

The Lord of Opium Study Guide

The Lord of Opium by Nancy Farmer

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Plot Summary

Matteo Alarcan, only 14 years old, awakened in his favorite camping spot after fleeing El Patron's funeral. Only his Safe Horse accompanied him; the majority of his acquaintances drank poison at the funeral and died. Among those dead were Matt's bodyguard Tam Lin, and the entire Mendoza family except for Maria and her mother Esperanza, who fled to the convent. Matt made his way from his camping spot back to his house, the former El Patron's hacienda, considering the task before him - to run a drug empire. Nobody expected Matt to have the job. He mourned the loss of his friends and the heavy weight on him.

Once arrived at the hacienda, Matt found his old foster mother, Celia, cooking in the kitchen for him. He was pleased to find someone familiar that he felt was an ally. However, she was with a UN pilot, Major Beltran, who immediately began bullying Matt about opening the borders of the country. Opium's borders were mechanically closed by a force field when El Patron died, and it was suspected that only Matt could open them.

Matt spent a first uncomfortable night in El Patron's room, dealing with unresponsive eejits (controlled human slaves). There was one servant girl he liked; he called her Mirasol. The next morning he had El Patron's rooms cleaned and met Cienfuegos, the head of the Farm Patrol - the group of men who oversee the opium farms and the eejits. Cienfuegos told Matt of the challenges of running the country: the most pressing needs were the closed borders, and the surrounding countries in the Dope Confederacy had all fallen to the African drug lord Glass Eye Dabengwa.

It was difficult for Matt to decide if he trusted Cienfuegos, but they talk further of Matt's plans to free the eejit population so they could think for themselves. Regarding this goal, nobody was very encouraging. All attempts to pull the microchips from the eejits' brains had failed.

The new patron went about his business for weeks in this manner; spending all of his time with either Celia or Cienfuegos and avoiding speaking to anyone on the holoport. The opium started to pile up, as they weren't shipping any of the drugs out of the country. Matt made a deal with the UN via Esperanza Mendoza to provide plants and animals from the still-healthy Opium in return for brain surgeons to help him with his eejits.

After several weeks, Matt fell ill with scarlet fever and was transferred via hovercraft to the main hospital in Paradise, a city across the country from Ajo. There he met Dr. Rivas, basically the only doctor left after El Patron killed so many at his funeral. Dr. Rivas appeared at first to be kind and helpful; he treated Matt for his illness and showed him the beauty of the city's gardens and fountains. One day while walking around the grounds, Matt met three children. Listen was a young African girl, a clone of Glass Eye Dabengwa's favorite wife. Mbongeni was a six-year-old with a baby's mind, and was a clone of Glass Eye himself. El Bicho, 'the bug' was another clone of El Patron, and of Matt. He was a violent child that wanted nothing more than to visit El Patron's space



station, The Scorpion Star. Matt was horrified that they were still making clones. He decided to bring Listen home with him to Ajo.

On the trip back to Ajo, Cienfuegos took Matt to the Alacran Biosphere, a collection of ecosystems that El Patron built as a model for his space station. It had been running continually for four generations; many of its inhabitants didn't even realize there was a world outside. Inside there were pristine ecosystems modeled after those on earth. Matt and Cienfuegos take some mushroom samples - mushrooms that were meant to kill pollution from the soil - and leave.

When he returned to Ajo, Matt planned to have his friends Chacho, Ton-Ton, and Fidelito visit him. He planned a party around them, with lots of fun things. They came with a nun from the convent, but not with Maria. Maria and Matt had had a few holoport conversations. They had declared their feelings for each other, and it only remained for her to come to Ajo with him. She promised she would as soon as she could. The boys were delighted with Matt's wealth in Ajo and enjoyed all of the fun Matt planned. They learned that Chacho's father was in Ajo - he was an eejit, the guitar master. Matt had renewed reason to free the eejits.

Esperanza's doctors had arrived, and they were in Paradise and Ajo working at Matt's request on the eejit problem, with no success. Cienfuegos met with the Mushroom man from the biosphere weekly and was seeing some success in ridding the fields of pollution - soon the ground would be ready to grow something other than Opium, if they could get the eejits to learn how to harvest a different crop.

Matt learned that Mirasol loved to dance. He could play certain music tracks and she would actually go through the dance steps. She would dance and then faint; twice, Matt kissed her to revive her from her sleep. The little girl Listen saw this dancing happen one day, and weeks later, when Matt was away, put on all of the music boxes to try to wake Mirasol up. As a result, Mirasol "went rogue", meaning her mind broke under the strain of trying to cut through the microchipping and have lucid thoughts. The girl yelled and thrashed and fell into a coma, and then she died. Her death caused Matt to fall into a stupor for weeks, because he had failed to save her.

After a few weeks, Matt flew to Paradise to speak to Maria on the holoport there. While in Paradise they decided to visit the telescope observatory, which was built to watch The Scorpion Star. At the observatory they noticed a tunnel underground with a forbidding looking door emblazoned with a red scorpion. They surmise that The Scorpion Star had something to do with the eejits' microchips. The next day Matt dialed Maria on the holoport; she hurled herself into the holoport, which was a cold hole through space, and into Paradise with Matt. The move caused her to spend several days in a coma in the hospital. Matt stayed by her side the entire time.

