels is Kody, arriving from Acheron's house to join the battle. Nick is relieved to be surrounded by his allies, but suddenly his skin becomes translucent again as he feels himself falling away from the world. The same strange voice in his head asks for his name. Nick falls through a dark unreal realm and lands on his supposedly dead father, who admonishes him for screwing up on his first day as the Malachai.

Despite his death, Adarian Malachai is still strong enough to hurt Nick, who doesn't have a body at all. Adarian, like Zarelda, tells Nick he isn't tied to his body because he is not human, and he has his powers no matter his physical state. Adarian claims one of his own generals, Laguerre, has orchestrated Nick's undoing, making a power grab while Nick is weak. Adarian urges Nick to tap into the universe; Nick has the power to see everything that has, is, or will happen. Nick focuses and is overwhelmed by the millions of sensations that accost him. The universal grief is unbearable, and Adarian scoffs at Nick's compassion, sure it will bring about his downfall. Adarian even loathes the small amount of humanity that seems to exist within himself, that he was able to love Nick's human mother even when she pitied and rejected him. Nick pities his father too, for craving love when he could never have it. Adarian rebukes Nick to fix himself and take control back from the generals, lest Cherise be the first victim of their wrath.

Nick asks his father for advice on how to regain his body and reality, but Adarian is cryptic, telling Nick no one can defeat him unless Nick himself allows it. He tells Nick to unlock his powers. Before Nick can question that statement, the voice in his head once again demands his name. Adarian explains that demons have true names which make them the complete slave of whomever knows that name, allowing the demon to be summoned on a moment's notice. Adarian tells Nick Caleb's summoning name is Cabal, while Nick's own is his confirmation name: Aloysius. Nick is relieved that due to a fluke he never told anyone his Confirmation name.

Adarian reminds Nick that the usumgallu cannot win without Nick as their leader. The generals will ride without him because some of them, like Death and War, don't care about winning, the destruction they wreak is enough. But without Nick, who is Conquest, they are bound to fail, and end the world. Nick understands that he must use his assets in order to get back to where he needs to be: his stupidity. He teases the disembodied voice, urging it to come after him.

Analysis

Within the three chapters of this section, two separate entities are blamed for Nick's body/soul divide. While Kody visits the Arelim in their realm, Suriyel and Adidiron tell her Sraosha and Ameretat took advantage of Nick's bound powers to separate and kill him. When Nick's father Adarian pulls Nick into a nether realm, he blames a Malachai general named Laguerre for seeing to usurp Nick's powers. The Magus Stone is introduced as the only means of reuniting Nick's body and soul, but is noted that it will be impossible to find. Nevertheless, it is clear to the reader that the Magus Stone is



critical, and is the only way that Nick will be able to proceed. Numerous pieces of the puzzle are falling into place, while others are new discovered or found to be missing.

Having a balance between good and evil becomes more of a paradox in this section when the Arelim introduce the concept of the Sada, a utopian world where evil has been destroyed and good reigns. The concept of imbalance between opposing forces, touched on earlier in the novel, here comes to fruition. The author creates an important set of questions here. Is the utopia impossible because good cannot exist without evil? Without evil to distinguish goodness, how is one able to argue for what is good?

This section again revisits the thematically significant concepts of destiny versus free will. Readers learn of the twin tables of Mashuan and Mashuani: "The Mashuan told what was destined to happen, the other foretold ways to accomplish or divert the Mashuan. It was the tablet of what-could-be" (Page 261). This paradoxical idea would seem to undercut the very essence of destiny; if events can be averted, then humans aren't truly at the mercy of fate.

Yet one of the prophecies foretold that the Malachai would destroy the race of the Arelim. The Arelim were expecting a direct attack from the powerful demon, but instead the Malachai has driven the Arelim to a civil war (albeit unknowingly). Destiny wins in the most unpredictable ways, and this does not bode well for Nick's ability to overcome his greater destructive destiny. Still Kody holds out hope for Nick, and implicitly urges the reader to do as well when she notes, "No destiny is set by any birth, no matter how lowly or how high. All creatures have the right and ability to choose who and what they become.... Be it good or evil" (Page 265).

Another key theme discussed at great length in this section is the power of love above all other magical forces. Various characters have alluded to Nick's goodness stemming from the love of his mother, who cared for him unconditionally despite the violence of his conception. Love has the power to change the nature of a being born of and intended for a hate-filled life. This theme is further evident in Adarian Malachai, who was subjected to a life of torturous violence at the hands of the gods who created him, yet still managed to love Cherise enough to keep himself in human prisons rather than run the risk of doing her further harm. He protects Nick in further tribute to her, knowing that Nick's death would destroy Cherise. Love is a human rather than a supernatural force, but it has the potential to be more powerful than the gods.

Discussion Question 1

Compare and contrast Thorn and Ameretat as Nick's enemies. Are they seeking the same goals by killing Nick? What will be the outcome if either of them is successful?

Discussion Question 2

What influence does Cherise have on Nick and Adarian? Would either of them be the men they are without her? Why or why not? What is the novel's attitude towards love?



Discussion Question 3

The Arelim have two tablets, one of destiny and one of what-could-be. Do you think it's possible for Nick to change his fate as the world's destroyer? Why or why not? Discuss a chain of events that could lead to either result.

Vocabulary

fledgling, tandem, Innate, congenital, implicit, stagnant, debilitate, corporeal, compel, deplore, chafe, sinister, putrid, extricate, omnipotent, intrusion, blatant, geld



Chapter 16

Summary

Nick puts all his energy and focus into summoning his powers. Suddenly he can see everything, past, present, and future. He sees his father as a young man, beaten and broken by the enemy gods who enslave the Malachai: Noir, Azura, and Braith. Noir fed on Adarian until his powers were almost completely sapped, making death desirable. Nick understands why his father is as he is, and how the Malachai have been conditioned to be vicious. Nick is disturbed to see the havoc he himself will one day wreak, turning his back on the world that created him. But Nick is determined to resist his destiny. Even as he makes this vow, Noir, the god of darkness, wraps Nick up and tries to carry him to the dark side.

Adarian watches Nick being taken by Noir and almost enjoys the idea of his son suffering as he himself once did. Adarian wants Nick to experience pain like the rest of the Malachai. But Adarian thinks of Cherise, and how much she loves Nick. Despite the pain Adarian caused her, Cherise always treated him decently even if she did not love him. Adarian is jealous of Cherise's affection for Nick, but knows Nick's absorption into evil will only hurt Cherise. Out of his love for Cherise, Adarian saves Nick from Noir.

Nick is shocked by the tenderness Adarian shows him, even apologizing for trying to kill Nick. Adarian warns him to respect the vision he just had, and to know Noir will always seek to enslave Nick. When Nick wrangles his generals, Noir and the other primal gods will know him to be the Malachai, and they won't rest until they have him in their control – and Nick has no hope of killing his creators. Adarian urges Nick not to trust anyone, and to tap into his power to instill fear and pain in order to keep others in line. Nick disagrees, believing love, respect, and loyalty will get him much further than hate and intimidation.

Nick gets dizzy as his soul returns to his temporary body. Adarian urges Nick not to become like Adarian but to be better than him. He tells Nick he has the power to create a positive legacy for the Ambrose Malachai. Nick awakes in Kody's arms and wonders if he dreamed his father entirely. Things are calm for the moment in the alternate reality, as Simi, Kody, Savitar, and Acheron forced Thorn and his allies to retreat. Nick decides to use Caleb's summoning name to bring him to the alternate reality, so that he and Kody can unbind Nick's powers. Caleb appears, disoriented but overjoyed to see Nick again.

