

The Last Summer of the Death Warriors Study Guide

**The Last Summer of the Death Warriors by Francisco
X. Stork**

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Plot Summary

"The Last Summer of the Death Warriors" is the story of seventeen-year-old Pancho Sanchez's quest for revenge after his sister's death, and his friendship with cancer patient D.Q. that changes his mind about what's worth living and dying for.

At the opening of the novel, Pancho Sanchez is being driven to St. Anthony's home for boys. He has recently lost his father and older sister, and now Pancho is under the guardianship of New Mexico State. Pancho's sister, Rosa, was found dead in a motel room just a few weeks earlier. Although the police determined that Rosa's death was not suspicious, Pancho knows that she was murdered. When Rosa's body was found, there was evidence of sexual activity, and there was alcohol found in her system. Rosa was mentally disabled and had the mind of a ten-year-old child, so she shouldn't have been having sex. Also, she was deathly allergic to alcohol and knew that drinking could kill her. As soon as he heard the coroner's report, Pancho knew that someone had taken advantage of Rosa's disability and given her alcohol. He plans to find that man and kill him.

When he arrives at St. Anthony's, Pancho has no intention of staying confined in the orphanage walls. Yet when he arrives, he's assigned to help care for D.Q., a boy his own age suffering from terminal cancer. When D.Q. is sent to a hospital in Albuquerque for treatment, the same city where Pancho believes Rosa's killer lives, Pancho jumps at the opportunity to escort him. With a revolver and \$200 in his pocket, Pancho begins scouring the streets for a man named Robert Lewis, whom he has tracked down as Rosa's boyfriend. Meanwhile, D.Q. busily composes "The Death Warrior Manifesto," obsessively writing down his final thoughts before his body gives out. "The Death Warrior Manifesto" outlines D.Q.'s beliefs that everyone should fight for the lives, enjoying every possible second of love before their time on earth ends. When he leaves the hospital and is sent to Casa Esperanza, a rehabilitation center, to recuperate, he is reunited with Marisol, the nurse he has fallen in love with. Through every step of his treatment, Pancho is reluctantly at his side, yet as time goes on, a real bond is formed between the two boys. Despite his better judgment, Pancho begins to care about D.Q. and does what he can to make his friend's horrific cancer treatments bearable. Along the way, Pancho makes friends with other cancer patients, and with Marisol, the girl D.Q. has given his heart to.

Two weeks later, Pancho finds Robert Lewis and manages to locate his address. He has all he needs to fulfill his revenge. At the same time, Pancho realizes that he, too, has fallen in love with Marisol. Suddenly, Pancho is faced with a decision: throw away his life by murdering Robert Lewis and spending the rest of his life in prison, or possibly start a new life - one filled with love and opportunity. Pancho breaks in to Robert Lewis' house with every intention of killing him, but when he sees Robert pleading for his life, swearing that he loved Rosa and never meant for her to die, he backs down. At the end of the novel, Pancho has learned to live life as a death warrior, fighting for life and love no matter what life throws at you. When Rosa announces that Pancho's feelings are

mutual - much to D.Q.'s heartbreak - Pancho believes, for the first time in his life, that he was a future.



Chapters 1 - 3

Chapters 1 - 3 Summary

The novel opens as seventeen-year-old Pancho Sanchez's social worker, Mrs. Olivares, drives him to St. Anthony's, the orphanage he will now call home. Pancho's father died a few months earlier, and just two weeks ago, his sister Rosa was found dead in a motel room. Pancho is sure she was murdered, but the police found no evidence of foul play. It was revealed in the coroner's report that Rosa had had sex just before her death, but she was mentally disabled, and, Pancho feels, incapable of consenting. Pancho has vowed to find the man who killed his sister and get revenge.

Mrs. Olivares has called in special favors to have Pancho admitted into St. Anthony, especially since he assaulted a boy at his last foster home. Throughout the drive to the orphanage, Pancho sits silently, brooding in the passenger seat. When he speaks, it's only to ask questions about Rosa's case and why it was closed. Mrs. Olivares encourages Pancho to put the past behind him, to try to heal his wounds. She says that the state of New Mexico will be auctioning off the trailer Pancho used to live in, and his father's truck. The money will be used to pay for Rosa's funeral. If there's anything leftover, it will be put in a trust in Pancho's name, which he will be able to access when he's eighteen. Pancho doesn't care about the money or any belongings left in the trailer. All he wants is revenge.

Inside St. Anthony's, Pancho immediately notices a glass trophy case containing a boxing trophy from 1998. He also feels someone staring at him, and when he turns around, a boy in a wheelchair has fixed his gaze on Pancho. When Father Concha admits Pancho, he informs him that he'll need a job for the summer. He tries to get Pancho a job on a construction site, but when that doesn't work out, assigns him to clean out the equipment room. After a quick tour around the orphanage, Father Concha shows Pancho to his "room," which is little more than a three-sided cubicle. As Pancho unpacks his few belongings, the kid in the wheelchair enters his room and starts a one-sided conversation (Pancho isn't much of a talker). The boy's name is Daniel Quentin, but everyone calls him D.Q. He tells Pancho about St. Anthony's and then informs him that Pancho has been assigned as his caretaker for the summer - that will be his job once the equipment closet is cleaned out. That night, Pancho falls asleep and dreams of his sister Rosa. The next morning, Pancho wakes to D.Q. standing over him. It's time to start the day and D.Q. is far too cheery for Pancho's liking. Over breakfast, D.Q. tells Pancho that he has cancer, which is why he can't walk. It will be Pancho's job to push him around and keep him company.

Chapters 1 - 3 Analysis

In this opening section of the novel, Pancho Sanchez's complicated, complex character is created. He is a teenage boy grieving terribly for the many losses in his life, but with



no one to show him how to properly express his emotions. He has become obsessed with finding the man he believes is responsible for murdering Rosa and seeking his revenge. Anger is one of the first stages in the seven-stages of grief, although Pancho battles with each stage as the novel progresses. It is possible that in a life so out of control - Pancho must feel completely helpless as his family dies all around him - seeking revenge is something Pancho knows he can control, which is why he has become so fixated on it. It seems as if Pancho has every reason to be angry: his mentally disabled sister was found in a hotel room with traces of alcohol in her bloodstream and evidence of sexual intercourse around her. It's no wonder that Pancho feels as if she was taken advantage of, but since she was twenty-years-old, the police find no evidence of foul play. For the rest of the novel, Pancho will seek out the man he feels is responsible, and kill him to avenge Rosa's death. It's interesting to note that Pancho believes the best way to honor Rosa's life is to kill her killer. Because he believes his life is worthless anyway, he has no qualms about spending the rest of his life in prison. Despite his anger and violent temper, Mrs. Olivares, his social worker, is certain that underneath his tough exterior, Pancho is a good boy. This is Pancho's internal conflict for the novel - his struggle to balance the good and bad sides of his character. In meeting D.Q., the boy dying from cancer, a perfect parallel is formed: both boys are fighting, but one boy is fighting to live while the other, Pancho, is arguably fighting to die.



Chapters 4 - 6

Chapters 4 - 6 Summary

Pancho and D.Q. begin sorting out the equipment room, dusting off old boxes and sorting old sports equipment to be moved to the gym. Pancho is delighted to discover two pairs of boxing gloves. D.Q. tells him that a few years ago, the boys were allowed to box when they were angry with each other. He doesn't know why Father Concha - or as the boys affectionately call him, "The Panda" - has stored the gloves. Probably because no one has an interest in them anymore. As they clean the room, D.Q. says that he's been at the orphanage since he was a baby, claiming that his parents left him outside in a basket when he was "no bigger than a football" (Page 24). Pancho is surprised that D.Q.'s parents abandoned him before his illness. D.Q. also explains that they're cleaning out this room because when it's finished, it will be his bedroom. D.Q. knows that he's dying and Father Concha has arranged for him to have a private room for his last few months.

Later that afternoon, Pancho steals a bike from the recreation room and rides down to the café where Rosa used to work. He asks to speak with Julieta, Rosa's best friend, to find out whether or not Rosa had a boyfriend before she died. Julieta acts cagey when Pancho starts asking questions. She reveals that Rosa had occasionally prostituted herself to the schoolboys outside the café. Julieta says Rosa did it not just for the money, but because also because she was a woman in need of affection: "I know in many ways she was a child, you know, mentally, but she was an adult too. A woman. She had a right to her private life" (Page 31). When Pancho presses her, Julieta admits to seeing Rosa get into a red truck with an older white man. She didn't see his face but she knew he was balding. The red truck had something written on the side, but she only remembers that it said, "And Son's." Before Pancho leaves, Julieta tries to give him an envelope full of money raised by concerned friends, but he tells Julieta to keep it.

When Pancho returns to St. Anthony's, D.Q. is waiting for him in the equipment room, anxious to get back to work. As they clean and sort, D.Q. tells Pancho about the books he's writing entitled, "Death Warrior Manifesto." In a way, the manifesto represents D.Q.'s outlook on life: "It's a declaration of intent. In the case of the Death Warrior, it is a public declaration of how the Death Warrior is going to live his life" (Page 36). The first rule in the manifesto is "no whining." Most people don't realize they're whining because they're not making any sound, but to a death warrior, whining is also silently complaining, in your head, much like Pancho does. As he speaks, D.Q. gets a philosophical look in his eye as he contemplates his new friendship with Pancho. He says that he's been waiting for Pancho, that Pancho is the chosen one. According to D.Q., they have been destined to help each other with their plans.



Chapters 4 - 6 Analysis

In this section, the complexity of D.Q.'s character is revealed. Like Pancho, he comes from a difficult childhood. He tells Pancho that his parents abandoned him, but as the novel progresses, it's revealed that this is not true. D.Q. is speaking symbolically. Although his mother is still alive, mental illness led to her emotionally abandoning him. Both boys' families have a strong impact on the way they desire to live their lives, and this parallel will be carried through the rest of the novel. Also in this chapter, the symbolism of boxing is introduced. Both Pancho and D.Q.'s characters are fully-fledged fighters - both physically and emotionally. Pancho views the outside world, including everyone he comes into contact with, as a fighter he must battle in the ring. He knows that everyone he tells will try to stop him from seeking out Rosa's killer, but he feels that this is his life's destiny, and he will fight anyone who stops him from achieving his goal. Pancho navigates the world with his head down and his fists raised, never leaving himself vulnerable to attack. When he meets D.Q., Pancho realizes, almost immediately, that he will have to be particularly guarded around his new charge. When D.Q. speaks, "The words, the voice, they all seemed to come from someone not just older, but ageless" (Page 39). Strangely, D.Q. believes that he and Pancho are soul mates. Even though he doesn't know him, D.Q. seems certain that whatever Pancho's goals in life may be, they are inextricably intertwined with his own.