During the time that Matt was occupied with Maria, El Bicho tried, at Dr. Rivas's urging, to open Opium's borders. This allowed Glass Eye Dabengwa and some of his soldiers to enter the country in an attempt to take over. Matt was able to close the border before too many troops came through, but it was too late; they were under attack.



Matt and Listen were captured and held captive for a few days. They were taken to see Glass Eye himself, who had just had surgery to get new eyes. He threatened to force Matt to open the borders. Matt and Listen were taken to see Glass Eye a second time; again, he demanded that Matt open the borders, threatening to harm Listen if Matt didn't comply. Glass Eye had already killed Dr. Rivas. Matt shined his ultra-bright flashlight in Glass Eye's fake eyes - the man was so old and made of so many imperfect body parts, that this killed him. Matt found Cienfuegos nearby, pretending to be an eejit, and the escape with Listen.

They knew they needed to go to the room beneath the Scorpion Star. They took Listen to the observatory and found Dr. Rivas's grown children, Angel and Marcos, forcing eejits to try to open the forbidding door. Matt and Cienfuegos tried to sneak away, but were caught. Cienfuegos was shot and they took Matt to force him to open the door. They learn from Angel Rivas that the room holds tons of treasure, with with she planned on taking over Opium with Glass Eye's soldier army.

Matt pressed his hand to the Scorpion symbol and the door opened. There was, as Angel said, tons and tons of treasure. Angel and her brother and the soldiers followed Matt inside, exclaiming over the riches. When Matt turned to leave he noticed a diagram on the wall of the Scorpion Star, beneath two large buttons that said 'uncouple' and 'couple'. Pondering the meaning of the words, Matt pressed the 'Uncouple' button. He closed the door behind him, and went to get Listen and Cienfuegos.

Cienfuegos was alive, but barely. When Matt got them out of the observatory he noticed that the eejits were all awake, wandering around the property talking and wondering what had happened to him. His work in the underground room had freed them.

Matt went back to the hospital to see that Cienfuegos was taken care of. The story ended with Matt and Maria rebuilding Opium with free people, good crops, an end to the drug trade, and a promise to make the country a good place.



Chapter 1-3

Summary

In the beginning of Chapter 1, Matt woke in the oasis, where he used to camp with Tam Lin. Three months after El Patron's gruesome funeral, Matt mourned his friend and the others who were killed there. It was the middle of the night, and to honor Tam Lin, Matt recalled the constellations his bodyguard taught him when he was a younger boy. When dawn came, Matt left his tent and made his way toward home.

During Chapter 2, Matt followed the trail home on his Safe Horse, an animal with a microchip that prohibited independent thought. During the ride across the country of Opium, Matt remembered that before El Patron's death he was only a clone, built from El Patron's skin to provide the drug lord with needed organs to keep him young. However, with El Patron truly dead, Matt was no longer a clone but the physical and literal heir to the drug empire.

The road took him along the opium fields, where Matt saw his army of workers - microchipped humans known as eejits - tend to the opium crop. Adult and child eejits alike worked in unison until exhaustion took them. The fate of living without independent thought horrified Matt, and he started to consider ways to improve their existence.

After arriving at the hacienda, Matt found the experience startling and new, as he was recognized as the new leader of the empire by the staff and workers. In the kitchen Matt found his former 'foster mother' Celia, Daft Donald (another bodyguard), and his music teacher, Mr. Ortega. Major Beltran, a UN pilot, sat nearby and immediately challenged Matt's claim to the empire. Major Beltran represented the UN and Esperanza Mendoza, who wished to immediately open the borders of the country, which El Patron had closed before his death. Matt refused to immediately obey anyone's wishes and sent the Major away.

Chapter 3 opens to find Matt going to bed in El Patron's private wing. Matt was tired from his journey as well as the grief and upheaval of what happened; however, El Patron's wing was still fashioned as if an old man was living there: the bathroom was prepared for an invalid, the curtains were heavy and dust-covered, and an impression of his body remained in the bed. Matt found he couldn't sleep until he piled blankets in the corner. The next morning he had difficulty getting the servants to help him: eejits were programmed to understand a simple set of commands, with only a few available responses. After his shower he went to the kitchen where a very beautiful eejit girl brought him an unappetizing, 'old man's' breakfast. Matt attempted to engage with her, but her only response was "I am called Waitress." Matt decided he would call her Marisol, and managed to get her to fix him an appropriate meal.



Analysis

In these opening chapters readers find Matt dealing with many issues: grief at the loss of Tam Lin, upheaval at the enormous change in his life, and shock and a little fear that he is expected to be the new patron. It is easy to forget that the main character is only fourteen years old. The author uses the journey on the Safe Horse to remind the reader (particularly those who may have missed the first book) about microchipping. The Safe Horse will only go where told, but will also overeat or overdrink if not monitored. This is an introduction to many of the characters in the novel who share similar traits, such as Waitress.

The confrontation with Major Beltran, which happens mere minutes after Matt walks into the hacienda, serves to immediately undermine Matt's confidence that he should be leading Opium. He stood up to the man, which was appropriate, but the Major's words regarding Matt's claim set up the main struggle Matt has with himself throughout the novel: 'Am I meant to be El Patron? If so, can I be a different Patron, one that is good and not cruel or selfish?' This identity crisis is at the heart of Matt's conflict.