Kody reminds them they need the Magus Stone to restore Nick to his body, and though Simi has seen the stone with her mistress Akra, she has no way of obtaining it from her. Thorn and the demons are returning, having captured Savitar and Acheron. Kody and Caleb have no choice but to unbind Nick's powers and hope for the best. Nick's body is filled with the warming sensation of his powers. They overwhelm him, making him dizzy and nauseous, as he tries to rein them in to his control. He throws up and Kody stays by



his side, undeterred by the unpleasantness. Nick vows to himself again that he will change the future and do no harm to her family.

Nick tests his powers and draws two fireballs out of thin air; he is ready for battle. With Caleb and Simi backing him up, he confronts Thorn in front of the house. Thorn refuses to back down, though Nick urges him to remember his place as Nick's general. Tabitha, at Thorn's side, urges Thorn on, believing Nick is bluffing. Caleb tells Nick he's going to have to prove to Thorn that he (Nick) is the Uma-Sarru, earning his subordinates' respect through whatever means necessary. As the demons attack, Nick sends them flying, and unleashes Simi to feast on them. Thorn demands Nick prove himself, and they face off, battling one on one. Kody and Caleb are astounded by Nick's new self-control and fighting prowess.

Kody fights Tabitha, distracting Nick long enough to take a direct hit from Thorn. As Nick comes close to blacking out he notices the darkness as an entity, a weapon he can use against Thorn. Kody realizes Nick is commanding the darkness, a skill he shouldn't have for years. She worries that Nick will be seduced by the darkness, and open himself up to attack from Noir. She and Caleb watch as Nick turns into his demon self, red eyes blazing. He seems on the verge of killing Thorn and absorbing his powers.

Analysis

Noir, which is French for "black," is the god of darkness in Nick's universe, and author Kenyon anthropomorphizes a metaphysical concept in creating this almost symbolic character, writing, "The darkness slithered over him like a deadly boa constrictor" (Page 319) and describing Nick's sudden ability to control the darkness: "Nick held his hand out to pet it. The dark rose up to caress his arm and lick it. Before he could rethink it, Nick slung his hand out and sent the darkness for Thorn. With his thoughts, he commanded it" (Page 354).

This is the only time readers see Nick even remotely teeter on the seesaw between good and evil, underscoring both his desire to be good, and his imperfection. By personifying darkness in this concrete way, Kenyon makes the struggle more vivid and palpable, reinforcing Nick's conflict in action rather than simply via an internal monologue. It raises the stakes, providing a sense of urgency regarding whether Nick will continue to resist the forces of evil that constantly try to control him.

Chapter 16 which starts with Noir's attempt to coerce Nick and ends with Nick's ability to manipulate Noir, is interrupted by a narrative interlude into Adarian Malachai's mind, which creates a bit of suspense about whether Adarian will actually save Nick from Noir's clutches. Adarian, whom readers believed was dead throughout the novel appears two-thirds of the way into the narrative not quite alive but not exactly dead either. That death can be overcome in the interdimensional realm is both a terrifying and relieving concept. It is terrifying in that evil beings can return, but comforting and relieving in the fact that the good may be able to return as well.



Adarian is “alive” enough to save Nick’s life. In addition, Adarian’s late introduction into the novel, and the mid-chapter interlude into his psyche, remembering the first time Cherise brought Nick to visit him in prison, simply slows the pace of the narrative. Through this remembered scene, Adarian’s love for Cherise is illuminated and creates a sense of sympathy for him because it was impossible for that love to be reciprocated. The theme of love is utterly important here.

This chapter continues to focus on the thematic power of love. Adarian saves Nick out of his love for Cherise. He then tries to persuade Nick to lead others by fear and intimidation, but Nick argues in favor of earning the respect and love of others in order to gain their loyalty. Despite the necessity of violence for Nick’s survival in the idea of self-defense, he has absorbed his mother’s anti-retaliation credo, admitting Cherise “fussed at him for not turning the other cheek” (Page 299). With this Biblical reference Cherise once again comes to embody the Christian ideal.

Specifically, Cherise represents the ultimate turning of the other cheek by not terminating her pregnancy with Nick. Nick explains Cherise’s actions to Adarian, saying, “She tells me that she hated you with everything she had until the moment I was born. And from then on, she couldn’t hate you ever again...Without you, she wouldn’t have me. And for that she says she’s eternally grateful to you” (Page 327).

Again, the writer returns to the idea that something good can come out of something horrible. Cherise is demonstrated to be a role model of Christian maternal love. This novel is here archetypally Christian, with its ultimate battle between good and evil. Kenyon teases expectations by making Nick, the hero, a demon and possibly an anti-Christ, born to destroy rather than save. Yet there is a good chance Nick will rise above his fate to save humanity, making the comparison to Christ clear, and reinforcing the idea that free will, rather than fate, reigns supreme.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss Adarian’s feelings for Nick. What are his feelings for Cherise, and how do they affect how he feels about Nick? Do you think he loves Nick? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Describe the arc of Nick’s relationship with Noir from the beginning to the end of the chapter. Predict whether Nick will kill or not kill Thorn. Support your position with examples from the text.

Discussion Question 3

Compare and contrast Adarian’s and Nick’s philosophies on earning the loyalty of others. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each approach? Which character do you agree with, and why?



Vocabulary

modicum, herculean, stringent, petrify, dulcet, wane, recede, progenitor, subdue, mitigate, subliminal, narcissism, impending, belie, chide, speculative, jubilant, parry, subjugate, amalgam, bode



Chapters 17 – 18

Summary

Nick feels the power at his fingertips and contemplates giving in to his fate. He relishes the feeling of control he has over the arrogant Thorn, as Nick holds him by the throat. He longs for a life where he is respected, rather than being clumsy and mocked. Killing Thorn would propel him to a status beyond the contempt of others. But Nick has a core of self-esteem and knows who he is already; killing a menial won't prove anything to anyone who matters, so Nick simply demands that Thorn yield. Thorn does not want to submit, but Nick assures him he's not looking for followers in a grand battle. He just wants Thorn to go away and not cause trouble.

Kody wants to intervene, worried that Nick will give in to his demon nature, but Caleb better understands what is happening between Nick and Thorn. Nick releases Thorn, who salutes him and departs with his demons and the Devereaux sisters. Kody and Caleb are impressed that Nick resisted Noir and retained his self-control. Nick suddenly doubles in pain as the symbol of Noir is burned into his chest; Noir is marking his territory, giving himself a way to find Nick. They hope that if Nick returns to his own body, Noir will be unable to track him.

Kody urges Nick to use his reinstated powers to return them to their own dimension. She encourages him as Nick relaxes and focuses on the task at hand. He freefalls through darkness, struggling to control his fall but he cannot summon his powers. The darkness holds him, and Nick sees himself as the Ambrose Malachai after devastating the world, with Caleb at his side. But Caleb fears rather than respects Ambrose, and Nick understands how unappealing fear is. Nick begs Kody to help him find his way home. He fights multiple temptations until he slams back into his reality, finding himself in Caleb's house faced off against Zavid. Caleb and Simi soon appear with him, but Nick remains nebulous, untethered to a body. He worries because Kody does not arrive back in their realm. Caleb and Simi break the news that because Kody is a ghost she cannot travel back to their dimension.

Nick is devastated, wondering why Kody didn't warn him, and wondering how she could abandon him to be alone in this realm. Caleb reminds him they don't have time for emotional outbursts as Nick still needs to stop the usumgallu from rising. Caleb urges Nick to suppress his Malachai hatred, and to recognize the selflessness of Kody's actions, letting Nick go to save him, while trapping herself in a lonely foreign dimension.