It's clear to most readers that D.Q.'s presence in Pancho's life will cause the angry teen to reconsider his ways, but D.Q. will have his work cut out for him. When Pancho returns to the café to speak with Julieta, the reader gains further access into Pancho's upbringing. He comes from the dangerous part of town where gangs, alcoholism, drug use, and prostitution are common place. At just seventeen-years-old, Pancho has had a sexual relationship with a much older woman. Despite the rocky upbringing, Pancho is surrounded by people who care, people who have donated money to him. But Pedro isn't interested in the cash; he knows he will be spending the rest of his life in prison and will have no need for it. It might also give Pancho a sense of responsibility, as if he must live up to these friends' expectations. They are trying to help him, while he is trying to throw his life away.



Chapters 7 - 9

Chapters 7 - 9 Summary

The next day, Father Concha says that he wants all the sports equipment moved yet again, which frustrates Pancho. D.Q. has gone to Albuquerque for treatment and Pancho thinks he'll have the day to himself, but a young boy named Guillermo - or "Memo" as he's known around St. Anthony's - volunteers to help him with the task. Pancho doesn't acknowledge the boy and sets to work on his own tasks. He finds a canvas bag and a shovel. He takes the tools outside and fills the bag with dirt. He asks Memo to find him some rope and a ladder to make himself useful. Memo is only too happy to help. He calls over two other boys, Coop and Marcos, to help Pancho hang the bag from a tree limb, and marvels when he sees that Pancho has created a punching bag. All four boys have a basic knowledge of boxing and are eager to start training, but Pancho has another plan. He challenges Coop to a quick match while Father Concha is away, \$40 to the winner. Coop knows that betting is strictly against house rules, but the thought of winning a quick \$20 is too much for him. He agrees. Memo runs around gathering a crowd and a group of boys to act as the judges. Despite the fact that Pancho has found headgear, Coop insists on fighting Pancho without safety gear. Pancho is hesitant, but eventually agrees. As soon as he steps into the ring, it's clear that Coop has been influenced by the crowd. He doesn't have the finesse and training of a true fighter, like Pancho does, and Pancho knows it will be easy to take him down. Although he planned to let Coop tire himself out before knocking him down, something snaps in Pancho while he's in the ring and with two punches, knocks Coop out cold. As he walks away from the ring clutching his winnings, Pancho feels as if he's broken an unspoken rule and guilt eats away at his good mood.

The next day, Mrs. Olivares arrives to take Pancho back to the trailer to pick up any belongings he might want to keep before everything goes up for auction. Even though he wasn't invited, D.Q. comes along, slipping quickly into the passenger seat of Mrs. Olivares' car before anyone can object. At the trailer, Pancho feels overwhelmed with emotion but tries to keep it hidden. He sneaks into Rosa's room and finds her diary, hoping it will contain some clues about the man she was seeing. He also slips into his father's room and takes his gun and seven bullets, knowing he'll need a weapon to exact his revenge. He manages to sneak everything back into the car without Mrs. Olivares noticing. D.Q. asks Pancho a lot of questions about what it was like growing up in a trailer park, and what his family was like before they all died. Pancho surprises himself by answering more questions than he expected. Walking around to his backyard, Pancho collects all the boxing paraphernalia he can find to bring back to St. Anthony's. That night, after everyone else has fallen asleep, Pancho cracks open Rosa's diary and begins reading. It breaks his heart to see Rosa's misspellings and childlike handwriting on the page, but he pushes himself through the emotion. In her own words, Rosa reveals that she has a boyfriend named Bobby, but their relationship must be kept a secret because Bobby is so much older. Rosa states that she's in love with Bobby but that she doesn't want to have sex with him, which he doesn't understand. Bobby says



he's going to leave Rosa unless she has sex with him. She hints at the fact that Bobby has arranged to take her away to "have fun" and to prove that she really loves him. This is her last entry.

Chapters 7 - 9 Analysis

The sparring match with Coop further highlights Pancho's conflicted character. From the onset, he knows the match is ill-matched and responsibly, he tries to convince Coop to use the safety equipment. Later in the novel, he compares their fighting styles to fighters he's seen practicing their moves in front of the full-length mirrors at the boxing ring back home: "The good boxers looked at the motion of their hands and feet as if they were someone else's hands and feet. The bad ones couldn't keep their eyes away from their faces, trying on different menacing looks, eating themselves up" (Page 109). For Coop, fighting in the ring is all about looking tough in front of the crowd, which is why he goes down so quickly. For Pancho, the fight is about survival - he has never cared what others thought of him, and he doesn't start now. This is symbolic of the way Pancho navigates the world. He keeps his eye trained on the fight, on his success, not his reputation. During the fight, something snaps in Pancho and knocks Coop out cold. This shows the reader how angry, and how dangerous, Pancho truly is. It's interesting to note that Pancho enjoys when Coop punches him: "There was something refreshing, pleasurable almost, in the feel of Coop's punches against his arms and the occasional blow that landed on his ribs. It was like being in a daze and getting shaken into wakefulness, or like a ghost regaining flesh and bones" (Page 53). Pancho has been drowning in his depression since Rosa's death, and the physical violence of the fight shakes him out of that stupor. His body reminds his brain that it's time to fight. Despite this, Pancho remains conflicted. He knows that he has taken advantage of Coop, and it reminds him of the way he used to take advantage of Rosa - tricking her into giving him her allowance money, for example. Guilt is one of the main motivations for Pancho's revenge, and it isn't until he can forgive himself for his failings as a younger brother that he can truly heal.

Also in this section, Pancho returns home to the trailer and collects a few items. Rosa's diary gives him valuable clues toward finding her killer. Along with Julieta's tip that the balding man drove a red construction word with "And Sons" in the name, Pancho now has all the information he needs to find Bobby. Reading Rosa's diary, it is clear that Bobby used alcohol to ply Rosa into having sex with him that night. The thought of his infuriates Pancho even though he knows Rosa used to prostitute herself. Rosa clearly loved Bobby, so much that she tried to abstain in their relationship to ensure that he loved her back. From her entries, it appears that Bobby was using her for sex, and when he didn't get it, he killed her. As soon as Pancho picks up the gun, readers should feel confident that he will find Bobby. The question now becomes, will he use the gun?



Chapters 10 - 12

Chapters 10 - 12 Summary

Pancho wakes up after a thunderstorm to find his punching bag soaked through with water. It makes the bag much tougher to punch, but Pancho punches the bag over and over until his knuckles are bloody. He turns around to see that D.Q. has been watching him the whole time, snuggled safely into the waterproof "cocoon," an old army tent with protection from the wind, rain, and insects. He informs Pancho that they'll be leaving for Albuquerque tomorrow to start his treatment at the children's hospital there. He hopes the treatment will only take a few weeks and then he can get started on his real plan. D.Q. is glad to have a friend joining him for the trip since he'll have to make contact with his mother, a woman he's desperately seeking emancipation from. The advanced treatment was her idea, and he's arranged for her to sign the emancipation papers if he agrees to the treatment, which he never wanted in the first place. D.Q. will receive his chemotherapy, spent two weeks recuperating in a therapy home called Casa Esperanza, and then two weeks resting at his mother's house. Although he's anxious about seeing his mother, D.Q. is most concerned about seeing Marisol, the volunteer at Hotel Esperanza that he's in love with.

The next morning, Pancho and D.Q. pack up their belongings and prepare for the drive to Albuquerque. Everyone is a bit emotional at the goodbye, especially Memo who fears he might never see his friend again. D.Q. annoyingly chatters through the whole drive, clearly masking his nervousness about the treatment. He and Father Concho speak at length about D.Q.'s mother and her motivations for insisting on this treatment. D.Q. is particularly aggravated that his mother has had the emancipation papers for months and refuses to sign them, even though she agreed she would if D.Q. agreed to the treatment. As they drive, D.Q. reads aloud from his Thoreau collection, including a passage about moving into the wild to live life to its fullest. Pancho recounts a time when his father killed a hawk and they sucked the marrow out of its bones. This example is exactly what D.Q. is talking about: living life as it comes. When they arrive at the hospital, both Pancho and D.Q. are immediately smitten with the nurse, Rebecca, who checks D.Q. into his room. She arranges for Pancho to sleep in the extra bed even though it's against hospital policies for a non-family member to stay overnight. D.Q. insists that Pancho is his "spiritual brother" which is the closest thing to family he has right now.

Chapters 10 - 12 Analysis

In this section, D.Q. reveals a bit more about his mother. She suffers from bipolar disorder and dropped D.Q. off at St. Anthony's during her first manic episode, which resulted in her driving her car into a telephone pole, nearly killing her son. Her character is also complicated because she has recovered from her illness and is now remarried to a successful, rich lawyer. She is trying to win back D.Q.'s affections by taking control of



his medical treatment. She hopes that if she can heal D.Q., he will love her again. The only problem is that D.Q. longs to live the final weeks of his life embracing the beliefs of a Death Warrior, one who embraces love, not hate. Being around Helen, as D.Q. calls his mother, elicits so much anger and frustration that he can no longer feel the love. D.Q. fears that if Helen is allowed into his life, he will lose the perspective he has worked so hard to gain. In a desperate trade, D.Q. has agreed to undergo a highly controversial cancer treatment in exchange for emancipation from his mother. On the drive to the hospital, D.Q. reads aloud from "Walden" by Henry David Thoreau: "I wend into the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practice resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life" (Page 80). In a way, this passage fully describes the Death Warrior Manifesto - D.Q.'s outline for living life to its fullest. Pancho remembers a time that he literally sucked the marrow out of hawk's bones, which is exactly what D.Q. is talking about. In this tiny moment, the reader is given a glimpse into the connection between the two teens: in his final weeks, D.Q. seeks to reignite the passion once present in Pancho's life.

Also in this section, the symbolism of a butterfly is introduced. When Pancho wakes in the morning, he finds D.Q. asleep in the "cocoon" outside St. Anthony's. The cocoon is an old U.S. Army hammock that has been left at St. Anthony's. D.Q. hangs it from a tree and often sleeps in it when there's a thunderstorm outside. The waterproof siding protects him from the wind and rain of the storm outside, keeping him safe and warm. Keen readers will remember the book Pancho had been reading while he lived in the trailer, "The Soul of a Butterfly: Reflections on Life's Journey" by Muhammad Ali. Readers should be encouraged to note instances where butterflies are present in the novel. They typically occur in moments where Pancho learns, once again, to love life. These moments signal to the reader that Pancho is undergoing a transformation, and that at the end of the novel, his future will be brighter, more beautiful, than in the beginning.