In Chapter 3, Matt shuns all of El Patron's trappings because they are not fit for him - the bed and bathroom and meals are all tailored to an old man, which Matt is not. He changes his food orders and tries to begin redefining the role of the Patron. Readers are also introduced to Waitress in Chapter 3, who will become a vital part of Matt's quest to free the eejit population. In keeping with the theme of transforming identity, Matt gives her a new name, Mirasol.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Matt decide to sleep on the floor?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Major Beltran disregard Matt's claim to be the new patron?

Discussion Question 3

What is different about Waitress, which Matt takes note of her?

Vocabulary

constellations, opium, amended, resin, hacienda, successor, ingratiating, humiliation, tapestries



Chapter 4-5

Summary

As chapter 4 opens, Matt met his “chief” or “Jefe” - Cienfuegos. Cienfuegos was a leader of the Farm Patrol - the mix of men and eejits who are tasked with harvesting the acres and acres of opium fields. The Farm Patrol also rounded up illegal aliens so they could be turned into eejits and forced to work.

Cienfuegos and Matt made plans for how Matt wanted to run the empire: for Matt, he wished to disband the drug trade, uproot the opium to plant actual plants, and turn the eejits back into Real Humans. These were lofty goals, as the Empire’s many parts were linked together. Cienfuegos told Matt that changing the eejits was impossible. Matt also wanted to plant other crops and open Opium’s border, which was closed after El Patron’s funeral.

Following these discussions, Matt and Cienfuegos went for a drive with the bodyguard, the mute Daft Donald. They used El Patron’s old car, a convertible that used to belong to Hitler. They drove around the fields, allowing Matt to be seen as the new patron. Cienfuegos warned Matt not to look too kind and not to smile. During this drive Matt is informed that the eejits are running low on food - with the border closed, they cannot get their regular supply from the neighboring country of Aztlan. Matt asked how to open the border, and Cienfuegos told him that the control room only recognized certain people, as a safeguard.

In the beginning of chapter 5, the tour of the fields continued on to the armory. At the armory Matt met a few more of his Farm Patrolmen and learned about The Dope Confederacy: the land between the United States and Aztlan. The Land of Cocaine was at one end; at the other end, near the Gulf of Mexico, were Marijuana, Hash, Tobacco, Meth, Snuff, LSD, and the tiny Ecstasy - all lands from the former Mexico that had been converted to drug kingdoms.

All of the neighboring drug lords were killed at El Patron’s funeral, which led to rampant civil wars in all of the lands surrounding Opium. Cienfuegos told Matt that whatever El Patron’s infirmities, he was a genius at maintaining control: he would lock the borders of the country whenever a threat arose, then he would shoot down anyone who tried to enter unauthorized and he never allowed jets over the territory. Matt was shocked at a story about the old Patron, who shot down an innocent passenger jet that accidentally strayed over the airspace. He sacrificed innocent lives in order to maintain his power and authority. Cienfuegos continued, telling Matt that with the nearby governments collapsing, the most vicious drug lord has been able to take control of all of the smaller countries - an African named Glass Eye Dabengwa. This notorious drug lord had withstood several civil wars and dozens of assassination attempts; he was nearing one hundred years old and had his own clones to supply him with new organs. His eyes



were glass and didn't require blinking; a trait that intimidated all who were around him. He had yellow, unblinking eyes and dusty gray skin.

Analysis

These chapters introduce one of the most important and complex characters in the story, Cienfuegos. He is a cunning and ruthless leader, who at the same time would like to see Opium restored to a country of usefulness. His strength will help Matt, even if they don't always agree on the next course of action. As a foil to Matt's struggle to be peaceful, Cienfuegos consistently encourages Matt to be tough and cruel, and compliments him when he acts "just like the old man." This early in the novel, Cienfuegos is chiefly concerned with establishing Matt's authority as the Patron.

The problems of the surrounding nations are established in these chapters. Several times in the novel the country of Opium is referred to as a house of cards or a machine with intricately interlocking parts - all parts are dependent on one another, and the balance was precarious. The eejits work the opium fields, which are protected because the border is closed. However, because the border is closed, the eejit food supply is dwindling. Later in the novel readers see this analogy borne out further when Matt and Cienfuegos consider planting other crops.

The author shows the reader that the rest of the former Mexico is divided into sections completely devoted to the drug trade - the world is different from the reader's world. The United States is out of the picture.

The author lays out some of the external conflicts Matt will be facing: not only the difficulties involved in running a country, but outside pressures. The most threatening of these is the African drug lord Glass Eye Dabengwa, who will continue to press the borders because the leadership is weak. Another external pressure is Esperanza Mendoza, who readers of the first novel will recognize. She is a complex character, like Cienfuegos. Whereas Cienfuegos has good motives with a ruthless manner, Esperanza has the appearance of good - she is the head of the United Nations - but her nature is cold and heartless.

The story of the patron shooting down a passenger airplane in order to retain control will become a major theme in this novel - is it acceptable to sacrifice some lives for the good of an entire country? Matt will wrestle with this question several times.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Cienfuegos call the empire a 'time bomb'?

Discussion Question 2

What were some of the ways El Patron was a genius at maintaining control?



Discussion Question 3

Is Esperanza a good person or a bad person?