Nick pulls himself together when his alternate self screams from another part of the house. Nick is disgusted to find his alter-ego cowering in fear from a spider. Nick moves to remove the spider, but it transforms into a woman with vampiric teeth, who claims Nick as she bites his neck. He is transported to an unfamiliar house, where he learns the woman is Livia, the Malachai's Sarru-Ninim, one of his generals. She is clearly used



to having an erotic relationship with the Malachai. She urges Nick to feed from her in order to gain even more power.

Nick is not interested in this proposition, wanting only to be reunited with his own body. This need takes on more urgency when Zarelda appears, warning Nick that the Arelim are about to attack Zavid and the others. Nick commands Livia to return him home and help him claim his body. Before they move they are joined by Xevikan, the oldest Malachai general, known as the Sarru-Dara. Xevikan is skeptical and contemptuous of Nick. He assumes Nick will send the usumgallu back to the boxes they are imprisoned in when the Malachai doesn't need them. Despite himself, Nick feels compassion for Xevikan and his oppressive existence.

Xevikan senses the Arelim approaching, and he immediately hurls himself into Caleb's house to protect Nick's body. Nick and Livia follow, but without his body, Nick is helpless to join the battle. Nick approaches his body and tries to simply enter it, to no avail. His allies are on the losing end of the battle, and Ameretat gets control of Nick's body. Caleb reminds him that the body isn't truly the Malachai, but Ameretat reasons that Nick will be powerless without his blood. He stabs Nick's body through the heart. Nick himself feels it, watching his body die as he fades away, regretting all the things he will miss about his life, particularly regretting that he won't have the chance to prove he could have been better than his destiny. Nick is disappointed to see Caleb looking satisfied about his death, having thought they were genuinely friends.

Analysis

The biggest test to Nick's conflicting demon and human natures is his chance to use his newly harnessed powers to kill Thorn. Here the theme of good and evil is readily explored. This quandary lasts four pages before Nick reasserts himself as one of the good guys. It proves to be a significant moral challenge to Nick, one which he ultimately overcomes. It also puts to the test the idea of nature and nurture as it relates to good and evil. Nick, a demon, is naturally predisposed to evil; however, his being raised and nurtured as a Catholic by a devoutly Christian woman undercuts his natural predispositions to evil. This also reinforces the idea that free will (nurture) trounces fate (nature).

The novel started out with a potential exploration of the value of normalcy, something each teenager struggles with as they fight a simultaneous desire to stand out from the crowd and yet belong. Since Nick's initial thought that it might be nice to be normal, nothing normal has happened to him, and the novel seems to be pushing him in the direction of embracing his uniqueness. Both Adarian and Zarelda tell Nick his powers are part of him and not his body, a message that could be a metaphor universally appreciated by teenagers, who are grappling with their own desire to be special. To emphasize one's soul over physical attributes is a healthy message.

The reader should also pay attention to Kody's sacrifice. Kody's decision in exiling herself to the foreign realm in order to save Nick, is another example of living rightly in



the Christian ideal. This sacrifice is born of selfless love. Her martyrdom microcosmically reflects that of Jesus Himself, who died to save humanity. This also clearly supports the thematic idea that free will is superior to fate. Kody did not have to sacrifice herself for Nick, but she has freely chosen to do so. Her free choice has a tremendous impact on Nick, who with his life, is able to continue on in his quest.

Discussion Question 1

Why doesn't Nick kill Thorn? Explain the logic he uses in making this decision. Do you agree with his choice? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the theme of nature versus nurture through the character of Nick. Which side does the novel espouse, and does it treat both arguments fairly? Do you agree with the novel's assessment of nature versus nurture? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Describe Nick's emotional reaction to the discovery that Kody is bound to the alternate reality. Why does this bring out this demon side, and how does it reflect his humanity? How would you react if someone sacrificed themselves for you? Why?

Vocabulary

deface, perpetual, metamorphose, minion, unison, evasive, beneficial, chaste, cessation, subservient, obsequious, sycophant, placate, inexplicable, pertinent, serrated, corporeal, archaic, ferocity, sullen, sidle, relegate, insidious



Chapter 19 – Epilogue

Summary

Nick feels himself falling, annoyed that he's going to hell instead of heaven despite all his efforts to be good. He lands gently and opens his eyes to discover he isn't dead after all. Caleb explains that by killing Nick's body, Ameretat forced the soul of the other Nick out, allowing Nick's own soul to rejoin its body; healing Nick's body was a simple task from there. Caleb urges Nick to complete the necessary ritual to return the usumgallu to their cages, but Nick is touched by the ferocity with which Xevikan and Livia defended him. They have proven themselves loyal, though Caleb argues with Nick, telling him Xevikan has betrayed him in the past. Xevikan claims he was the one betrayed and punished out of proportion. Nick makes Xevikan and Livia promise to protect him and all those who are important to him, and they vow loyalty to the Malachai. Caleb takes Nick to the cemetery to finish the ritual needed to seal off the rest of the usumgallu, while Xevikan and Zavid marvel at the strangeness of Nick as the Malachai.

While Caleb enacts the ritual, Nick interrogates him about his history with Xevikan. Caleb tells Nick that he (Caleb) was one of the judges who stripped Xevikan of his powers after Xevikan betrayed his people. Caleb is annoyed that Nick blithely embraced Xevikan as an ally. Caleb's grief over his own lost family pours out, and Nick apologizes, but Caleb wonders why they bother fighting at all, since destruction is inevitable. Nick gives a resounding pep talk about fighting for the people they love, for the moments of happiness that come unexpectedly amidst the pain. Nick stands in the middle of the circle Caleb created with oils and assumes all his powers, speaking the words to box up his generals. Relieved to have regained control with minimal fighting, Nick embraces his imperfect life, and vows to live without regret.

Nick must still face something terrifying: his mother Cherise. Nick brings Xevikan home since Caleb won't let Xev stay at his mansion. He confronts his mother's worry from the "tropical storm" that kept them apart all day (his mother seemingly knows nothing about his demon life). Nick introduces Xevikan, telling his mother he's a friend who needs a place to stay because of the storm. Cherise welcomes Xev with open arms, and Xev is genuinely touched.

Xevikan overhears Nick speaking on the phone with Caleb about finding a way to bring Kody back. He questions Nick about it, learning that Kody is a ghost who was trapped in the other realm. Xevikan understands Nick's pain, and wants to repay the kindness Nick has shown him. When Nick goes to dinner, Xevikan summons his own powers to travel through dimensions to find Kody and bring her back. Determined to protect the world from an overtaking Sarru-Dara, Kody is ready to fight Xev. Xevikan explains that he's come to retrieve her for Nick; Kody is skeptical, believing only a god can pull her spirit back, but she reluctantly trusts him.



Nick comes looking for Xevikan and is shocked to find Kody in his room. They are jubilantly reunited, even as Xev passes out from a reopened wound in his chest. Kody recognizes he is cursed, and wonders what he is beyond the Sarru-Dara. When she learns his name, Kody is flabbergasted – Nick has unleashed and befriended the most dangerous ancient god in existence.

Analysis

Nick jokingly references his disappointment that he's falling, as if toward hell, despite attending Sunday Mass every week. Yet he clearly believes in the power of God, the Truths of the Catholic Church, as well as Heaven and Hell. That Nick as the Malachai demon has the power to destroy the world does not, as would seem, negate the omnipotence of God. Just because the power to destroy the world exists, doesn't mean it is going to happen. Whether or not it happens is dependent upon the free will of the characters of the novel – a free will that God has gifted them.