Chapters 13 - 15

Chapters 13 - 15 Summary

When D.Q.'s mother arrives, Pancho is surprised by how beautiful she is. He immediately recognizes her as a "country club" type of woman, which he also wasn't expecting. D.Q. generally ignores his mother, calls her by her first name, and is only interested in the emancipation papers she refused to sign. Later that afternoon, while D.Q. is in treatment, Pancho takes a walk with Father Concho. They speak bluntly about D.Q.'s case and what Pancho can do to help him. It's clear to Father Concho that D.Q. has selected Pancho for his relationship with death: "The idea of death filled him with anger, hatred, a suffocating urgency, remorse even, but there was no fear anywhere" (Page 102). Father Concho gives Pancho an envelope containing \$300, which he says to use showing D.Q. a good time during their vacation. He tells Pancho a bit more about D.Q.'s relationship with his mother, and why D.Q. despises her so much. It seems as if Father Concho sides with D.Q.'s mother, or at least that he understands why she's so desperate to save him. At the end of the conversation, Father Concho insinuates that he knows Pancho is hoping to skip town. He urges Pancho to reconsider. Whatever he's searching for will still be there a month from now. Right now, D.Q. needs him, and deep down, Pancho knows that.

Inside, later that afternoon, Pancho sits down in the hospital cafeteria to read more of Rosa's diary. Before he can start, he's approached by D.Q.'s mother who has brought him a cup of coffee. Like Father Concho, she tells Pancho a bit more about her relationship with D.Q. including the fact that while she was drunk one afternoon, she drove her car into a telephone pole with D.Q. in the backseat. He almost died that day, but doctors managed to resuscitate him. Something changed about him after the accident, however. He became more contemplative, concerned with his identity and his mission in life. He was only nine-years-old but had very adult thoughts and theories about life and death. Pancho can tell that Helen wants something from him, so he bluntly interrupts her story to ask her. She says that she wants Pancho on her side. She wants Pancho to convince D.Q. to fight his cancer, to live as long as he possibly can. Pancho doesn't make any promises.

Chapters 13 - 15 Analysis

The relationship between D.Q. and Helen is further explained. Helen fears that if she hands guardianship over to Father Concho, he might pull D.Q. from the trial before its full effects can be seen. All she wants is to ensure that D.Q. has the best possible medical care money can buy. Unfortunately for her, D.Q. has resigned himself to death. He's using his last few months to prepare for his time ending, he doesn't want to spend that precious time in a hospital. Helen, on the other hand, still holds hope that D.Q. can be cured. Whether motivated by guilt or motherly love, all she wants is to save her son's life. She goes on to explain that Dr. Melendez, who is one of her husband's clients,



believes three months, rather than one, would be the best timeframe to evaluate D.Q.'s care. D.Q. is outraged by this bait-and-switch. He agreed to one month in Albuquerque in exchange for emancipation. Now he feels like he's being tricked into three.

Through the conversations with both Father Concha and Helen, Pancho begins to realize the role he will play in D.Q.'s treatment. D.Q. has chosen Pancho as his companion because he is the one person on earth who doesn't fear death. Pancho has faced the deaths of his mother, father, and sister, yet he still survives. The mentality that death is inevitable is exactly what D.Q. wants by his side as he faces his own demise. He cannot cope with his mother's irrational belief that if they discover a medicinal "silver bullet," he will be healed. Helen, on the other hand, requests that Pancho get on her side. That he convince D.Q. that his life is worth fighting for. This is an interesting request for a teenager who believes he has nothing left to live for. In convincing D.Q. to fight for survival, he risks believing the message himself, and then where will that leave his anger and revenge?



Chapters 16 - 18

Chapters 16 - 18 Summary

After D.Q.'s mother leaves the cafeteria, Poncho takes a walk down Lomas Avenue, away from the hospital. He walks for an hour until he reaches a rundown looking restaurant called MaxDonald. There's a sign on the window proclaiming that the best jalapeno burgers in town are served here, so Pancho goes inside. He orders a burger, fries, and soda, Father Concho's money weighing heavily in his wallet. There's an older man sitting next to him at the bar, pounding back beers, watching Pancho out of the corner of his eye, especially when he takes out his money. Pancho feels the guy's eyes on him the whole time he's eating, knowing what's about to happen: this guy is going to try to rob him. Pancho almost embraces the exchange he knows is coming, this is a situation where Pancho feels completely comfortable. Finally, the guy sidles over and asks if he can buy Pancho a beer. Even though Pancho declines, the man orders a beer, served in a dark glass without foam so passers-by will think it's soda. When the beer arrives, Pancho insists that he doesn't drink. The guy is clearly offended, saying that it's an insult to turn down a free drink. Pancho apologizes and offers to pick up the guy's check. Pancho makes a big deal about fanning out his money so the guy, Billy Tenn, can see how much he has.

Billy Tenn asks Pancho to join him out by his car. Pancho knows exactly what's happening and is prepared when Billy Tenn leads him to an empty parking lot and demands that he hand over the money. When Pancho refuses, Billy Tenn clicks open a switchblade and starts swiping at Pancho. One swipe makes contact, slicing open Pancho's chest. Even with the injury, Pancho never loses his focus. He waits until a drop of sweat drips into Billy Tenn's eye and he has to wipe it away. In that tiny moment, Pancho punches Billy Tenn as hard as he can, connecting with his nose. A sickening crack and pool of blood instantly lets Pancho know that Billy Tenn's nose is broken. When Billy Tenn collapses to the ground, Pancho takes \$20 from his wallet to reimburse himself for the meal, then he races back to the hospital. Along the way, he stops at a quick-stop to bandage up his bloodied chest. The cut is worse than he thought, but he's used to treating his own wounds. It hurts to breathe deeply, but Pancho doesn't want anyone to know what's just happened. At the hospital, D.Q. is suspicious of Pancho's strange behavior, but doesn't ask any questions. He's too nervous thinking about seeing Marisol tomorrow morning. Before Pancho falls asleep, D.Q. says that he knows his mission in life. An angel in heaven handed it over to him. His mission has something to do with Marisol and something to do with Pancho. Pancho is too tired from the fight to ask any questions and falls asleep while D.Q. is still explaining. The next morning, D.Q. and Pancho are driven to Casa Esperanza where Marisol eagerly awaits their arrival. As soon as they arrive, she and D.Q. scurry off together to see D.Q.'s new room, leaving Pancho alone with an eight-year-old girl named Josie. Josie is also being treated for cancer at Casa Esperanza and, like D.Q., has found that cancer makes her bossy. She demands that Pancho take her to the swing set and play with her until Marisol returns. When a pack of noisy birds swoop down and frightens her, she throws herself into



Pancho's arms for protection. Surprising himself, Pancho speaks softly and comforts the girl.

Chapters 16 - 18 Analysis

As they're sitting at the bar, Pancho explains to Billy Tenn why he doesn't drink: his dad, who worked at a Sears Auto Center, used to work with an alcoholic who drank on the job. This guy, Jeff, made tons of mistakes, but Pancho's father always covered for him. Jeff had six kids at home and Pancho's father knew they would be the ones to suffer if Jeff lost his job. One day, Pancho's father was helping Jeff underneath a car, when Jeff slipped - wasted on alcohol - and knocked the jack holding the car above Pancho's father's head. When it fell, it killed Pancho's father immediately. His head and chest were so crushed under the weight of the car that even if they'd let Pancho in to identify the body, he wouldn't have recognized him. This story is one of many that has led Pancho to embrace a clean lifestyle. It's interesting to note that Pancho holds firmly to his beliefs even while he throws his life away. It would be easy for Pancho to justify getting wasted, but he doesn't, which should signal to the reader that perhaps Pancho's future isn't as bleak as it appears.

The fight with Billy Tenn highlights Pancho's keen fighting spirit. While most teenagers would be terrified if faced with a dangerous man wielding a knife, Pancho embraces the situation because he knows he can control it. Even though Billy Tenn has a knife, Pancho never questions whether or not he can overpower the man. He has been well-trained to fight and he uses his street smarts to survive. It is also interesting to note that Pancho has very little formal education: he has never used a computer or cellular telephone in his life. Street smarts are all he has to rely on, and in situations like this, they serve him well.

Once again, D.Q. babbles on about the psychology of a Death Warrior, and his grandiose plans for the future. He seems most talkative when he is nervous, and today, he's nervous about seeing Marisol again. D.Q. feels certain that an angel in heaven personally handed his task in life to him - perhaps while he was technically dead after the car accident - which would explain why he often seems "otherworldly." For his part, Pancho is uninterested in D.Q.'s mission, and is solely concerned with his own: finding Bobby. He fears that if he becomes too involved with D.Q.'s life - including his cancer treatments - he'll become soft and lose sight of his goal: revenge. Although he doesn't plan to join D.Q. at Casa Esperanza, Father Concha's words of encouragement ring in his ears. Plus, he's heard that Bobby might live near Albuquerque, which is why he ultimately decides to join. When he arrives at Casa Esperanza, Pancho surprises himself by befriending a little girl with cancer, Josie. As the novel progresses, Josie becomes like a sister to Pancho, and her no-nonsense attitude helps him overcome his crippling emotions of grief and anger surrounding Rosa's death.



Chapters 19 - 21

Chapters 19 - 21 Summary

Marisol joins Pancho and Josie at the swing set, and invites Pancho and D.Q. to them at the zoo later that week. Pancho isn't really interested, but figures that D.Q. would enjoy spending the afternoon with Marisol. He agrees, as long as D.Q. is feeling up to the outing. Pancho has supported D.Q. through each of his chemotherapy treatments thus far, and they're far more gruesome than he ever could have imagined. D.Q. is weaker than ever and constantly vomiting. She and Pancho talk about how interesting D.Q. is. Marisol thinks he has an extraordinary amount of faith - something Pancho had never considered before - and that he seems to be in touch with another dimension. Later, she asks Pancho if he'd like to work the rickshaw once a week, pulling the kids around town. Pancho doesn't want to do it, but there's something about Marisol that he can't tear his eyes away from. It's as if she sees through him, and that makes Pancho uncomfortable. He tries to tell Marisol that he has too much to do, but she doesn't believe him. She goads him into working the rickshaw one hour a week. Pancho agrees as long as he can use the rickshaw to run errands around town. No matter what is going on around him, Pancho vows to never quit searching for Bobby, the man who killed Rosa.

Later that afternoon, Pancho fills D.Q. in on everything Marisol said, with D.Q. eating up every word. He seems genuinely jealous that Marisol told Pancho about the zoo instead of him, but Pancho manages to rebuild his friend's self esteem. When Pancho recounts what Marisol said about D.Q.'s faith, he surprised to see D.Q. nod his head. He does have faith, even though he's never talked about it. When Pancho presses him, defining faith as a religious thing, D.Q. shrugs away the question and refuses to define his personal faith. As time goes on, whatever faith D.Q. has is tested as his reaction to the chemotherapy goes from bad to worse. His doctors are forced to lessen his treatments because they don't think his frail body can handle the drugs. D.Q. is practically bedridden, saving all his energy for his daily walks with Marisol. While D.Q. is in treatment, Pancho pulls out an old phone book and searches for every construction company with "and Sons" in its name. He finds five.