Vocabulary

fermented, emaciation, menacing, excrement, maintain, stiletto, annihilate, preemptive, fanatic



Chapter 6-7

Summary

Back at the hacienda, Matt and Celia ate lunch together. Things were tense because Matt saw Celia as a mother and wished to spend time with her; Celia thought that Matt, as the drug lord, should be eating alone. He had an image to portray to his people; Opium was currently only led by a handful of humans and thousands of eejits.

They discussed Cienfuegos and whether or not he was trustworthy. As a Farm Patrolman, Matt was suspicious; however, Tam Lin had recommended Cienfuegos as a man who wanted to end the drug trade and restore the land to its previous farmable state. He had studied agriculture in college and wanted to see Opium grow crops again. Cienfuegos was a sort of high-level eejit. He was microchipped in a very specific fashion that allowed him freedom of thought and actions, but he was programmed to protect Matt at all costs, never cross Opium's border, and never disobey a direct order.

Matt once again considered the vast lengths El Patron went through to maintain control - microchips, underground chambers, secret passages for spying on his workers.

Matt remembered his servant girl, Waitress. He asked Celia about her; she seemed more alert than other eejits. Some eejits are less intelligent than others - they are literally only able to complete one task over and over, while others seemed to be able to learn and respond to stimulus. Matt asked about having Waitress "retrained" to respond to the name Mirasol.

That evening, Matt and Cienfuegos had dinner together in El Patron's formal dining room, which was heavily decorated with original Mexican paintings. Cienfuegos recalled how he used to stand as bodyguard there when El Patron was alive; El Patron liked him because he was good at reading faces. For example, he accused Matt of thinking of Waitress, the eejit girl. Matt was flustered, but Cienfuegos was amused. They discussed the closed border and the holoport - a holographical image used to communicate with other places. Matt figured they should contact Esperanza first: they would ask her to help find a way to free the eejits before he would open the border. He also wanted her to send Maria to him. They discussed the matter of freeing the eejits further - Cienfuegos assured Matt that the microchip used to program eejits was smaller than a grain of rice, and attempting to manually remove them was impossible. Matt fed his dessert to Waitress. To his amazement, Waitress paused after her first bite, as if she was enjoying the taste. Matt promised to fix her brain.

In chapter 7, morning had come and with it, a new positive attitude. Matt thought about Maria, Esperanza's daughter, and if it was possible for them to be married.

In the kitchen Matt found Celia with Major Beltran again. Major Beltran was berating Celia for her coffee when Matt quietly entered the room. His tirade continued on about



his quarters and the eejits; he ordered Celia around and treated her poorly. When Matt had his fill of this, he ordered Major Beltran back to his room, and they end up arguing. The Major challenged Matt and taunted him; Matt wasn't sure what to do, as the Major was a large man, an adult, and a UN representative, but Matt didn't want to appear weak. Before reacting to the Major's taunts, Matt stalled, trying to figure out the best way to handle the Major. During this time Matt heard a voice whisper in his head: "he wants to kill you." Matt lingered near the soup pot with his back to the Major and his taunts. The voice whispered in Matt's head: "Do it. Do it!" Matt took the soup pot and threw it at the major, covering him in boiling soup. Cienfuegos entered at this point and removed the Major from the kitchen. He praised Matt for acting quickly and decisively, but Matt was unsure of his actions. He was unable to explain to himself how he heard the voice in his head and what came over him.

Analysis

Some of Matt's insecurities as a leader are evident when he's with Celia. Because she is the closest thing to a mother he has, he feels he can let his guard down with her; however, she won't generally allow him to. Losing that ability is another "cost" to Matt's newfound role of power.

The discussion about Cienfuegos - that he is actually a sort of high level eejit - foreshadows a time when Matt will need to use this knowledge to get the man to do what he wants him to do. But the author also shares more of Cienfuegos's heart for the country. In chapter 6 Matt and Cienfuegos share the first of many meals together to discuss the state of Opium. The jefe reveals that he's very good at reading faces, another glimpse into his cunning character. They discuss the microchipping process in more detail; the chips are like tiny grains of rice embedded in the eejits' brains. This complex process will set up an interesting moral dilemma for Matt, as some amount of eejits may need to be sacrificed in experiments to manually remove the chips. During this discussion, Waitress pauses and smiles over her dessert, which symbolizes hope for Matt. Each time the girl shows a glimmer of thought outside her programming, Matt will attack the problem with new vigor. It is also a short moment of sweetness in an otherwise grisly sort of life that he leads.

Matt and his chief discuss the possibility of conflict with Esperanza. Will she give him brain surgeons to study his eejit problem? Will she give him Maria? Esperanza is a formidable foe that Matt must figure out how to deal with.

In Chapter 7 Matt actually begins his day with a positive attitude, but then he finds Major Beltran berating Celia in the kitchen. In this scene the author introduces an interesting plot device - El Patron's voice speaking into Matt's brain. The author never really resolved how this happens, whether it's the shared DNA or if Matt has a taste of microchipping himself, but the old man's voice presents an interesting "devil on your shoulder" element to the story. For the bulk of the story, the whispers are insidious, although in this first instance the voice did save Matt's life. Throughout the novel the reader can watch Matt's development play out in his response to the voice of El Patron.



At first, he welcomes it because he feels like something or someone is on his side; later, however, he begins to wonder how much he wants to be like the patron.

Discussion Question 1

Cienfuegos praises Matt for his quick thinking in throwing the soup at Major Beltran. Does Matt view this as a good thing or a bad thing?