The focus on action rather than description throughout the novel gives it a cinematic feel, as the plot moves quickly from attack to attack. The cutting between narrative perspectives is also cinematic in feel, like cutting between scenes to give the audience a full picture of what's happening, even if the protagonist is not aware of all the factors that affect his or her life. This underscores the ideal of normalcy and reality between multiple dimensions.

This also occurs again in a conversation between Xevikan and Zavid after the final battle with the Arelim is over. This dialogue unsurprisingly mainly revolves around Nick and what an unusual Malachai he is, but readers also discover that despite the animosity between Xevikan and Caleb, the two are family. Xevikan's late entrance into the novel makes him something of a *deus ex machina*, as he appears just in time to save Nick in the final Arelim showdown, then repays Nick's kindness by traveling through dimensions to bring Kody back, just when it seems she will be stuck forever in the alternate reality.

Because the novel is part of a series, Xevikan's late, unexpected appearance and cryptic relationship with Caleb offer foreshadowing for conflicts to be resolved in the next novel. But his presence does give this novel an easy ending, where the good handily win and live to fight another day. The conclusion is thus open-ended.

Xevikan asks Nick what it feels like to be loved, and claims his devotion to his family was based on "honor, obligation, and responsibility" (Page 433) rather than affection. Xevikan's resentment of Nick will surely play a role in future installments of Nick's story, but it also reasserts the theme of love that permeates the novel. When Caleb despairs that the epic battle between good and evil is ultimately futile, Nick rebukes him, "We do it for those tiny moments when the world opens up and we're no longer alone. Those moments when we realize that we aren't the center of the universe, but to one single person, we're their entire existence. We are what they live for and we matter to them more than anything" (Page 422), adding, "We don't fight for ourselves. We fight for who



and what we love. And if there's any chance to save them, we have to take it" (Page 423). Nick emulates the all-encompassing, sacrificial love of his mother and Kody, and more symbolically, of Jesus Christ. Dying is a small price to pay in order to save others, and love is the ultimate motivating factor of such sacrifices.

As Nick reflects on his surreal life, he comes to the conclusion that, "It wasn't perfect, yet it was all his" (Page 426). The ultimate message of Nick's story is that normalcy is overrated, and one should embrace the unique qualities that make one an individual. Everyone is extraordinary in his or her own way. This is, as mentioned, an important message for teenagers struggling to cobble together an identity of who they are. Nick evokes the idea that it is better to stand out from the crowd if one is being true to oneself than to hide or diminish what makes one special in order to fit in. Nick's otherworldly life and exceptional goodness may make him difficult for teen readers to relate to personally, but the overall moral of the story will resonate.

Finally, readers should note how many elements of foreshadowing never came to fruition in the novel. Neither Nick nor Kody came close to interfering with the space-time continuum and destroying someone's future. The much vaunted Magus Stone was not required to reunite Nick's soul with his body after all. Readers never meet Laguerre, the general who supposedly instigated Nick's disembodiment, or Jared, the Sephiroth personification of goodness, the only living entity that can kill Nick. These characters, objects, and concepts may come to play in other novels in Nick's series, but here they are merely background information. As the reader also learns, both realities are equally real, just different, and Nick steadfastly belongs in the world where he is the Malachai demon.

Discussion Question 1

Caleb says to Nick, "I don't know what's worse. Your humanity or your demonkyn. Both are liable to kill you and get the rest of us slaughtered in the process" (Page 419). Which do you think is more of a liability for Nick? Why?

Discussion Question 2

Do you agree with Nick that it is better to be unique and true to yourself rather than to fit in? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Compare and contrast Nick and Kody as Christ-like figures. Do you agree that love requires sacrifice? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

proverbial, vile, Wary, unscathed, respite, acclimate, moniker, colloquialism, cowed, habitable, modicum, traverse



Characters

Nick Gautier

Nick Gautier is a 16-year-old half human, half demon who is destined as the heir of the Malachai demons to destroy the entire universe centuries in the future. Nick is 6'4" with dark hair and blue eyes in his own reality. He wakes up one day in a realm that is similar but just slightly off, including the fact that Nick is 5'8" with blond and gray eyes. Nick was conceived in an act of violence perpetrated by his father against his mother, but unlike every other Malachai demon in history, Nick was raised by a devoted and loving mother, which has a profound influence on his attitudes and actions. Nick follows his mother's religious beliefs as much as a 16 year old can, and tries to avoid violence (despite his demonic nature). He is fair and generous, offering his loyalty to those who are loyal to him. Nick prefers to instill respect rather than fear, and even in a pivotal moment where he has the chance to prove his strength and flex his supernatural powers, he chooses not to do so, maturely understanding that he has the respect of everyone who matters to him already. Though an outsider in his normal reality, Nick has an extraordinary self-confidence, rarely doubting his ability to succeed, even when it involves turning a flaw like stupidity into an asset. Nick comes from a Cajun background and this translates into a stubborn determination to fight the odds and courageously stand against his enemies even when it seems impossible he can win. Nick is aware of his destiny, an enormous burden for someone so young, but he is determined to change it, and to make choices that will lead to a happier outcome. He is motivated by love, for his mother, his girlfriend Kody, and his cobbled together "family" of humans and demons who all fight evil in order to save innocent lives.

Kody (Nekoda)

Kody (Nekoda) is an Arelim, a guardian of the order of the universe, who was sent back in space and time to kill the Malachai demon before he can destroy the universe. Kody lived as a human centuries in the future, dying at the hands of Nick (the Ambrose Malachai), who also killed her entire family. Kody is then recruited as an Arelim, but she technically is a ghost. Kody is conflicted between her mission to kill the Malachai coupled with her own desire to save her family from its bloody end, and her deep love of Nick, who is still an innocent, kind, and brave teenager. Kody wants to protect Nick from the pain that would force him to change into the Ambrose Malachai, and she fights evil alongside him. Kody even sacrifices herself to save Nick's life, pushing him to return to his own reality even though she knows she cannot join him there.

Caleb Malphas

Caleb Malphas is a demon disguised as a teenager (a "pretty boy jock") to help protect and guide Nick in learning to use his nascent demon powers. He was inherited by Nick



from Nick's Malachai father, Adarian. Caleb is unfailingly loyal to Nick, despite his irritation at Nick's stupid bravado and wise-cracking casualness in the face of danger. Caleb is a demon who fights evil. He has a tortured past in which his family were all killed by evil forces, motivating him to spend eternity fighting back, though he sometimes questions the futility of the epic struggle. Through Nick's absence from his normal realm, Caleb's genuine affection for the youth comes to the forefront and surprises even Nick.

Cherise Gautier

Cherise Gautier is Nick's mother, a regular human woman. In Nick's reality, she is a hard-working, moral waitress who loves Nick unconditionally. In the alternate reality, Cherise is a high-powered businesswoman, but she loves her version of Nick just as much. A no-nonsense woman, Cherise was raped by Adarian Malachai, but she raised Nick with as much love as if he had been conceived out of desire. Cherise's love is the primary force shaping Nick's actions and setting him apart from all the other Malachai demons who have come before him. She is the ideal model of Christian maternal love, and though she barely appears directly in the narrative, her influence is always felt.

Michael "Bubba" Burdette

Michael "Bubba" Burdette is a vigilante demon fighter. In Nick's normal reality, Bubba is something of a conspiracy theory lunatic, driven mad when his wife and child were killed by demons. In the alternate reality, Bubba is a former Super Bowl-winning football star, well known, and respected in the community. In both worlds he seeks justice and refuses to back down from a challenge, fighting to protect those he cares about most.