A few days into his stay at Casa Esperanza, Pancho decides to attach an umbrella to the rickshaw so the chemotherapy kids won't burn their bald heads in the sunshine. As he works, a guy about his age approaches. He nudges Pancho and points at Marisol in the distance, calling her, "one juicy piece of slender ass" (Page 164). Not sure why he's so offended, Pancho has to stop himself from punching the guy in the face. The guy, who introduces himself as Sal, continues speaking rudely about Marisol's body before announcing that he's here to interview for a summer job. Pancho is shocked. This guy is scum and he doesn't want him anywhere near Marisol. As she approaches with Pancho's first ride of the day, a little girl named Kelly, the girl starts crying. She's terrified of the umbrella and doesn't want to go anywhere near it. As Pancho tries to console Kelly, Sal makes his move on Marisol, trying to convince her to show him around



campus. It's obvious that Marisol is uncomfortable and she knows exactly what this guy is up to. Slipping out of his oily grasp, Marisol hurries inside to get Laurie - the director in charge of job interviews. As Laurie approaches, Pancho asks Sal to bring Kelly toward the rickshaw while he tightens the bolt. Sal, who hasn't taken his eyes off Marisol, absentmindedly picks Kelly up and starts walking toward the rickshaw. Predictably, Kelly starts screaming and Sal drops her to the ground. Laurie sees the whole thing as she unenthusiastically greets Sal for his interview. It's obvious that Sal has no chance of winning the position, which pleases Pancho.

Chapters 19 - 21 Analysis

In this section, the theme of faith is introduced when Marisol says she believes D.Q. has an unshakable faith in his future. Upon seeing Pancho, D.Q. knows that he's the friend he's been waiting for. As soon as he sees him, D.Q.'s faith in the future begins to grow: "Your purpose and mine are joined somehow. You'll see. We'll figure it out in time" (Page 42). D.Q. has a plan - leave St. Anthony, return to Casa Esperanza to be reunited with Marisol, and change the path of Pancho's life in the process. He clings to this seemingly blind faith against all odds, including Pancho's debilitating fear of the future. As the novel progresses, Pancho and D.Q. learn to rely on each other for strength when their own faith weakens. Throughout their entire conversation, Pancho finds that he cannot tear his eyes away from Marisol. Although he had initially said Marisol wasn't anything special, he feels locked into her somehow, and he feels as if she can see inside his soul. In this way, Marisol is very similar to D.Q. in her seemingly otherworldly sense of calm. Although Pancho doesn't realize it yet, he is falling in love with Marisol, which will greatly complicate his relationship with D.Q. When Pancho sees another man hitting on Marisol, for example, he feels inexplicably jealous and feels the need to protect her, even though this goes against his dispassionate nature. Before he met D.Q., Pancho refused to get involved with anyone because he feared that it would interfere with his mission. Being forced to support D.Q. through his terrible treatments has left Pancho vulnerable to emotion. Despite his best efforts to remain isolated, Pancho has befriended D.Q., Josie, and now Marisol.



Chapters 22 - 24

Chapters 22 - 24 Summary

Pancho, D.Q., Marisol, and Josie all prepare to visit the zoo. Even though D.Q. is feeling particularly weak from his chemotherapy treatment, D.Q. refuses to miss an opportunity to spend the afternoon with Marisol. Pancho feels himself strangely drawn to Marisol and makes a point of avoiding being alone with her; he doesn't want to hurt D.Q.'s feelings. The four ride the public bus to the zoo and for the first half of the journey are the only passengers. Josie chatters about the animals she wants to see, while Pancho distractedly listens. The next time the bus driver stops, she picks up three boys about Pancho's age. They're dressed in baggy jeans and loose fitting shirts that give the immediate impression that they're gangsters. One of the boys speaks loudly into his cell phone, cursing every other word. They don't pay the driver, but she looks too intimidated to insist on a fare. Annoyed by the volume and language in the boy's speech, D.Q. weakly stands up and asks him to please keep his voice down. The boy on the cell phone ignores him. Glancing back at Marisol and Josie, D.Q. taps the boy's shoulder again and asks him not to use such language. The boy on the phone, obviously offended that D.Q. would touch him, angrily pushes D.Q. away. D.Q. is too weak to fight back, so Marisol stands up to help him back to his seat. When the boys' aggression turns to Marisol, Pancho leaps out of his seat, snatches the boy's cell phone, and smashes it on the ground. Marisol begs Pancho not to start a fight and surprisingly, Pancho listens. The boy with the smashed cell phone knees Pancho in the groin, sending him straight to the ground. Throughout the entire altercation, Pancho never throws a punch.

Despite the fight on the bus, the foursome still spends the afternoon at the zoo. Pancho has never been to a zoo before and he finds himself enjoying the animals. While supervising Josie at the aviary, Pancho learns that Marisol has a crush on him. Josie says she heard Marisol calling him "a hunk" (Page 190). If this is true, Pancho is surprised. Ever since the fight on the bus, Marisol has been looking at him strangely. Three days pass without Marisol uttering a word to him. Finally, she approaches him while he's fixing the rickshaw. She suggests that he speak to D.Q. about whatever is bothering him. He needs to start relying on D.Q. as a friend, the way D.Q. relies on him. Later that afternoon, D.Q. reads his Death Warrior Manifesto to Pancho. Pancho isn't very receptive and would rather talk about Marisol. D.Q. reveals that Marisol's brother is in a gang, which is why she was frightened by the incident on the bus. She fears that Pancho is unpredictable and violent, like her brother. D.Q. agrees with her. He read Pancho's file at St. Anthony's and has figured out that Pancho is in search of the man who killed Rosa. D.Q. fears that Pancho might kill him. D.Q. promises Pancho that if he stays with him through the rest of his therapy, he'll help him find Bobby.



Chapters 22 - 24 Analysis

This section clearly highlights the way Pancho's character is beginning to change. First, he finds himself avoiding Marisol, whom he is beginning to have feelings for, because he doesn't want to hurt D.Q.'s feelings. A few weeks before, Pancho wouldn't have cared whose feelings he hurt while pursuing something he wants. This shows that he has developed a true friendship with D.Q. even if he hasn't expressed it in words. He also, for the first time in his life, backs down from a fight on the bus. The ruffians certainly deserved to be punched, but because Marisol asked Pancho not to hurt them, he didn't. As a result, he found himself knocked to the ground and embarrassed. This shows Pancho's level of respect toward Marisol. Previously, Pancho earned respect through his fierce fighting style. Now, he is learning to earn respect other ways, and this doesn't go unnoticed by Marisol. It seems as if she, too, is developing feelings for Pancho but she fears his seemingly split personality: "It's like you're two people ... One Pancho is funny and kind and patient with the little kids. And another is ... I don't know, angry. It's like you can't make up your mind what kind of person you want to be" (Page 193). This statement sums up Pancho's entire character conflict. By the end of the novel, he will have to decide which Pancho to embrace: the violent one or the vulnerable one.

When he returns to the hospital room, D.Q. seems more desperate than ever to impart his knowledge of Death Warriors to Pancho. "The Death Warrior Manifesto" is the book D.Q. is writing. When describing the book to Pancho, he says, "It's a declaration of intent. In the case of the Death Warrior, it is a public declaration of how the Death Warrior is going to live his life" (Page 36). This book is particularly poignant because D.Q. knows that he is dying. In a way, this manifesto will be his final legacy. Before he dies, D.Q. wants to change one life with his ideas, and it's clear that he hopes that life will be Pancho's. After reading Pancho's case file, he knows what Pancho's mission is. Even though it goes against his better judgment, D.Q. agrees to help Pancho find Bobby as long as he stays with him throughout his treatment. It appears that D.Q. hopes that he can change Pancho's mind about murder before it's too late.



Chapters 25 - 27

Chapters 25 - 27 Summary

Despite agreeing to give up his search for Bobby until after D.Q. has finished his treatment, Pancho takes the rickshaw into town and starts calling the five construction companies that have "and Sons" in their name. At each company, he asks to speak to Bobby, pretending to have a package to deliver. When he calls Jensen and Sons, he's connected to a Robert Lewis. Immediately, Pancho knows that he's speaking with the man who killed Rosa, and he's barely able to control his emotions. He tells Robert Lewis that he needs his home address to deliver the package, and Robert easily complies. Pancho hangs up the phone, shaking. He now knows where to find Rosa's killer. It was much easier than he had anticipated and the weight of this new knowledge, of Robert Lewis' address, weighs heavily on him. As he cycles back to Casa Esperanza, Helen drives up next to him and asks if she can take him for a drive. She says she'd like to show Pancho something, something that might help with D.Q.'s recovery. Hoping to get his mind off of Robert Lewis, Pancho agrees. They drive through the desert to a starkly Mexican neighborhood filled with crumbling adobe houses. She pulls into one driveway and announces that it's the home of Johnny Corazon, her shaman, or spiritual healer. Helen swears that it was Johnny Corazon's treatment that cured her of her bipolar disorder, and that he has a long list of patients he's cured from terminal diseases, like cancer. Helen doesn't think D.Q. wants to survive, and she hopes Johnny Corazon can teach him to love life again. If he believes he can live, if he fights for his life, he'll have a better chance at survival.

Pancho isn't impressed by Johnny Corazon's speech. Looking around the shaman's room, it all looks hokey: the incense burning, the flickering candles, the religious statues. It seems catered to an ignorant American audience, like Helen. Pancho is especially annoyed when Johnny Corazon starts talking about the anger Pancho carries with him and how it's going to kill him one day. Pancho doesn't believe D.Q. would want anything to do with Johnny Corazon, and is annoyed that Helen has wasted his time bringing him here. As he starts walking to the door, Johnny Corazon hands Pancho a flashing plastic heart key chain, "To remind you," he says (Page 224). When he gets back to Casa Esperanza, Pancho gives the key chain to Josie, much to the little girl's delight. He and D.Q. have arranged to have dinner at Marisol's mother's house that night, and D.Q. plans to finally tell Marisol how he feels about her. When they arrive at Marisol's mother's house, Marisol is shocked to see that her brother Ed, the gangster, has unexpectedly arrived. As soon as Pancho walks in the house, Ed starts sizing him up as if he wants to fight him. The dinner is relatively uneventful except that D.Q. asks Ed a million questions about prison and what would happen if a teenager, like Pancho, was sent there. While washing up the dishes after the meal, Marisol asks Pancho if he'd ever join a gang. Their conversation becomes somewhat flirtatious, and Marisol asks if he'd like to take a walk with her. He declines, saying that D.Q. had been looking forward to being alone with her. Marisol's happy mood deflates. She nods and tries to smile. Before walking out to meet D.Q., she quickly writes down her phone number and tells



Pancho to call her when he gets to Helen's. That night, when they get back to Casa Esperanza, D.Q. mournfully tells Pancho that his conversation with Marisol didn't go as planned. He tries to be brave but he's clearly heartbroken. He snaps at Pancho and tells him that he's wasting his life searching for Bobby, shouting that it's not what Rosa would have wanted.