Discussion Question 2

Sometimes Celia seems to be progressive in how she wants the country to develop, yet other times she wants to 'keep the old ways.' Discuss how Celia feels about Opium and where it could be headed with Matt as its leader.

Discussion Question 3

Where do you think the voice of El Patron comes from? Is it substantive or part of Matt's imagination?

Vocabulary

insistent, industrial, implanted, microchip, plankton, dolefully, ornamental, humanitarian, submission, elated, stealth



Chapter 8-9

Summary

Chapter 8 opens just after the fight with Major Beltran. Cienfuegos and Matt headed to the holoport to speak to Esperanza. The control room had a giant screen filled with messages from people trying to contact Opium. Cienfuegos reminded Matt that nobody could send messages in or out of the country, or open the borders, because the controls were wired to respond to certain people's skin, and with El Patron and all of his family members dead, the country had been in a state of seclusion for three months. El Patron, who thought Matt would die with the rest of them, had wanted to kill everyone in Opium by locking the borders and keeping supplies out, slowly starving everyone still in the country.

Cienfuegos believed that Matt, who was El Patron's clone with his DNA, would be able to work the controls. They waited for Esperanza's messages to come onscreen. Esperanza's name came on screen, and Matt placed his hand on the control panel. The action was a physical assault on Matt, who felt sick as the controls read his skin.

Esperanza appeared on screen. She was a small, fierce, unpleasant woman. She and her daughter Maria were staying in a convent. Her attitude towards Matt wasn't welcoming; she immediately ordered Matt to find her husband and get the border open. Matt realized Esperanza didn't know that El Patron had murdered most of the people of Opium, including her husband and older daughter, Emilia.

Matt stalled for time while Esperanza taunted him, asking him to find somebody capable for her to deal with. Cienfuegos urged Matt to tell her the truth. Matt heard the whisper in his head again: "I'm like a cat with nine lives. As long as there are mice to catch, I intend to keep hunting."

Feeling bolstered by the voice in his head, Matt told Esperanza firmly that he was the heir, and described El Patron's murder of the other people in power. Esperanza was shocked, not at her family's death but at the thought of dealing with such a young patron. Matt was 'only a clone', and nobody had ever allowed one to last as long as Matt did.

Resolved that Matt is her only hope, Esperanza told him about the situation in the entire Dope Confederacy. The land had been stripped and over-farmed, the game killed by bored drug lords. Glass Eye would have a difficult time making any money; it was only a matter of time before he turned to Opium. Esperanza told Matt even more complicated information: the entire Dope Confederacy, the country of Aztlan, and most of the United States was polluted, over-farmed, and ecologically unsafe. Of all the neighboring lands, only Opium boasted an unpoisoned ecosystem. Only Opium had a thriving agriculture, unpolluted air, and animals. The UN called Opium a natural refuge, and Esperanza wanted scientists to have access to its plants and animals to repopulate the lands. She



urged Matt to allow her and the UN to help him, that Glass Eye wouldn't wait for long without invading. Matt knew she was right, but first he made Esperanza promise to send him some brain surgeons that can help him cure the eejits.

In the beginning of chapter 9, Matt was back in the kitchen with Celia and Cienfuegos. Cienfuegos was pleased at how Matt stood up to Esperanza, but secretly Matt was worried about power and its corrupting effects. The chief continued trying to give Matt a new nickname that sounded fierce.

Cienfuegos took Matt back to the control room to show him how to open the border in small sections. Matt did so to allow needed supplies into the country for a short period of time - the time his hand was on the scanner left him sickened and tired. The chief reminded him that unauthorized use of the scanner causes one's skin to melt, so Matt was lucky he was able to use it.

Later, Matt retired to his room, considering El Patron and his selfish hoarding of good land, his use of eejits to do his farm work. He found his bodyguard Daft Donald and his music teacher Mr. Ortega playing chess in the garage, and asked them to drive him around. They took him to the guitar factory. The house was built like an English country home and was filled with instruments. Matt met the guitar master, Eusebio, who was a craft eejit- an eejit who was programmed to retain his skills. Mr. Ortega told Matt the story of him and Eusebio entering the country together; Eusebio saved Mr. Ortega's life and was microchipped, while Mr. Ortega was not turned to an eejit, but was shot by a stun gun. As a result he couldn't hear.

Mr. Ortega played the guitar for Matt, and it was beautiful. Matt and Eusebio fell into a kind of happy trance as they listened. A Farm Patrolman interrupted; Matt flew into an unexplainable rage, which left him uncomfortable and worried at the person he could become.

Analysis

The holoport is the author's vehicle for Matt seeing into the outside world. Through it he can contact others and open and close Opium's borders. The control panel is keyed to El Patron's DNA, so that only Matt can open it. This truth makes Matt vulnerable, both because it threatens his safety, but also because he is in complete power of the people of Opium. He realizes this, that he has the ability to starve Opium's inhabitants. This tension is a large part of Matt's development through the novel. The act of even working the controls is interesting; it's described as "ants crawling over the skin" and is physically exhausting to Matt. And indeed, for those that try to use the control panel that aren't Matt, their skin is literally melted from their body. The author ties this grim and physically assaulting action to one that is so heavy with power on purpose.