Thorn

Thorn is a demon ally in Nick's normal universe, but in the alternate reality, Thorn is the sakkan, the general who leads the Malachai's strongest forces in battle. Thorn first comes across Nick in Karma's house, and though he doesn't initially know Nick is the Malachai, he opportunistically takes advantage of Nick's weakened state to gain power for himself. He is self-serving and power-hungry, and hates being made submissive. Ultimately, he is forced to capitulate to Nick, who wisely uses his power to dominate Thorn without completely humiliating or killing him.

Adarian Malachai

Adarian Malachai is Nick's father, a demon of cruel provenance who is trapped in a paradox of wanting love but being unable to achieve it. Adarian died the night before the novel began, thereby transferring his powers to Nick, and only appears as a lost soul in a realm that exists between realities. He was reared by primal gods who tortured and fed on him, preening him to be a merciless killer. Somehow Adarian falls in love with



Cherise, and though those feelings can never be reciprocated, they influence all of Adarian's actions. He regrets the pain he caused her by impregnating her with Nick and allows himself to be held in human prisons to avoid hurting her again. He hates Nick for having Cherise's love, yet protects his son because he knows how detrimental Nick's death would be to the woman he loves. Adarian represents a step on the evolutionary scale of the Malachai, feeling emotions other than hate and fighting his nature to keep Cherise and Nick safe as much as he can. He urges Nick to be a better man than he himself was, and to fight his destructive destiny.

Simi (Nick's reality)

Simi (Nick's reality) is a Charonte demon ally of Nick's and future aunt of Kody and daughter of Acheron, who chars her prey with fiery breath and eats them doused in barbeque sauce. She is disguised in the human realm as a "flamboyant" Goth girl, but she stands well over six feet tall. She is loyal to Nick but can't fathom the ways of human beings. She speaks in a child-like English that belies it is not her native tongue.

Simi (alternate reality)

Simi (alternate reality) is Acheron's granddaughter, a shy, conservative high school friend of Nick's. She is a voice of compassion and reason, urging her grandfather not to hurt Nick unnecessarily. Nick's heals her through supernatural powers when she is nearly killed by a demon, and this earns Acheron's respect and grudging mercy toward Nick.

Acheron Parthenopaeus

Acheron Parthenopaeus is an 11,000-year-old immortal warrior who stands seven feet tall. He is similar in both Nick's reality and the alternate world, though the alternate Acheron is a fiercely protective grandfather to Ash and Simi after their human/demon parents were killed. Acheron is cynical and stern, yet he fights on the side of good, and he values generosity and fairness in others, particularly Nick, whose cause he reluctantly joins.

Ash

Ash is Acheron's grandson in the alternate reality, a high school friend of Nick's who is only five feet tall and seems ordinary. He has some supernatural powers but has little control over his life in the face of his overprotective grandfather.



Selena Devereaux

Selena Devereaux is a psychic known as Madame Selene, one of a family of magical women whom Nick is acquainted with in his own reality. In the alternate reality, Selena is the first supernatural familiar face Nick comes across and he trusts her enough to tell her he needs to get home to his other reality without worrying she'll think he's crazy. Selena quickly brings him to her other sisters for assistance before fading from the novel, but like her sisters, she is on the side of evil in the alternate realm.

Karma Devereaux

Karma Devereaux is one of the nine sisters of the magically inclined Devereaux family. Karma is the most suspicious and protective of her family. She lives fearlessly in a house inhabited by a plethora of ghosts. She manipulates Nick and Kody into trusting her enough to betray their secrets before betraying them by allowing Thorn to get his hands on them.

Amanda Devereaux

Amanda Devereaux is another of the Devereaux clan, twin sister to Tabitha. In both realities she is the most ordinary of the sisters, the one least predisposed to magic. But in the alternate reality she is still capable of magic, and she joins with her sisters in trying to entrap Nick and hand him over to his enemies.

Tabitha Devereaux

Tabitha Devereaux is an acquaintance of Nick's in his own reality, a dyed-black hair stereotypical Goth girl, completely different from her twin sister Amanda. She is aggressive, but while in Nick's reality she uses that forcefulness against demons, in the alternate reality, she is on the side of darkness, having a special relationship with Thorn and accompanying him to fight against Nick.

Ameretat

Ameretat is a cruel Arel general, who joins forces with Sraosha and leads the battle against Nick on behalf of the Arelim. Ameretat would rather instigate the Sada, a false utopia, and end the world by Arelim means rather than let it continue several more centuries until Nick as the Ambrose Malachai can end it. Ameretat thinks he succeeds in his mission when he stabs Nick's body through the heart while his soul is still disembodied, but he only succeeds in forcing out the other version of Nick, allowing the true Nick to rejoin his body.



Savitar

Savitar is a Chthonian demon and Kody's godfather. Kody takes a risk that the alternate realm Savitar is the same as the one in Nick's reality, and calls on him to help save Nick when he gets in trouble with the Devereaux sisters. Savitar is fierce and cynical, but he fights on Nick's behalf, and he speaks eloquently in favor of free will.

Zarelda

Zarelda is Zavid's sister, who falls in love and is then betrayed, and finds herself bound for hell until Zavid steps in and offers himself in her place. Zarelda dies anyway, but comes back as a ghost to implore Nick to help her brother. She urges Nick to tap into his powers, letting him know they are a part of him that can never be separated from his soul.

Xevikan

Xevikan is the Sarru-Dara, the Malachai demon's usumgallu general who reigns over blood and fire. He is also an ancient and dangerous god. Xevikan has spent centuries relegated to a box as the Sarru-Dara, having been exiled by his people (including his relation, Caleb) for supposedly betraying them to their enemies and death. Xevikan is bitter about his fate, both his exile and his relegation to a cage, and he is resentful of Nick's idyllic upbringing, full of love and gentleness. Yet he is bound by honor, and he repays Nick's kindness and generosity in freeing him from slavery by bringing Kody back from the alternate reality where she is trapped. Xevikan has tri-color hair (red, yellow, and black) and his eyes are a mix of reddish brown and green.

Livia

Livia is the Sarru-Ninim, one of the seven usumgallu generals unleashed by the Malachai's death, primed to lead the charge in destroying the world. She is used to having an erotic relationship with the Malachai, biting him with vampire teeth and kissing Nick even when he doesn't have a corporeal body. She loyally defends Nick's body from Ameretat, and for that earns her freedom from her box, though Nick refuses to offer her any physical affection.

Sraosha

Sraosha is one of the Arelim elders, part of the guardian race who protect the order of time and space. Sraosha goes rogue against his brethren, unilaterally deciding that rather than wait for the Ambrose Malachai to destroy the world, the Arelim should bring about its destruction by killing Nick as a teenager and inducing the Sada, a false utopia



in which only good exists. This imbalanced world of good would end the universe but in a gentler way than the Malachai, and Sraosha earnestly believes this is preferable.

Surivel

Suriyel is one of the Arelim elders, part of the guardian race who protect the order of time and space. He is one of the three who recruits Kody to go back in time to kill Nick. He fights against his Arelim brethren who wish to destroy the teenage Nick and end the race of the Malachai, believing Nick is good enough to possibly change his own destiny. He joins the fight to protect Nick rather than kill him.

Adidiron

Adidiron is one of the Arelim elders, part of the guardian race who protect the order of time and space. He is one of the three who recruits Kody to go back in time to kill Nick. He fights against his Arelim brethren who wish to destroy the teenage Nick and end the race of the Malachai, believing Nick is good enough to possibly change his own destiny. He joins the fight to protect Nick rather than kill him.

Noir

Noir is the primal god of evil. As the embodiment of darkness, he tries to seduce and enslave Nick for his own purposes, even branding Nick with his own symbol, but Nick stays strong and refuses to allow Noir to control his actions.