Chapters 25 - 27 Analysis

Although it doesn't seem like it at first, Johnny Corazon is the only character in the novel who seems to embrace the teachings of a Death Warrior. He admits to having overcome a heroin addiction and has now dedicated his life to helping heal others. He doesn't promise a cure for D.Q.'s cancer, but he promises to help the boy embrace life again. Pancho isn't ready for such unfiltered life advice, so he has an automatic aversion to it. Pancho has been taught to fight for what he wants, and Johnny Corazon teaches the opposite. He teaches peace, love, and understanding. Throughout the conversation, Helen appears more and more desperate for Pancho's approval. She knows that if Pancho doesn't agree that Johnny Corazon can help D.Q., there's no way her son will agree to his treatment. Helen's fatal character flaw is that she truly believes that with the right herb, the right medication, D.Q. will be healed. Her faith is reliant on miracles, even impossible ones. She frequently butts heads with D.Q. because her faith differs greatly from his own. D.Q. knows he is dying and he believes it will be soon, yet he faithfully believes that it's his duty to love life (much as Johnny Corazon preaches) every minute until the end. Right now, that love is focused on Marisol. At the end of this chapter, it becomes clear that D.Q.'s affections are not returned, and that he is heartbroken.

It is interesting to note that at dinner, D.Q. is obsessed with Ed's prison experiences. It's clear that he's trying to educate Pancho about the consequences of his decision to murder Robert Lewis - perhaps if Pancho hears about the harsh realities of prison life, he will realize that life on the outside is much better. Ed's stories of prison gang violence don't intimidate Pancho. In fact, he's drawn to the fact that joining up with Ed's gang now might offer him some protection in prison. In the end, Pancho decides against it because he hopes prison life will be short: he hopes to be murdered by a violent gangster in his cell so he won't have to live forever with his guilt and grief.



Chapters 28 - 30

Chapters 28 - 30 Summary

The morning arrives for D.Q. to transfer from Casa Esperanza to Helen's house. He's not looking forward to the transition, but he puts on a brave face for the other patients. Josie takes the move particularly hard, weeping and wailing when Pancho tries to say goodbye. She's just received amazing news, that her cancer is in remission, but she doesn't think she can celebrate without Pancho. Seeing Josie cry floods with Pancho with emotion. Suddenly, beautiful scenes from his last few weeks flash in his mind and he feels tears welling in his eyes. He gruffly hugs Josie and walks away. When he's out of her eyeshot, he leans against the building and weeps for the first time in his life. He weeps for the death of his father, losing Rosa, and all his other goodbyes. Then he clenches his jaw, wipes his eyes, and marches to the car. During the drive to Helen's house, Pancho notices that D.Q. is acting strangely, as if he has completely given up on life. He nods absentmindedly to whatever Helen says and stares blankly out the window. Once, he asks his mother to pull over to the side of the road so he can vomit. Helen is clearly disturbed by D.Q.'s illness and assures him that Johnny Corazon will whip him up a batch of herbs to make him "Good as new" (Page 259). As they drive, D.Q. suddenly realizes that he's left his beloved perico behind. Pancho says that it's no problem, he'll call Marisol to drop it off, accidentally letting it slip that she'd given him her number. D.Q. is crushed and barely speaks to Pancho for the rest of the day.

At the house, which is more of a castle in Pancho's mind, Pancho meets Juan, Helen's groundskeeper. He's an old, Mexican man who speaks in broken English and is enthusiastic about having another Mexican around. It's clear that Helen has spared no expense readying the house for D.Q.'s arrival, installing a new ramp and electric elevator for D.Q. to use instead of the stairs. Even though it's clear that D.Q. is angry with him, Pancho does his best to make his friend comfortable. D.Q. admits that he's slipping closer and closer to death. He says that the end is near and that he should start preparing himself. When Pancho accuses him of whining, breaking the first rule of the Death Warrior Manifesto, D.Q. snaps that the manifesto is "bullshit" and that without Marisol, he doesn't believe in it anymore (Page 293). During their talk, D.Q. had bared his soul to Marisol, telling her that he loved her, and she had said that his affections weren't returned. She saw D.Q. as a good friend, not a love, and she felt very sorry if she had led him to believe otherwise. Pancho isn't sure how to take this news, especially since it has become clear to him that Marisol has feelings for him. He's torn between wanting to start a relationship with Marisol and feeling like he's betraying his best friend. These emotions startled and frighten Pancho. He fears he's going soft - he's never cared about anyone's emotions before.

Days pass with D.Q. barely speaking to Pancho. Desperate to find some work to busy his hands, Pancho helps Juan build a stone wall around the house. He enjoys his time with Juan because the old man seems to understand him on a level no one else has. Without knowing him very long, he trusts Pancho implicitly and even agrees to let him



borrow the truck from time to time. He teaches Pancho how to break a horse, and every morning, the two men spend hours in the corral training Helen's newest purchase: a wild stallion named Caramelo. One afternoon while exploring the house, Pancho finds a painting Helen has made of D.Q. She has painted a portrait of him, but imagined what he would look like if he were well. The image disturbs Pancho and he feels that D.Q. must see it. Showing D.Q. the portrait creates a bridge between the feuding friends. D.Q. realizes that Pancho cares about him and that his mother will never accept his illness.

Chapters 28 - 30 Analysis

Leaving Casa Esperanza behind has a profound emotional impact on Pancho. Showing just how much his character has changed, Pancho cries for the first time since his father's death. This proves that he has become emotionally vulnerable. Now that he has properly processed his grief, he should be able to heal. In an interesting turn of events, Pancho and D.Q. swap roles in their friendship. D.Q. has become withdrawn and angry, while Pancho lends him a supportive shoulder and even doles out advice on how to get on with his life. D.Q. is heartbroken not only by Marisol's rejection of his love, but by the realization that she has feelings for Pancho, his best friend. In his anger, D.Q. shouts that the "Death Warrior Manifesto" by which he has lived the last few months of his life is "bullshit," and that he only wrote it to impress Marisol. In this moment, D.Q. becomes a real teenager, not the heavenly being he has been portrayed at thus far in the novel. As an honest act of friendship, Pancho decides to forgo a relationship with Marisol and to do all he can to reunite her with D.Q. He calls Marisol that night to ask about the perico and then invites her down to Helen's house.

Also in this section, Pancho forms a friendship with Juan, Helen's Mexican groundskeeper. Through this relationship, Pancho is able to reconnect with his Mexican heritage, and it becomes clear that Juan will soon be a stand-in father figure for Pancho as he repairs the emotional damage that threatens to steal his young life. Together, the pair works together to tame Helen's wild stallion, Caramelo. The beautiful horse is a symbol for Pancho as both have wild spirits that need to be tamed. Finally, when he sees his mother's portrait of him, D.Q. realizes all his fears about his mother are true: she will only love him when he's healthy, and she refuses to respect his final wishes. His anger and frustration are so palpable, they shake him out of his jealous rage toward Pancho. He knows that if he is truly going to live life like Death Warrior, he needs to get out of this house.



Chapters 31 & 32

Chapters 31 & 32 Summary

Johnny Corazon has moved into D.Q.'s house and gives him treatments everyday in the cabana. Johnny has decided that D.Q. should take part in a healing ritual, spending the night outdoors to communicate with the gods. He says it is a ritual to show his desire to heal, both physically and spiritually. Even though the ritual is usually undertaken by one person alone, Johnny Corazon suggests that Pancho make the same commitment to healing. When Pancho sees the sparkle in D.Q.'s eye, he knows he cannot say no. Ever since contributing to D.Q.'s heartbreak, he's felt guilty, and he hopes a night out together might mend some of those wounds. That night, as they trek out into the piñon grove, D.Q. whispers that his health is slipping. Even though he thinks some of Johnny Corazon's methods are silly, he hopes this ritual works. Since seeing his mother's painting, he realized that he wasn't living by the Death Warrior Manifesto. All this time, he's been preaching about sucking the marrow out of bones, living life to its fullest, when he's been doing nothing but mope and feel sorry for himself. The only time he felt like he was truly embracing life was when he was with Marisol, but now he has come to appreciate her friendship, and despite his jealousy toward Pancho, he can support their romantic relationship. He compares himself to the perico, saying words without fully understanding what they mean, without believing them.

The next day, Marisol arrives for a visit. Pancho plans to kill Robert Lewis that evening, but, at D.Q.'s request, he agrees to spend an hour with Marisol before he goes. D.Q. drives them up into the mountains on his ATV and tells them to go explore the rocks - there's supposed to be beautiful petroglyphs chiseled into the mountains. It's obviously an excuse to give Pancho some time alone with Marisol, which makes Pancho feel uncomfortable. He doesn't want to be alone with Marisol because he doesn't want his thoughts to waiver from his plan: killing Robert Lewis. Climbing into the mountains, Pancho tries to avoid eye contact with Marisol and answers all of her questions monosyllabically. Finally, she spins Pancho around and forces him to talk to her. She expresses her romantic feelings for Pancho and tells him not to stop hiding his emotions. She suggests that he apply for the live-in college student position at Casa Esperanza, and then she kisses him on the lips for added encouragement.

Chapters 31 & 32 Analysis

The healing ritual is the turning point in D.Q. and Pancho's friendship. For the first time, they honestly bare their souls to each other, not hiding behind D.Q.'s "Death Warrior Manifesto" or Pancho's quiet rage. D.Q. realizes that his life is worth fighting for, no matter whose medication or treatment plan saves it. Ironically, the heartbreak of Marisol's rejection has made him see that he truly wants to live. He realizes that he has been living life like a perico, repeating words and phrases without fully understanding

what they mean. Marisol isn't the marrow of his life, love is. He wants to fight with all that he has because he realizes that he's worthy of being loved in return.

For Pancho, Marisol represents a beautiful future, one he never thought would be on his horizon. She seems to understand Pancho's complexities and love him anyway. She offers him the opportunity to go to college, to have a fulfilling job, and to have a romantic future with her. Before she arrived that afternoon, Pancho had laid on the bed and imagined what it would be like to marry Marisol and start a family with her. The whole idea is so ridiculous that he actually laughs. He decides that no matter what Marisol says, he won't be convinced. Like D.Q., Pancho believes that his life has one destiny: to kill Robert Lewis. The kiss they share in the mountains is short, but "just long enough for him to taste the future" (Page 322). Even though he speeds away to find Robert Lewis directly afterward, it should be clear to readers which path in life Pancho is about to take.