In the control room the reader is finally introduced to Esperanza, and can wrestle with her goodness and her cruelty. She is a woman who is powerful and cruel, yet does good things with her power. This question of good and evil coexisting in one person is another



common theme in this novel. When Matt hears El Patron's voice in his head this time, it gives him courage to stand up to Esperanza and make his demands of scientists and surgeons for his people.

During the conversation with Esperanza the reader gets another glimpse into the rest of the world - Opium is a place of ecological refuge. The rest of the area is polluted, the ground sick. The author uses the state of the world as a platform for another of her themes - ecological protection. Throughout the novel there are references to plants and animals and the beauty of nature, and Opium is the only country that hasn't depleted its natural resources. Matt is able to use this as a bargaining chip.

The chapter closes with Matt returning to his love from the first novel in the series - music. The reader sees Matt retreat into a world of comfort and safety when he hears good music - this is repeated several times in the story, with Matt and other characters. The tranquil scene closes with Matt completely losing his temper at the Farm Patrolman that interrupted his musical reverie, and wondering from where such anger and rage came.

Discussion Question 1

How does music play a part in Matt's life? In Eusebio's? Mr. Ortega's?

Discussion Question 2

What message is El Patron trying to send with the holoport control pad and the way it affects those who use it?

Discussion Question 3

How did Opium manage to stay unpolluted, while the surrounding countries are suffering from an ecological crisis?

Vocabulary

surveillance, voracious, sarcophagus, vulnerable, amenities, solitude



Chapter 10-11

Summary

Matt visited the hospital, hoping to find information on the microchipping process for the eejits. He barely made it in the door before suffering an asthma attack from the poor quality air. A nurse named Fiona helped Matt, telling him that there were basically no patients in the hospital, only eejits. When Matt was home and safely in bed, he asked Fiona about the eejit microchips.

The chipping process began with an IV drip. The chips are inserted into the bloodstream with the IV. Fiona told him the chips are smaller than blood cells and filter through the entire body. After fifteen minutes, the regular brain function is gone and the people have turned into eejits. The talk of eejit training reminded Matt that he'd sent Waitress to be retrained. Despite his sickness, Matt frantically jumped from his bed and asked to be taken to her.

In the armory, Matt found Waitress strapped to a chair, and Cienfuegos electrocuting her to retrain her to respond to the name Mirasol. Matt told Daft Donald to stop the chief - the two men scuffled while Matt freed Mirasol's bonds. Cienfuegos was so angry he was fighting Daft Donald to the death, but Matt remembered that he was microchipped and programmed to obey. For a moment it looked like Cienfuegos would not obey, but Matt said: "I am the cat with nine lives. You will not prevail against me." The man quaked beneath the words and crumpled in pain. He continued to writhe until Matt said, "I forgive you." Matt couldn't figure where he thought to say those words. At Daft Donald's suggestion, they drove to the hospital to treat their wounds.

In chapter 11, they all arrived at the hospital. Matt was annoyed to deal with Nurse Fiona again. She treated Cienfuegos's injuries while talking nonstop about her past. She started talking about clones, but Cienfuegos stopped her, reminding her that Matt himself was a clone, grown from a strip of El Patron's skin.

Matt asked Fiona to fix Waitress's hands, which were burned during the electrocuting. Fiona refused, saying eejits don't feel pain, but Matt argued and commanded her to obey. Cienfuegos told Matt he didn't think eejits felt actual pain, that screaming was an automatic reaction and not a response to stimulus, but Matt ignored the reasoning.

The discussion continued back at the hacienda, where Daft Donald told Celia about the fight with Cienfuegos. Celia echoed the arguments of the others - that eejits didn't feel actual pain. Matt reminded them all that people said the same of clones, but he was a clone and he felt pain and rejection like anyone else. Matt's friends were worried that he was starting to care for Waitress/Mirasol, and that she could never care for him in return. Matt argued that she was really like a pet, that one would feed and play with, but not expect any return of affection.



Matt started feeding Mirasol regularly. All of the eejits were suffering from the lack of food. He allowed her to eat his leftover food, and she always ate with no impulse control. Matt wondered if there was a way back into Mirasol's mind, to wake her from her programming. After dinner, Celia took Mirasol back to her dorm to sleep, against Matt's wishes. He confessed to Celia that he was lonely, but Celia responded that he had to be strong because he was the Lord of Opium.

She suggested Matt use the holoport and call the convent the next day so he can talk to Maria. He could also invite the boys to come: Ton-Ton, Fidelito, and Chacho.

Matt met them when he worked at the plankton factory before El Patron's death (See House of the Scorpion). Matt grew excited thinking about all the ways he could make the hacienda fun for the boys to visit.

Analysis

These two chapters deepen the issues the author has been building in the early part of the novel; Matt makes an offhand request to "retrain" his Waitress so that she will respond to a name he likes better, and he finds that "retraining" is a cruel process including electrocution. The prevailing opinion is that the girl doesn't actually feel the pain. The author will present this question throughout the story regarding eejits. Are they human? Does the process that affected their brains make them less so? The questions of "what makes a human" is applied to clones in the first novel in this series, and now that Matt is leading the country, the question is applied to eejits. Does their lack of awareness dehumanize them?