Symbols and Symbolism

Holy Water

Holy Water is water consecrated by a priest in a Catholic church, which Nick uses both to bless himself and as a weapon against demons. By mixing the holy water with his blood, Nick can create a substance he likens to “demon napalm.” Unfortunately this trick doesn’t work in his alternative reality body, which doesn’t contain his own mystical blood.

Barbeque Sauce

Barbeque Sauce is the primary condiment used by the Charonte demon Simi, an ally of Nick’s on her prey, which she chars to death with her fiery breath.

The Magus Stone

The Magus Stone is a piece of the sun that was used as a weapon in an ancient battle between primal gods, which turned into a stone when it hit the desert. The stone was set into a sun medallion and given as a peace offering after the war was over. In theory, this medallion is the only object that can reunite Nick’s soul and body, though no one knows where to find it.

Chants

Chants are magical spells and incantations designed to bring about supernatural effects, changes, or situations. For example, during the novel, Nick is able to use a healing chant learned from his grandmother to heal Simi.

Lightning

Lightning is used as a conduit for beings and demons to travel between various dimensions. During the novel, while rushing to a convent with Nick, lightning strikes the car Bubba, Savitar, and Kody are driving. Thousands of winged demons emerge from the lightning and attack the trio. beset them.

Teleportation

Teleportation is a process of travel that is instantaneous and can transport one or more individuals between various dimensions and between various places within the same world. For example, during the novel, Acheron teleports Nick, Simi, and Ash into his



study in order to announce that the Arelim also want Nick. This exposes Nick to knowledge of the race of the Arelim for the first time.

Fireballs

Fireballs are a kind of magical weapon Nick wields in battle against his enemies. Nick is able to draw two fireballs out of thin air magically. Prior to his confrontation with Thorn, Nick tests his ability to make fireballs before heading after Thorn with Caleb and Simi. The use of fireballs demonstrates Nick's abilities and powers which may ultimately be used for good or evil. Nick, however, chooses to use his abilities with fireballs for good.

Armor

One of Kody's distinguishing characteristics in her angelic form is her wearing of armor. The armor is intended not only to denote who Kody is, but also to protect her from harm. In the novel, Karma is distrustful of Kody, and demands that Kody show her true form. Kody hesitates at first, but by showing her winged and armored form, is able to prove who she is.

Aura

Auras are the spiritual energy given off by individuals and other beings which can be seen, read, and interpreted by others. When Karma, Tabitha, and Amanda escort Nick to Karma's house, for example, they worry about his true nature as a demon. Tabitha, however, can read his aura and knows he is telling the truth.

Eclipse

An eclipse occurs when the sun's light is blocked by the moon passing between the sun and the Earth. In the novel, an eclipse occurs early on in conjunction with a blood rain. Kody knows that the eclipse and the rain foreshadow the appearance of the usumgallu, seven demon generals who were unleashed by the death of Nick's father. The seven demon generals are being summoned together by Sarru-Dara, and when they unite they will destroy the world.



Settings

New Orleans

New Orleans is the setting in both Nick's own reality and the other dimension, and there is some overlapping in his personal landmarks, though some of the shops he is used to are different, as well as his own home. New Orleans has a long Cajun history, which influences Nick, who is proud of his heritage. This mainly manifests itself as "Cajun stubbornness," and a determination to persevere even in the face of failure. As a city with a mixed cultural background and a generally regarded laissez-faire attitude, is a perfect arena for the mingling of human and demon elements. It also has a strong Catholic history, which plays a role in Nick's narrative, forming the moral backbone which grounds him, via his mother.

Karma Devereaux's House

Karma Devereaux's House is the location where Selena Devereaux and her sisters take Nick to try to decipher how he came to be in another reality from his own. Karma shares the house with a variety of ghosts who are hostile, but Karma does not let them intimidate them. When Nick accidentally summons Kody to save him when he is attacked in the house, he learns that she, too, is a ghost.

The Burdette Mansion

The Burdette Mansion is where Nick's mother and "father" Michael "Bubba" Burdette live in the alternate reality. The house is not familiar to Nick but it makes him wonder if being rich and normal might be a nice change from being poor and ostracized. The mansion is the sight of a battle between Nick, his allies, and the demons who are trying to kill him, including Thorn and the Devereaux sisters.

Erzulie's Voo Doo Shop

Erzulie's Voo Doo Shop is the place where Nick had a pitched battle with his enemies that resulted in his father's death on the night before he woke up in an alternate dimension. The shop, full of magical objects and books, is exactly the same in the alternate reality, but the Devereaux sisters who run it are on the side of evil in the alternate world.

St. Louis Cathedral

St. Louis Cathedral is a Catholic church in New Orleans where Nick seeks sanctuary once he intuits that the Devereaux sisters cannot be trusted.



The Arelim Realm

The Arelim Realm is a dimension that exists completely independently of human space and time, where Kody goes to visit her Arelim contacts to determine if they have changed tactics and are trying to kill Nick themselves rather than trusting her to do it.

The Realm of Lost Souls

The Realm of Lost Souls is an unnamed dark space where Adarian Malachai pulls Nick to save him from death. He calls it the “nothingness between everything. That miniscule flicker that you can sometimes glimpse right before darkness becomes light” (Page 311). It is the place where souls get stranded when they can’t find their way home.



Themes and Motifs

Destiny vs. Free Will

Nick's destiny as the Ambrose Malachai is to bring about the destruction of the universe. It has been confirmed by Nick's future self, who came back to warn him of his impending actions, and Kody, whose family was killed by Nick centuries in the future. Kody was sent back in space and time to destroy Nick before he can destroy the world; yet Kody hesitates because 16 year old Nick is a loving, big-hearted, morally righteous teenager. She holds out hope that Nick's destiny can be changed, if Nick can stay strong enough to make different choices, rather than giving into the hatred and violence that is his birthright as the Malachai. The novel claims that destiny is not written in stone, because of the existence of free will. Kody speaks of twin tablets created in ancient times: the Mashuan, a compendium of destined events and the Mashuani, a tablet of how to accomplish or divert destiny – a tablet of “what-could-be” (Page 261).

This seems to be a bit of a paradox; if an action is avoidable, then it cannot be “destined.” Ancient Greek tragedies, filled with as much interference by gods into the human world as Nick's life, often showed that trying to avoid one's destiny was the path leading directly to those foretold events. However, the novel optimistically wants to point out that humans should never feel trapped by their circumstances. People always have a range of choices and the free will to make them. The existence of the alternate reality in which Nick finds himself acts as a proof of the infinite worlds that could hypothetically exist based on the difference of a single decision or factor. As Savitar points out to Nick in this other realm, “For better or worse, every decision we make, good or bad, small and large, puts us on a course to nightmares we don't see coming until they're in our face...In every universe, we play out different decisions we've made for whatever reason . What breaks one person at one time can make them strong at another. And one small variable can have devastating consequences. Timing is everything, kid” (Page 141). The tension in Nick's story, which plays out over a series of novels, is seeing whether Nick will become the destructive Ambrose Malachai (and what chain of events would cause him to turn into such a hate-ridden demon) or if he will overcome his destiny and “be more than what he'd been born for.”

The Power of Love

Despite all the magical powers that exist in Nick's world – teleporting, instant fireballs, mind control, splitting souls and bodies, flying – the novel makes a strong argument that the greatest power in the universe is love. As the Malachai demon, Nick should have been born of a mother who hated him, and then raised as a slave to gods, beaten and verbally abused until he was frothing at the mouth to pour his hatred into the world through violence. Nick was born of hate – it is strongly implied that Adarian Malachai raped Cherise Gautier – but Cherise is able to overcome the hatred and violence of Nick's conception to love him anyway. As Nick tells his father, Cherise can't even



continue to hate Adarian because she is so grateful to him for giving her Nick. Kenyon sidesteps the issues of gender politics and women's liberation in this structuring of events, giving the novel a neat Christian message: turn the other cheek and love your enemies.