Chapters 33, 34, and Epilogue

Chapters 33, 34, and Epilogue Summary

Despite his lovely afternoon with Marisol in the mountains, Pancho joins Juan for his ride into town, and borrows his truck from there. Pancho drives to Robert Lewis' address and spends some time scoping out the property before he makes his move. He's surprised when a young girl, about twelve-years-old, leaves the house with her mother, Robert Lewis' wife, for a soccer game. Looking through the windows into the house, Pancho sees the girl's bedroom, filled with the same dolls Rosa used to collect. In the living room, he sees Robert Lewis asleep in an armchair, a bowl of chips and a bottle of beer nearby. Pancho manages to slide open the backdoor and enter the house without waking Robert Lewis. Crouched in the porch, Pancho opens Rosa's diary and writes three pages of handwritten thoughts on its pages. He pulls the revolver from his belt and approaches Robert Lewis. He awakens to the sight of Pancho hovering above him, gun drawn. Without wasting a moment, Pancho demands to know, "Did you give Rosa Sanchez alcohol on the night she died?" (Page 330). Robert Lewis realizes that Pancho is Rosa's sister almost immediately. The two share a long exchange about Rosa, her allergies, and his grief over her death. Even though Rosa told him repeatedly that he was allergic to alcohol, Robert Lewis didn't realize how gravely allergic she was. He was hoping to loosen her up for sex, since she had been abstaining. With the gun drawn to Robert Lewis' head, and Robert Lewis weeping on the floor, Pancho decides not to kill him. He forces Robert Lewis into the bathtub, tells him to count to one hundred, and then silently drives back to town to pick up Juan.

Invigorated after the encounter, Pancho drives back to Helen's house, marches into the dining room, and tells D.Q. to pack up his bags; they're going back to St. Anthony's. D.Q. is astonished, more than happy to get out of his mother's house and back to his private room where he believes he can truly heal. Helen and Stu, her husband, do everything they can to stop D.Q. from escaping, even calling the police to try to have Pancho arrested. Juan helps load D.Q.'s belongings into his truck and drives the boys away, knowing that he'll certainly be fired for acting as an accomplice. When the boys arrive back at St. Anthony's, D.Q.'s room is ready and Pancho is pleased to see a second bedroom has been added on for him. In the epilogue, the reader reads Pancho's entry into Rosa's diary, written in his own hand. He explains his decision not to kill Robert Lewis, saying that he realized Rosa wouldn't have wanted another little girl's life ruined, no matter how terrible her Daddy was. Letting Robert Lewis live is the way Pancho has chosen to honor Rosa's life. In this way, he has embraced the mentality of a Death Warrior.

Chapters 33, 34, and Epilogue Analysis

In the final section of the novel, Pancho finally finds himself face-to-face with his sworn enemy, Robert Lewis. Rather than feeling empowered, Pancho feels sad for this man



who lives a sorry existence, trapped in an unhappy marriage and forever carrying the weight of Rosa's death on his heart. Pancho never would have thought to believe it, but when Robert Lewis says he truly loved Rosa, it rings true. He shows Pancho photos of the two of them together, with Rosa beaming, gazing, obviously in love, into Robert Lewis' eyes. Even though she's dead now, Pancho sees that with Robert Lewis, Rosa felt truly alive. When he sees that Robert Lewis has a daughter, Pancho knows he could never ruin that little girl's life. He knows he won't be able to kill Robert Lewis because, if she were alive, Rosa would have been devastated. In that way, he chooses to honor Rosa's life by letting her true love live. In this way, Pancho has fully embraced the beliefs of a death warrior and he has fully transformed into a beautiful butterfly. There should be no question in the reader's mind that Pancho will have a bright future, likely surrounded by Marisol's love. It's interesting to note that Stork does not give the reader an end to D.Q.'s story. By choosing to end the novel on an ambiguous note - the reader doesn't know whether D.Q. lives or dies - Stork calls on the reader to rely on their own faith to decide what happens in D.Q.'s future.



Characters

Pancho Sanchez

Pancho Sanchez is the seventeen-year-old protagonist of the story. When the novel begins, Pancho is being driven to St. Anthony's orphanage for older boys after having been kicked out of his most recent foster home for violence. He is an extremely angry, bitter teenager whose only goal in life is to find the man who killed his sister, and seek his revenge. Although his social worker has pulled a few strings to get Pancho admitted into St. Anthony - a school that provides an excellent opportunity for his future - Pancho is ungrateful. He doesn't plan to stay long, and is looking forward to spending the rest of his life in prison for murder. At St. Anthony's, Pancho is assigned the task of caring for D.Q. a young resident suffering from terminal cancer. D.Q. knows he only has a few months left to live and he wants to live each day to the fullest. Slowly, D.Q. encourages Pancho out of his shell and the two become friends. Although Pancho is reluctant to expose himself to the vulnerabilities of friendship, he is unable to ignore the intimacies of their relationship, particularly after caring for D.Q. during his chemotherapy treatments, when he is forced face-to-face with the reality of dying. Through the course of helping care for D.Q., Pancho makes an assortment of new friends - another unexpected side effect from his time at St. Anthony's - including Marisol, the beautiful nurse in charge of D.Q.'s case. Marisol offers Pancho a future, away from violence, revenge, and prison life. By the end of the novel, when Pancho finally tracks down Robert Lewis and is presented with the opportunity to kill him, Pancho realizes that the better way to honor Rosa's life is to let Robert Lewis live. In this moment, Pancho embraces life as a death warrior, and for the first time in his life, embraces his future.

Daniel Quentin / D.Q.

Daniel Quentin / D.Q. is a seventeen-year-old boy suffering from terminal cancer. When he meets Pancho at St. Anthony's, D.Q. knows he has only a few months left to live. In his final days, D.Q. writes tirelessly in his journal penning "The Death Warrior Manifesto", a handbook detailing the ways one should live their life to the fullest, embracing love as their final emotion. Even though D.Q. knows he's dying, he is always upbeat, always encouraging Pancho to express his feelings and stare love in the face. Despite his chipper mood, D.Q. is also plagued with a history of family troubles. His mother suffers from bipolar disorder and has a bizarre inability to accept the fact that D.Q. is dying. She seems to believe that one simple remedy - if she can find it - will make D.Q. "as good as new." The one thing D.Q. lives for is his love for Marisol, one of the nurses on his case at Casa Esperanza. He writes the Death Warrior Manifesto not only as his legacy, but with the hopes that Marisol will read it, realize his bravery, and fall in love with him. D.Q. is heartbroken to learn, therefore, that Marisol is not in love with him, but is in love with Pancho. Although he's initially jealous of Pancho, he eventually realizes that a Death Warrior would not whine in jealousy, he would be happy for his friend and happier still for the woman he loves. At the end of the novel, D.Q. has



made great strides in his recovery but his cancer is still terminal. He has learned to embrace the mentality of a Death Warrior and has begun to suck the marrow from the bone, living his life - however long he has - to the fullest.

Rosa Sanchez

Rosa Sanchez is Pancho's twenty-year-old sister. She died in a motel room two weeks before Pancho was sent to St. Anthony's. Rosa was a semi-functioning adult, suffering from a mental disability that left her with the mind of a ten-year-old. Despite this, Rosa worked at a café, a job she loved, and occasionally worked as a prostitute for extra cash. Throughout the novel, Pancho searches for the man he believed killed Rosa to inflict his revenge.

Mrs. Olivares

Mrs. Olivares is Pancho's social worker. She is one of the only stable adults in Pancho's life after his father dies. She arranges for Pancho to be admitted into St. Anthony's after he's kicked out of his foster home, and drives him to the trailer to pick up any belongings he might want to keep.

Father Concha / The Panda

Father Concha / The Panda is the priest in charge of St. Anthony's orphanage. He is a tall man with a booming voice that initially seems unfriendly. He has earned his nickname because his face is white as a sheet, save for the dark circles under his eyes that make him look like a panda.

Mrs. Duggan

Mrs. Duggan was Pancho's foster mother before he was kicked out. She made the decision to exclude Pancho from her home after he broke another foster boy's jaw for speaking poorly of Rosa.

Lupita

Lupita is the secretary that runs the front office at St. Anthony's.

Julieta

Julieta was Rosa's best friend at the café, and the person who drove Rosa home from work each night. She is also woman whom Pancho loses his virginity to. After Rosa's death, Pancho returns to the café to speak with Julieta. He learns that Rosa had an



older boyfriend who picked her up from work in a red truck, and that Rosa occasionally prostituted herself outside the café.

Guillermo / Memo

Guillermo / Memo is the young boy at St. Anthony's who helps Pancho set up his first punching bag. He also helps arrange the sparring match between Pancho and Coop.

Coop

Coop is the boy who agrees to fight Pancho during the first sparring match. They bet \$20 each, even though gambling is against house rules. During the fight, it's clear that the crowd has influenced Coop and that he doesn't have the finesse and training of a proper fighter. Although he gets in a few good punches, Pancho knocks him out cold with two shots.

Helen Quentin-Morse

Helen Quentin-Morse is D.Q.'s mother. She has a strained relationship with her son, who is hoping to emancipate himself from her care. She had a mental breakdown when D.Q. was twelve and opted to send her son to St. Anthony's when she found herself emotionally unable to care for him. While he was away, she was diagnosed with bipolar disorder, a condition she learned to treat. Although she repeatedly tried to bring D.Q. home, especially after she remarried, D.Q. refused. He still holds a grudge for the time she had one too many drinks and drove her car into a telephone pole while D.Q. was in the backseat. That accident nearly killed him.

Rebecca

Rebecca is the beautiful nurse that admits D.Q. into the New Mexico Children's Hospital where he's receiving his advanced chemotherapy treatments. Although both D.Q. and Pancho are immediately smitten with the young nurse, D.Q. convinces Pancho that Rebecca only has eyes for him, a thought that makes Pancho blush.

Dr. Melendez

Dr. Melendez is the doctor at the New Mexico Children's Hospital in charge of D.Q.'s cancer treatment. He has planned an advanced chemotherapy trial that he hopes will lengthen D.Q.'s life, if not completely cure him. He was enlightened to D.Q.'s case by Stu, D.Q.'s stepfather who is also Dr. Melendez's lawyer.



Billy Tenn

Billy Tenn is the hillbilly from Tennessee that Pancho meets at MaxDonald's diner in New Mexico. As soon as he sees the older man sizing him up at the bar, Pancho knows that the man plans to rob him. He plays perfectly into the man's hands, fooling him into believing that he's a naïve, trustworthy teenager. When they're in the parking lot, however, Pancho punches the man in the face, immediately breaking his nose. Before this happens, however, Billy Tenn stabs Pancho in the chest with a switchblade.

Jeff

Jeff is the alcoholic who worked with Pancho's father at Sears Auto Center. Jeff's dependency on vodka caused him to make many errors at work, but Pancho's father refused to turn him in to their superiors because he knew he had six children at home who would suffer if Jeff lost his job. One afternoon, Pancho's father helps Jeff under a car and Jeff slips, knocking the jack that holds up the car. Pancho's father is immediately crushed by the weight of the car and dies.

Josie

Josie is the eight-year-old girl being treated for cancer at Casa Esperanza. She takes an immediate liking to Pancho when he arrives with D.Q. and befriends him, despite Pancho's reservations. Before Pancho and D.Q. move into Helen's house, they learn that Josie's cancer is in remission.

Sal

Sal is the sleazy teenager who comes for a job interview at Casa Esperanza. He spends his entire time there hitting on Marisol, which irritates Pancho. Just before Sal's interview, Pancho tricks him into scaring a little girl, ensuring that he won't earn the position.