The question is further complicated when the reader sees Cienfuegos and his conflict with obeying - he must obey Matt, he must protect Matt, but he had two orders from Matt that conflicted, and trying to disobey was literally hurting him inside. Because Cienfuegos is a "higher form" of eejit, Fiona the nurse is willing to treat him at the hospital, but she refuses to treat Waitress because she is a "full" eejit. With Fiona's attitude towards Waitress the reader sees an actual example of racism; one can argue that believing a group is less human than another is the root of racism. The reader sees this attitude even in Celia, who is generally Matt's ally in everything.

Matt's friends tell them that because Waitress can't "feel", she will never show any affection for Matt. In this chapter the reader sees Matt grow more attached to Waitress, and his feelings for her grow complex throughout the story. This early in the plot, he categorizes his attachment to her as "loneliness." He is isolated from true friendships and Waitress is one person who he can say anything to and she will remain devoted to him.

Towards the end of chapter 11 the reader is introduced - or re-introduced - to Matt's friends from the plankton factory. They originally join the story in the first book. Ton-Ton, Chacho, and Fidelito provide balance for Matt; they are Real Humans, and they are friends like brothers. They aren't at all involved in the running of Opium, so their outlook



on Matt's leadership of the country is fresh and without bias. They also ground him; there are times in the story where Matt allows a narcissism to take over, and it results in insensitivity towards others. The presence of the boys remind him that his possessions and wealth are not that important.

Discussion Question 1

What is the significance of Matt's words to Cienfuegos during his fit of rage?

Discussion Question 2

Celia has loved Matt well since he was a child. How can she also say that eejits don't feel any pain?

Discussion Question 3

How does Waitress/Mirasol make a good companion for Matt?

Vocabulary

eroded, mosaic, catatonic, electrodes, anesthetize, prejudice, civilize, scatterbrained



Chapter 12-14

Summary

Matt went to the holoport room to summon the convent where Maria and his friends were staying. When he contacted the convent, they told him that Esperanza was away. Instead Matt spoke to Sister Artemesia, a teacher nun who was in charge of Maria and the boys. After a few minutes speaking to her, Matt learned that Maria was still unaware of her father and sister being killed at El Patron's funeral. When he asked to speak to Maria, Artemesia replied that her mother had taken her to New York on a shopping trip. To Matt this means that Esperanza was attempting to keep them from speaking.

Artemesia summoned the boys. On either side of the holoport, the groups had their lunch. Artemesia also brought a few animals that Maria had been tending back to health. The younger boys mostly asked Matt questions about Opium and the eejit slaves, which they called zombies. With all of the food and excitement, there was a scuffle and one of Maria's birds flew into the holoport. It arrived on the other side in Matt's control room, frozen solid. It thawed into three separate pieces, melting into the floor. Matt disposed of it and shut the holoport down.

In chapter 13, Matt was in the hacienda, thinking about the holoport, the convent, and the boys. For a while he mourned how simple his life used to be, devoid of responsibility. He considered the dead bird and what happened to things that traveled through the holoport.

Bored, Matt asked Daft Donald and Mr. Ortega to take him to the opium factory. He recalled seeing the factory as a child - one assembly line rolled the dried poppy sap into flat disks. Another line dissolved the opium into alcohol and flavored it - this was called laudanum. The most advanced eejits made the opium into drugs - morphine, codeine, and heroin. With the trade shut down, the walls of the factory were stacked high with unsold opium products, and the dealers around the world were anxious for their shipments.

Matt was discouraged: without the drug trade, the opium was piled up everywhere, but he had a thousand human slaves who didn't know how to do anything except farm opium, and if the eejits weren't working they would get sick.

The foreman at the factory noticed Matt's distress and led him to the chapel, where the farm workers sometimes went to relax. The chapel housed a saint to whom the farm workers prayed, and many of them left mementos, notes, and pictures in devotion to their prayers. Matt learned that the saint's name is Jesus Malverde, and that the saint's likeness was exactly that of a young El Patron, and therefore, of Matt himself.

After dismissing the foreman, Matt sat for a while at the foot of the statue and looked through the prayer notes and mementos. There was one from the deaf Mr. Ortega - a



drawing of an ear. Many were photographs or drawings of children. With a chill Matt found a photo of a child with a note asking for her protection - it was signed Cienfuegos.

In chapter 14, Matt returned to the hacienda. He was in a terrible mood and demanded to eat in the kitchen with Celia rather than be sent to the dining room alone. Cienfuegos appeared, reporting to Matt that they had enough food to feed the eejits for another three months.

Matt asked Cienfuegos about the bird dying in the holoport. Cienfuegos explained that traveling through the holoport is similar to traveling through space - freezing cold. Matt grew angry at the conversation, feeling like he should be able to have his friends there with him. Celia and Cienfuegos seemed to communicate wordlessly about Matt's sour mood; this made it worse, and he stormed from the room. Back in his private dining room, Mirasol appeared with his dinner tray, and Matt let her eat his food instead.

The chapel was troubling; Matt was sad that so many people thought El Patron was a saint that could answer prayers. His bad mood intensified as he thought about Maria in New York without him. He started feeling really bad: dizzy and overwhelmed and sore. He thought about El Patron and the whispers he heard in his head. He threw the dishes from the table and screamed that he'd never be like El Patron, and then he passed out.