Love is nothing short of an evolutionary adaptation: Adarian loves Cherise in his own warped way, and his behavior as a Malachai demon is modified accordingly. He allows himself to be locked in human jails rather than risk hurting her further. He lets Nick live despite his jealousy and hatred of his son because he knows Nick's death would ruin Cherise's life. Adarian is far from perfect, but he is less evil than his Malachai ancestors, and Nick is even more moral and well-behaved. Having grown up in a nurturing environment with a doting mother, Nick has a clear sense of right and wrong. Though he knows his potential destiny, he fights his congenital instinct for hatred and violence and tries to use his powers only to defend himself and those he loves. Cherise's love, combined with that of Kody, has the potential to change the course of history, ending the rein of Malachai terror as Nick works to save mankind rather than destroy it.

The Advantages and Disadvantages of Normalcy

Nick is deeply disturbed when he wakes up in an alternate reality, where his body is not what he's used to, nor are his family and friends. Nick is without his demon powers, and for a brief moment he relishes his normalcy: "You know, this has possibilities. It might not be bad to be normal for a while. Weird and poor hadn't worked out that well for him. Rich and well-dressed might be another story" (Page 22-3). Nick is tired of not fitting in at his school, where everyone thinks he's a freak while he keeps the secret of his true identity. His life is constantly under threat from demons and other evil forces, and he realizes it might be nice to have a break from the chaos. Yet those evil forces follow him, demonstrating symbolically that there might not be a "normal" in any universe. Nick quickly misses his powers and magical allies. He comes to appreciate his uniqueness, and embrace his life because he has control of his decisions and his abilities. By the end of the novel, Nick is happy to be restored to his own reality: "But this was his life, and honestly ... He liked it. It wasn't perfect, yet it was all his" (Page 427).

Nick's situation as Malachai demon may seem far-fetched, but his feelings of being a misfit and social outcast are typical for the average teenager. Everyone wants to belong, and most people go through a phase where they feel as if they don't fit in. Nick's story is a metaphor that most teenage readers will be able to relate to even if they don't have magical powers or demon-infested lives. The novel urges Nick and readers to embrace what is special about them and be proud of being an individual. It suggests that there is no standard for "normal," and living one's life as decently, morally, and cheerfully as possible is the only rule to follow.



Styles

Point of View

The novel is written in the third person, somewhat limited perspective. While the third person narrator mainly cleaves to Nick's thoughts, revealing his inner monologue throughout the action of the novel. Despite being the Malachai demon, Nick demonstrates remarkably little inner conflict. His moral compass is firmly set to good, and he never wavers from doing the brave, just, or right thing. Even in the moment when he holds Thorn's life in his hands, Nick does not truly consider killing him. The novel is an archetypal epic of good versus evil, but despite theoretically containing both sides of the coin within himself, Nick does not struggle. The battle is entirely externalized.

After the Prologue and Chapters 1 and 2, the novel unexpectedly shifts to Nick's true reality, where readers see Kody and Caleb dealing with the ramifications of Nick's disappearance. This obviously means the chapter is told from the perspectives of other characters, and readers go inside the minds of Kody and Caleb; later readers will get the perspectives of Adarian and Xevikan as well. By leaving Nick's side, the novel allows readers to see what is happening in real time in other parts of the universe. This can be useful in creating a little suspense about Nick's immediate fate in any given scene, as in Chapter 3. Much of the internal narratives of the other characters are simply a way of revealing exposition, given that the backstory spans centuries both in the past and the future and Nick himself wasn't present for a great deal of it. The author could give this exposition in a more objective way, but revealing it through one character or another's eyes creates emotional resonance for the readers to invest in. If the characters aren't offering off exposition, then they are revealing their feelings about Nick, bolstering the authenticity of Nick's claim to be a "good guy" despite being a demon. Transitions between one character's perspective and another's can be abrupt, as in Chapter 16, when Nick's inner monologue is interrupted by Adarian, as he watches his son being taken by Noir. This is an unusual stylistic element, but is generally signposted clearly by the author so that readers will not be confused.

The third person narrator isn't omniscient, because readers never enter the minds of the novel's villains; readers never learn why the Devereaux sisters are evil in the alternate realm, or why Nick's general Thorn is trying to destroy him (is it simply opportunistic or is it pre-meditated?) This emphasis on the conflicted but ultimately "good" guys tips the balance of the novel, perhaps squandering any tension that things could end any way but happily for the protagonist.

Language and Meaning

The novel is written in simple, direct language that focuses on action rather than description. The author uses an emotional shorthand, relying on a few recurring tropes



to quickly denote a character's state of mind, such as a character rubbing his jaw in frustration, shedding a single tear, or unshed tears filling a character's eyes. Similes are frequently used to describe painful and violent moments, comparing an invisible foe to the crush of a boa constrictor, or Nick's first sight of his alter-ego in a photo feeling like a "kick in the crotch" or someone's words hitting Nick "like a fist." These analogies are accessible to readers and create a sense of action even in emotional moments. This reliance on clichés allows the action to move quickly, and the narrative hurtles along, compelling the reader to turn the page as he or she comfortably visualize the scenes.

In addition, the dialogue is short and quippy; none of the characters are prone to long, poetic monologues. Nick jokes and scoffs his way through the tensest moments. This conversational style underscores the idea that Nick is fearless, a true hero, yet it lowers the stakes because he never seems to truly be under threat. The overall effect of Kenyon's fast-paced, action filled writing style is almost cinematic, building a framework that some well-place CGI-special effects could fill in.

The novel is set in New Orleans, and the author uses some Cajun phrases to create local flavor. Characters address each other as "Boy" or "Woman," firmly setting the novel in the American south. Nick is a teenager living in millennial America, and as the novel is mainly told from his perspective, there is an informal, sitcom-like feel to the writing. Nick is a product of his time, and no dilemma lasts too long as Kenyon strives to keep the readers' attention.

Structure

Illusion: Chronicles of Nick is divided into twenty-one sections, including a prologue and an epilogue. The shortest chapter is seven pages, and the longest is forty-three, but most chapters are around twenty pages long. Most chapters end with a mini cliff-hanger as one of the characters, usually Nick, finds his life in danger, but the story is picked up immediately on the next page in the new chapter. This attempt at suspense is a device to compel readers to keep turning the page, making the novel a fast read. While the narrative cleaves mainly to Nick and his perspective of events, it occasionally transfers to other characters. In Chapter 3, for example, the story shifts focus back to Nick's true reality, so readers can see the flip side of his body swapping and how his friends at home are dealing with the interloper in Nick's body. Chapter 9 gives Kody a chance to air her memories and explain exactly how she came to hunt Nick, and why she is prepared to kill him. Even when readers aren't getting Nick's perspective, they are getting information about Nick; all the other characters' thoughts and perspectives seem to revolve around illuminating Nick's history or personality.

The novel has an unusual structure in that it encompasses an intricate mythology, and elements and characters are introduced than left by the wayside. It doesn't stick with a standard crisis/rising action/climax/denouement structure, but feels more episodic as crisis after crisis appears and is averted. There is not a single "villain" in the novel. Readers first meet the Devereaux sisters and might assume they will be the antagonist in Nick's alternate reality, but they get lost less than halfway through the novel and



readers only see them as backdrop characters in the final showdown with Thorn. Readers never learn their motivations, or why they are evil in this realm while they are good in Nick's. Thorn appears as an enemy, then Ameretat of the Arelim, and Adarian mentions that the Malachai's general Laguerre is behind Nick's disembodied predicament, though readers never even meet Laguerre directly. These characters revolve in and out of the story so quickly that, ironically, they don't have much dimensionality. They are simply evil in the battle between good and evil.