Johnny Corazon

Johnny Corazon is Helen's shaman, whom she hires to help cure D.Q. Johnny is an ex-heroin addict who has turned his life around with the help of spirituality. His addiction has left its mark on his appearance: his skin is saggy, his eyes float in a web of red lines, and his long hair is always greasy. Despite his appearance, Johnny is an excellent healer who has cured hundreds of patients, even some with terminal diseases.



Ed

Ed is Marisol's brother who belongs to the Mexican gang, Los Locos. Even though Marisol is frightened of violence, she is somewhat appreciative of the fact that her brother's dangerous decision to join a gang provided her the protection needed to have a normal life. Because her brother was a notorious gangster, Marisol was able to complete school and focus on her studies rather than focusing on survival in the streets.

Robert Lewis

Robert Lewis is the man responsible for Rosa's death. Throughout the novel, Pancho is completely dedicated to finding and killing him to avenge his sister's murder. When he finally tracks Robert Lewis down, however, Pancho is unable to kill him. He knows that he would be throwing his life away and that Robert's death won't bring Rosa back. By sparing Robert Lewis' life, Pancho shows that he has completely transformed, maturing into a beautiful butterfly.

Juan

Juan is the groundskeeper at Helen's house. He is seventy-two years old but continues working tough physical labor as if he were a much younger man. When Pancho arrives, he tries to bond with the boy about their shared Mexican heritage, and eventually teaches him how to break a horse. He becomes a father figure to Pancho and encourages him to dream about his future rather than frittering it away.



Objects/Places

St. Anthony's

St. Anthony's is the orphanage in Las Cruces, New Mexico where Pancho and D.Q. live. Pancho is sent to St. Anthony's after being kicked out of his foster home. The orphanage is run by Father Concha, and is the home to eighty boys between fourteen and eighteen years old.

The Death Warrior Manifesto

"The Death Warrior Manifesto" is the book D.Q. is writing. When describing the book to Pancho, he says, "It's a declaration of intent. In the case of the Death Warrior, it is a public declaration of how the Death Warrior is going to live his life" (Page 36). This book is particularly poignant because D.Q. knows that he is dying. In a way, this manifesto will be his final legacy.

The Aztec

The Aztec is the boxing ring Pancho used to visit when his father was a fighter. The first time Pancho ever went to the ring to watch his dad box, he was six-years-old and terrified that something terrible was going to happen to his father. As he grew up, Pancho began training at the Aztec, like his father had done, and became an excellent fighter.

The Diary

The Diary is Rosa's prized possession. She dutifully wrote down all her secrets and dreams for five years, from the age of fifteen until her death at twenty. Pancho breaks into the diary to find out about Rosa's relationship with Bobby (Robert Lewis) in the hopes of solving the mystery surrounding her death.

The Green Perico

The Green Perico is what D.Q. requests to take from Pancho's trailer. Pancho carved and painted the bird for a school project, and it was the only assignment he ever received an A+ on. D.Q. hangs the parrot in his new room. At the end of the novel, D.Q. claims that he is like the perico, both repeat words without fully understanding them. The perico has taught him to fully embrace the Death Warrior mentality rather than just preaching it.



The .22 Smith and Weston

The .22 Smith and Weston is the gun Pancho takes from his father's room when he returns to the trailer. He plans to use the gun to kill Robert Lewis.

The Cocoon

The Cocoon is an old U.S. Army hammock that has been left at St. Anthony's. D.Q. hangs it from a tree and often sleeps in it when there's a thunderstorm outside. The waterproof siding protects him from the wind and rain of the storm outside, keeping him safe and warm.

The Organ Mountains

The Organ Mountains are the mountain range that D.Q. can see from his bedroom window. He stares longingly at the mountains everyday, hoping that one day, with Pancho's help, he'll be able to climb them.

The New Mexico Children's Hospital

The New Mexico Children's Hospital is where D.Q. receives his advanced chemotherapy treatments. He's been sent to this particular hospital because they have the most up-to-date cancer trials, but his mother would be willing to fly him anywhere in the world if they promised to lengthen his life.

Bi-Polar Disorder

Bi-Polar Disorder is the mental condition Helen Quentin suffers from, although she now has it under control. When D.Q. was nine-years-old, Helen's bipolar disorder caused her to have manic episodes of extreme highs and extreme lows, during which her behavior was erratic and unpredictable. During one such episode, she drank too much and wrapper her car around a telephone pole with D.Q. in the backseat. He almost died.

The Rickshaw

The Rickshaw is what Pancho uses to pull kids around Casa Esperanza. He greatly enjoys the physical work of pulling the rickshaw, and also enjoys the fact that it gives him time in the fresh air.



The Rio Grande Zoo

The Rio Grande Zoo is where D.Q., Pancho, Marisol, and Josie go during a rare day out from Casa Esperanza. On the way to the zoo, D.Q. picks a fight with a group of gangsters for talking on their cell phones too loudly. When it becomes apparent that the gangsters are going to smash D.Q., Pancho stands up to defend him. It's the first time that Pancho has ever backed down from a fight, at Marisol's request, signaling to the reader that he has matured.

The Key Chain

The Key Chain is a gift from Johnny Corazon to Pancho so Pancho will always remember to love. It's a cheap plastic heart with a blinking red light in the middle that Pancho wouldn't be caught dead carrying around, so he gives it to Josie.

Los Locos

Los Locos is the Mexican gang Marisol's brother Ed belongs to. When he meets Pancho, he encourages him to join the gang saying it would be a great financial move for him. Pancho considers joining the gang because he figures that if he's arrested for killing Robert Lewis, he'll need some protection in prison.

Caramelo

Caramelo is the wild stallion Helen purchases and Pancho helps train. The beautiful horse is a symbol for Pancho - both have wild spirits that need to be tamed.

Alcohol

Alcohol is what Rosa was allergic to. Simply having one sip of alcohol could kill her. When Pancho reads the coroner's report after Rosa's death and sees that her blood alcohol level was 0.01%, he knew someone had plied her with alcohol and killed her.



Themes

Friendship

At the opening of the novel, Pancho Sanchez doesn't have a friend in the world, nor does he believe himself to be worthy of one. When he thinks back on his life, he realizes that the only friends he ever had were his mates down at the boxing ring. They weren't friends that he would share his hopes and dreams with, but they were the men he saw most frequently, and in his mind, that constituted friendship. Perhaps because Pancho has never had real friends, he struggles to relate to people his own age. When he first arrives at St. Anthony's he can't believe that he and D.Q. - who comes from a wealthy, white family - would have anything in common, which is one of the many reasons why Pancho is initially standoffish. Rather than try to make new friends at St. Anthony, Pancho continues living life as he always has: with his fists raised, ready for a fight. When he's forced to spend quality time with D.Q. during his treatments, Pancho slowly feels the layers of his tough exterior falling away, exposing the vulnerable young man underneath. Pancho fights to hold D.Q. at arm's length, but eventually, D.Q.'s tenacious spirit wins out, and he and Pancho become close friends. Along the way, Pancho also befriends Marisol and Josie, two girls who become important replacements for the sister he's lost. He also befriends Jose, the Mexican groundskeeper who becomes Pancho's stand-in father figure. Through each of these friendships, Pancho learns that he can be accepted and loved for who he is. Due largely to this love, Pancho realizes that life is worth living, and for the first time in his life, he looks forward to having a real future.

Faith

Much of the novel revolves around the idea of faith. Immediately upon seeing Pancho, D.Q. knows that he's the friend he's been waiting for. As soon as he sees him, D.Q.'s faith in the future begins to grow: "Your purpose and mine are joined somehow. You'll see. We'll figure it out in time" (Page 42). D.Q. has a plan - leave St. Anthony, return to Casa Esperanza to be reunited with Marisol, and change the path of Pancho's life in the process. He clings to this seemingly blind faith against all odds, including Pancho's debilitating fear of the future. As the novel progresses, Pancho and D.Q. learn to rely on each other for strength when their own faith weakens. At their closest, Pancho encourages D.Q. to continue with his treatments even when D.Q. fears the end is near, while D.Q. encourages Pancho to believe he is worthy of a happy future.

By embracing Marisol's love, Pancho begins to believe. The first time he and Marisol kiss, he tastes "the future" on her lips - signaling to the reader that there is hope for Pancho yet. Perhaps he won't throw his life away in prison. Perhaps he'll apply for the job at Casa Esperanza, marry Marisol, and start a beautiful family. The fact that Pancho sets Robert Lewis free at the end of the novel shows just how much he's grown. He's learned to live life like a Death Warrior, honoring faith in the future over the immediate satisfaction of revenge. Similarly, even though D.Q. despises his mother's opinion of his



treatment, meeting Johnny Corazon gives him hope, for the first time in a long time, that he might be healed. In Johnny's words, "The body and the mind are one. What you think and what you feel affect your health. Western medicine, the kind that is treating Daniel back at the hospital, is for his body, but what about his mind? Healing will come when the mind is healed" (Page 215). By expressing his outward desire to be healed, and his faith that healing can come, D.Q. has made the first, all-important step to recovery. By choosing to end the novel on an ambiguous note - the reader doesn't know whether D.Q. lives or dies - Stork calls on the reader to rely on their own faith to decide what happens in D.Q.'s future.

Life Versus Death

On the surface, it appears that D.Q. is the only character in the novel fighting for his life as he battles terminal cancer, but there are many characters caught in a symbolic battle between life and death. In the wake of his sister's death, Pancho no longer feels that his life is worth living. He would rather seek out Robert Lewis and kill him - resigning himself to a life spent in prison - than live with the grief of knowing that he failed his sister while she was alive. He would much sooner put his faith in a prison gang protecting him than the friends he's begun to make on the outside. Hatred and revenge define Pancho's life and threaten to push him over the edge. Similarly, Helen's entire existence is built around the bizarre hope that with the right drug, D.Q. will wake up one morning "as good as new." She cannot accept that her son is dying - and she certainly cannot accept his opinions about the way his illness should be treated - and as a result, she has single-handedly sucked the life out of their relationship. Finally, Juan feels as if he's wasting his life away as Helen's groundskeeper. He longs to join his daughter in California, or spend more time with his Mexican friends, rather than waste away his days chlorinating Helen's infinity pool. In the "Death Warrior Manifesto," D.Q. urges all warriors to live their lives to the fullest, embracing love above all else. He chastises Pancho for his willingness to throw his life away in prison while he counts down the final days of his life. What a waste, D.Q. thinks, of a young, healthy body. By the end of the novel, both Pancho and Juan have learned "suck the marrow from the bone," and live each day to its fullest. Pancho chooses to spare Robert Lewis' life as a way of honoring Rosa's death, and Juan seizes the opportunity to set D.Q. free while simultaneously recapturing his own dream. In the end, it is only Helen who fails to see the error of her way, and as a result, she loses her son - perhaps for good - and is destined to live her life in guilty, lonely misery.



Style

Point of View

"The Last Summer of the Death Warrior" is told in third-person limited omniscience narration from Pancho's perspective. The reader is held very close to Pancho's emotions and thoughts, as these are the most important factors to understanding the novel as a whole. Because the reader is held so close to Pancho, the point-of-view is completely reliable. As Pancho struggles to understand what is happening to him, and around him, the narrator has no reason to manipulate the circumstance. Pancho's situation - being forced to live with strangers when he would rather be on his own - provides the perfect opportunity for the reader's questions to be answered. Whenever the reader is confused about the events in the novel, whether physical or emotional, some meddling character (like D.Q., Father Concha, or Marisol), asks Pancho to explain what he's feeling. Even if Pancho doesn't answer the character directly, he thinks about what he would say if he were brave enough, thus letting the reader in to the complex psychological make-up of a deeply disturbed, grieving teenager. The intimate relationship between Pancho and the reader is particularly important because Pancho is not necessarily a likeable character. He is rude, violent, dangerous, and selfish, and as a result, readers risk an immediate aversion to his character. Yet it is Pancho's fear of the future, guilt, embarrassment, vulnerability, anger, and unabashed honesty that endears him to the reader. Without access to Pancho's thoughts and emotion, this vital relationship would be lost and the novel would not be as successful. In the epilogue, the point-of-view switches to Pancho's first person narration of the moments before he chooses to let Robert Lewis free. Through hearing Pancho's final thoughts, in his own words, the change his character has undergone is solidified in the reader's mind and they can celebrate with him as he embraces his newfound future.

Setting

"The Last Summer of the Death Warrior" is set in modern times across various cities across New Mexico, a state filled with dry, desolate deserts. This barren landscape is symbolic of the bleak future Pancho sees before him: dry, desolate, and lonely. It should be no surprise, then, that the places where Pancho begins to see hope are places where greenery - life - abounds: the grounds of Casa Esperanza and the piñon grove, for example. The first part of the novel is set in St. Anthony's home for boys, the orphanage in Las Cruces where Pancho and D.Q. live. Pancho is sent to St. Anthony's after being kicked out of his foster home. The orphanage is run by Father Concha, and is the home to eighty boys between fourteen and eighteen years old. The orphanage is small and crowded, but under Father Concha's guidance, each of the boys - however troubled - finds enough space to explore their unique beauty. Although most of boys live in three-walled cubicles, Father Concha arranges for D.Q. to have a private bedroom with a window facing the mountains to prepare for his death.



For his treatments, D.Q. is sent to the New Mexico Children's Hospital because they have the most up-to-date cancer trials. He spends a few days in the hospital before being transferred to Casa Esperanza, an oasis for cancer patients in the middle of the desert. Casa Esperanza is set-up like a luxury hotel, where each of the patients' needs are met by a team of excellent nurses, including Marisol. D.Q. loves it at Casa Esperanza, not only because it gives him full access to Marisol, but because he is surrounded by fellow cancer patients - mostly children - on their road to recovery. D.Q. spends two weeks here before moving in to his mother's house in Albuquerque, his least favorite place in the world. Helen's house is a mansion by anyone's standard, complete with an art studio, infinity pool, horse corral, and acres of land. Despite its size, D.Q. feels confined at Helen's house because he isn't free to be himself.

Language and Meaning

As the novel is written for teenage readers, the language tends to be very conversational and easy to follow. The novel is clearly geared toward modern teenagers and is written in modern teen-speak. Adult readers may be confused by some of the teenaged vernacular, but are given ample contextual clues to understand its meaning. The sentences are constructed in a way that is not only easy to follow, but also gains momentum as the reader reads on. The sentences are constructed to entice the reader to turn the next page, and often this structure works. This novel is told mostly through exposition, with the exception of Pancho's scenes with D.Q., to highlight the isolation Pancho feels in the world. After his parents' death, Pancho closes himself off to the outside world, forcing himself into reclusive isolation, with only his anger to keep him company. Because of this, the reader's only insight into the world is through Pancho's thoughts and emotions. As the novel progresses, and Pancho begins to come out of his shell, long passages of exposition are replaced with scenes of snappy dialogue that help to characterize Pancho and the world around him. Because Pancho comes from a rough background, where gangs, violence, and sex are common in teenager's lives, the language is a bit rough around the edges (including one instance of the "F" word). There is a note on the back cover that, although published for teenage readers, Pancho's story is only appropriate for older readers.

Structure

"The Last Summer of the Death Warriors" is comprised of 33 short chapters ranging in length from 5 - 19 pages in length. The short chapters tend to deal primarily with Pancho's emotional state, or short scenes of memory, while the long chapters explore the various relationships he is forming. The novel fluctuates between packing loads of action into short passages and contrasting that action with long passages of seemingly rambling dialogue. These "rambling" passages - which are usually in D.Q.'s dialogue - often deal with highfalutin, psychological ideals that foreshadow the novel's later events. Everything seemingly rambling D.Q. says makes sense when the novel comes to a close. The majority of the novel deals with the relationships Pancho reluctantly forms after Rosa's death, and the way those relationships affect his anger and revenge. There



are multiple symbols of the transformation Pancho's character undergoes - from the cocoon and butterfly symbol to the symbol of the wild stallion needing to be tamed. Each of these symbols highlights the way Pancho matures through love and learns to embrace his future. Although the forward momentum of the novel is ever present (D.Q. knows he only has a few weeks left to live, and he must accomplish all his goals before he dies), within Pancho's head, the narrative jumps between present, past (before Rosa's death), and eventually the future (to highlight his dreams). At the opening of the novel, Pancho is a lost soul willing to throw his life away in prison, but by the end of the novel, he believes, for the first time in his life, that he is worthy of a happy future.



Quotes

"I know it's frustrating not to have someone to blame. I know you feel helpless. But you can't take your frustrations out on people. I know you're a good boy inside. I know it" (Page 3).

"It's a declaration of intent. In the case of the Death Warrior, it is a public declaration of how the Death Warrior is going to live his life" (Page 36).

"Your purpose and mine are joined somehow. You'll see. We'll figure it out in time" (Page 42).

"He had a strange feeling, like he was pulling a fast one on a child. It reminded him of the times he would cheat Rosa out of her allowance by some trickery she was incapable of detecting. He started to jog, but the strange feeling remained" (Page 50).

"This was the truth he swore: that no matter what happened, no matter what anyone said or pleaded, at the right time, he would honor his sister's life by finding the man who hurt her and making him pay for the wrong done to her" (Page 68).

"I don't want my last few months to be wasted. I have to take control here. You want me to have a positive attitude toward these trials. OK. You want me to believe that a miracle is possible? I believe a miracle is possible. But I'm not going to be a fool about it" (Page 78).

"The balance of hope and acceptance is at the heart of what it means to be a Death Warrior. It's an equilibrium that needs to be maintained" (Page 83).

"The idea of death filled him with anger, hatred, a suffocating urgency, remorse even, but there was no fear anywhere" (Page 102).

"You reap what you sow. She sowed nastiness, she'll reap nastiness. We sowed kindness, we'll reap kindness" (Page 113).

"It was strange that not only did Pancho and his father not talk about revenge, they didn't even think about it. It was as if the option of revenge did not exist, could not even be imagined. How strange that a feeling once so foreign to him now gripped him with such persistence" (Page 140).

"Here he was wondering what he was going to do with the innumerable minutes and hours and days that stretched before him, and there was D.Q., who probably knew he had a definite number of days left. What if he could trade places with D.Q.? Maybe it wouldn't be so bad, to know for sure that the boredom and emptiness had an end" (Page 150).

"But he had always seen himself as different from the Mexican kids who sniffed glue or tattooed themselves with gang signs. Those kids were wild, angry with everyone,



violent. And he was ... what? He was ... someone who didn't care what happened any more. He was going to kill someone in a few days, no matter what. Maybe he wasn't so different after all" (Page 185).

"The Death Warrior fights against all that seeks to diminish the value of life. He fights against the death of the spirit, whatever form it takes. The death of the spirit can come when we grasp life more than we should or it can come when we fail to appreciate life, when we are not grateful for it, when we don't even notice we're alive" (Page 198).

"The body and the mind are one. What you think and what you feel affect your health. Western medicine, the kind that is treating Daniel back at the hospital, is for his body, but what about his mind? Healing will come when the mind is healed" (Page 215).

"You think she wants you to kill this guy? Really? You say you're doing it for her, you say it will make things right, but that's bullshit! You're killing that guy for you, not for her. You think killing that bastard is going to help you get rid of the loss and guilt and self-hatred for not being a good brother. You are so wrong. You're so wrong it's unbelievable" (Page 251).

"You are seekers of meaning and healing because we all need meaning and healing, but you know that the ultimate meaning and healing does not come from you. You open yourselves to it. You wait for it. You hope for it. And you trust in its existence even if you can't see it or feel it" (Page 304).



Topics for Discussion

At the opening of the novel, Pancho is positive that Rosa was murdered. What evidence does he have to back up his suspicions? How does Pancho's evidence compare / contrast to the police evidence of Rosa's case? Knowing what Pancho knows of his sister's final day, does the ending of the novel surprise you? Why or why not? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Pancho's relationship with Rosa seemed to change quite a bit after she died. First, describe Pancho's relationship with his sister while she was alive. How does this relationship compare / contrast to his relationship with her after her death. What causes this turnaround? What emotions seem to motivate Pancho's quest to find Rosa's killer? How can you tell? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

What role does boxing play in the novel? Literally, how does boxing, and training, affect Pancho's life? What does his fascination with the sport tell the reader about his character? Symbolically, how are both Pancho and D.Q. like boxers? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

When they first meet, both Pancho and D.Q. have singular motivations for how they would like to live out their lives. First, describe Pancho's main motivation (or goal) in life. How does this goal compare / contrast to D.Q.'s goal? In your opinion, which character seems to emulate the definition of a Death Warrior through this goal? Why? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Faith is an important theme in the novel that drives both Pancho and D.Q. to the end of the story. First, compare / contrast Pancho and D.Q.'s definitions of faith. How are they the same? How are they different? What major events in both boys' lives have shaped their definitions of faith? At the end of the novel, what do D.Q. and Pancho hope for? Does this surprise you? Why or why not? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

What role does Johnny Corazon play in the novel? How does his treatment plan for D.Q. compare / contrast to the hospital's plan? At the end of the novel, has any healing taken place? How can you tell? If so, do you think this healing is due to Johnny Corazon or another force? If not, why do you think Johnny Corazon's treatment plan has failed? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

The only time Pancho and D.Q. question their friendship is when they are both in love with the same girl: Marisol. In your opinion, do either of the boys actually love Marisol or are they simply in love with an idea of her? How can you tell? In the end, why do you think Marisol chooses Pancho over D.Q.? Do you think she made the right choice? Why or why not? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.



Where are Pancho and D.Q. at the end of the novel? In your opinion, is this the best place for them? Why or why not? What do you think happens to D.Q. and Pancho in the next few months? What clues are given in the text - and the novel's title - about the boys' future? Is the ending hopeful? Why or why not? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.