Xevikan appears in the final chapters of the novel, and serves as a sort of deus ex machina, easily bringing Kody back from the alternate realm when that looks like an insurmountable challenge. The Magus Stone is mentioned as the only means of reuniting Nick's body and soul, but then an alternative method is found, leaving readers to wonder why the Magus was mentioned at all if it was not significant. This lack of consistency and overwhelming cast of characters might confuse readers, particularly since many of the characters have two counterparts, one in Nick's own reality and one in the alternate universe. Furthermore, because the novel is part of a series, it assumes a familiarity with the characters that new readers might not have. Nick's relationships with his allies and enemies is confusing for someone already not immersed in this particular mythological universe.



Quotes

This was a normal life. Really normal, like other people's lives. No one was trying to kill him, or eat him. He didn't have a principal who thought he was the biggest loser on the planet. Half the football team wasn't turning into zombies or werewolves... You know, this has possibilities. It might not be bad to be normal for a while. Weird and poor hadn't worked out that well for him. Rich and well dressed might be another story.

-- Nick (Chapter 1)

Importance: Nick contemplates the bright side of being exiled from his own dimension into an unfamiliar world where he is powerless. The advantages and disadvantages of being normal are a major theme of the novel, which ultimately seems to argue that Nick should embrace what makes him special, and use his uniqueness for the greater good.

One life touched thousands. For the first time, Nick truly saw the vastness of it all and fully understood. Every man is born as many and dies as one. With every choice made, a part of the future died and an opportunity was lost. You narrowed your options and steered yourself down the path of your life.

-- Nick (Chapter 2)

Importance: In this quote, Nick contemplates the interconnectedness of human life, and how each of a person's actions will have consequences for others. Nick already knows his violent destiny, and knows he must make specific choices that will lead him to it. He wonders if he can be smart enough to make better choices and lead himself to a different destiny.

Over, under, around, or through, there's always a way. You don't give up and you never give in. They can scar your body and take your freedom, but only you can surrender your heart and soul. Nothing is worth compromising yourself for. Stand fast and stand true. Always.

-- Kody (Chapter 6)

Importance: This is the motto for living that Kody learned from her father. It explains why even after she was killed by the Malachai she agreed to track him through space and time to destroy him. It also explains why she hasn't killed Nick yet, as to blindly follow orders and kill an innocent boy would compromise her values. This motto could easily be Nick's as well.

For better or worse, every decision we make, good or bad, small and large, puts us on a course to nightmares we don't see coming until they're in our face... In every universe, we play out different decisions we've made for whatever reason. What breaks one person at one time can make them strong at another. And one small variable can have devastating consequences. Timing is everything, kid.

-- Savitar (Chapter 7)

Importance: Savitar explains the basic idea of free will. Every decision is made



because of a multitude of factors, and represents the way a person chooses to react to their circumstances. People aren't always what one might expect because of their free will.

You were so not what I thought you'd be. I went there expecting a cruel Malachai to battle to the death...And instead I found a sweet, bashful, respectful boy who wore the tackiest shirt imaginable just to make his mother happy and not hurt her feelings, even though everyone else mocked him for it. One who gladly took a beating to protect his saintly mother's reputation... You have inside you a purity that is so rare. The capacity to love unconditionally and completely. In spite of what you are, and as unbelievable as it is, you are truly decent.

-- Kody (Chapter 7)

Importance: Kody explains the paradox of Nick: he is destined to destroy the world and yet he is the most kind-hearted teen in the world. Born of hate, his mother rose above those feelings to love him, and Nick reciprocated with the appropriate gratitude. The mystery of the series is discovering what happens to Nick that turns him into a monster, and if he will have the strength to overcome those circumstances.

He held a new confidence in himself that hadn't been there before. It was as if he no longer felt guilty for ruining his mother's life. As if he realized that he had real value to the world and wasn't the loser other people had called him all his life. Strange that he would find it now when he had no powers to draw on.

-- Narrator/Kody (Chapter 8)

Importance: Kody notices how well Nick is handling the crisis of being without his powers in a stranger's body, all while being under attack from enemies. She is implicitly making the argument against normalcy; Nick is extraordinary even without preternatural powers, and embracing his gifts he becomes powerful in a different but equally important way.

In some ways, he missed the naive assumption that the world was only inhabited by humans. But honestly, it'd been no less evil. Not really. The enemy had only taken other forms in those days. One good thing about demons, they didn't pretend to be your friend. They declared their enmity and attacked accordingly. Full frontal assault. Humans, alone, pretended to be your friend while plotting ways to stab you in the back and cut your throat.

-- Nick (Chapter 10)

Importance: Nick realizes the irony of living in a world where demons truly exist; demons are simply acting out their natures in a straightforward, predictable manner. Humans, on the other hand, choose to be cruel, malicious, and violent, and are therefore much more difficult to handle than evil beings.

It's a myth," she said. "Sada upsets the necessary balance. If you do that, it will destroy the entire universe." A universe that hinged on an ever-shifting balance and harmony with all things. Even good and evil.



-- Kody (Chapter 12)

Importance: Kody reveals another paradox: the necessity of evil in keeping the balance of the universe. Too much goodness will lead to destruction the same way too much evil will. Utopias are impossible.

Nick lowered his father's hand away from his lips so that he could whisper back. "Are you telling me that I picked my own downfall?" His father snorted. "Trust me, boy. We always do. Every step we take is one inch closer to our salvation and one foot closer to our doom.

-- Nick and Adarian (Chapter 15)

Importance: In this conversation between Nick and his father about Nick's demonic summoning name, Nick again highlights the paradox of fighting one's destiny. The harder one fights it, the more likely one is to be walking directly into it.

It was love that bound them together much tighter than hatred and fear ever could. As Kody so often said to him— into all gardens rain will fall. But the heart and the love it's capable of will give us shelter from even the worst storms. Love and respect kept someone in check a lot more than fear and hatred.

-- Nick (Chapter 16)

Importance: Nick directly contradicts the prevailing thought among his ancestry of Malachai demons, including his father. Rather than destroying demons or people simply because he can, and to prove his power, Nick would rather do the work of earning respect, and thereby keep his allies loyal for the right reasons, lest Nick always have to watch his own back for treachery.

And yes, all of us will die eventually, but that isn't what matters. What matters is how we live in the interim. We don't fight for ourselves. We fight for who and what we love. And if there's any chance to save them, we have to take it. Because they deserve nothing less than our absolute best, and by all the gods of all the universes that's what I plan to give to you and the others. My absolute best. Always.

-- Nick (Chapter 19)

Importance: Nick gives Caleb a pep talk when Caleb feels like their fight to save the world is futile, as it is bound to be destroyed eventually anyway. Nick urges Caleb to remember the good in the world, and that family, even a cobbled together, supernatural family like the one they share with their friends, is worth fighting for.

But this was his life, and honestly ... He liked it. It wasn't perfect, yet it was all his. And while it was true that he'd had no choice in how he'd entered this world, and he would most likely have no choice in how he left it, he did control the in-between years.

-- Nick (Chapter 19)

Importance: Nick finally comes to terms with his unique set of circumstances, and knows normalcy would never work for him. He embraces his ability to control himself

and all that entails, and lets go of all the parts of life he can't control. He is at peace with himself.