When he woke up he was in the hospital with a fever. Celia and Cienfuegos were with him. Fiona the nurse said he must have been delirious, but she didn't know exactly what was wrong with him and she didn't know exactly what to give him. Celia told Matt that Waitress/Mirasol had come to the kitchen and hovered around her for hours until Celia finally followed her to where Matt lay on the floor.

Cienfuegos loaded Matt and Fiona into a hovercraft and flew them to Paradise, a city with a hospital on the other side of the country. At the last minute Matt begged to leave Fiona behind and take Mirasol instead.

Analysis

These chapters introduce the reader to some interesting concepts that foreshadow some bigger plot developments. The holoport, which appeared in the earlier chapter as just a screen used for communication, is actually a sort of wormhole - cold, like space - that connects two places. With a bird inadvertently traveling through the holoport and dying in the process, the reader is shown the possibilities of who or what else could end up traveling through the holoport, and the danger that would accompany such a journey. It was also the very pleasant "picnic" with the boys that inspires Matt with a later idea to have them come to see him.

Sor Artemesia plays a larger part in this chapter, and her role will continue to grow as the story progresses.

Matt's tour through the opium factory reminds the reader that his country actually is a living, working drug state. That there are people outside the country that are depending



on Matt to actually sell them drugs, and that all of the opulence in which Matt lives is funded by the fields of beautiful poppies surrounding him. This is dramatic irony - something as beautiful as a poppy, which the author describes on several occasions - is then dried and pressed and sold as drugs. Furthermore, the author paints a vivid scene of opium discs stacked along the sides of the factory. The discs are piled up with no relief in sight, and so are Matt's questions and conflicts in his new role as Lord of Opium.

Jesus Malverde, the patron saint of drug lords, is the author's vehicle to discuss religion. One wouldn't ordinarily think of a drug lord as a worthy object of adoration or worship, but as Matt peruses the chapel, a place of peace, and sees the many notes, prayers, paintings, and signs of devotion, the author shows that faith and devotion in itself is a worthy calling; the object of the faith doesn't matter as much. It is also key that Jesus Malverde looks so much like El Patron and, therefore, Matt. Later in the chapter Matt is frustrated that so many people put their trust in El Patron, who could not help them; this is foreshadowing of the fact that somebody else will eventually help them, will eventually answer their prayers, and he too will look like El Patron.

Towards the end of the chapter, before Matt collapses with fever, he goes into a rage in front of Celia and Cienfuegos, who exchange nervous glances in obvious comparison to Matt's predecessor. Seeing their look prompts an even bigger rage when he's alone with Marisol. Matt wishes to grasp his own fate, declaring that he will not end up like the old Patron. He will not allow himself to be the old man, reborn. This declaration is one of Matt's most significant struggles throughout the story.

Discussion Question 1

Why do so many people worship Jesus Malverde?

Discussion Question 2

Why can't Matt allow the opium fields to go fallow?

Discussion Question 3

Why is Matt frustrated that Maria has gone to New York City?

Vocabulary

shirk, reluctant, laudanum, makeshift, respirator, meditate, resemblance, irritable, persistent, wormhole, coincidence, obscurely, damask, tranquilize



Chapters 15-17

Summary

Matt was transported via hovercraft to the hospital. From the ceiling of the craft he could see the stars, most notably the Scorpion Star to the south. The hospital was located in Paradise, the “heart” of El Patron’s empire, and was supposedly the best hospital in the world. However, all of the doctors in the empire were dead except for one. “Paradise” was a beautiful place and the hospital itself was like a mansion. The remaining doctor was Dr. Rivas, who diagnosed Matt with scarlet fever. Cienfuegos wondered if the holoport scanner had weakened Matt’s immune system.

The recovery was slow; Matt spent time resting and talking with Dr. Rivas. He told the doctor about Mirasol and her slight reactions to stimuli. The doctor told Matt not to get his hopes up about “waking Mirasol up.” Dr. Rivas was an illegal that slipped across the border on his way to the United States with his father, his wife, and three children. He studied cloning in college and was put to work on cloning El Patron. When the initial experiments didn’t go well, El Patron turned Dr. Rivas’s son into an eejit. Eventually Dr. Rivas created Matt. The doctor was very informed on the cloning process and the eejit operation. He told Matt that there were other clones, but Matt was the most healthy. Other clones were killed trying to harvest organs or blood transfusions. Matt asked the doctor how he could stand doing such things; he responded that he had a family to protect, and “you get used to being evil.”

At the beginning of chapter 16, Cienfuegos took Matt to the holoport to contact the convent, to speak to Esperanza. When they saw her on the screen, she immediately yelled at Matt, telling him that she’d found some brain surgeons to help with the eejits. She placed the information in a metal cylinder and hurled it into the holoport. Remembering the bird, Matt flinched; the information came out of the cylinder unharmed. Esperanza asked for a list of plants and animals so she could start rebuilding the ecosystems outside of Opium.

Matt asked to see Maria. Esperanza said she would allow it if Matt promised not to tell Maria what happened at the funeral. Esperanza warned Matt that he was safer if people didn’t know; it was better for everyone to think that Opium was doing fine. Otherwise Glass Eye may try to invade.

Maria appeared on the screen and Matt was happy to see her. His feelings for her left him unable to speak. Maria chattered happily about her trip to New York. The conversation went along well until Maria caught sight of Mirasol in the background. Esperanza, who was still in the room supervising Matt’s and Maria’s conversation, laughed at the sight of Matt with the eejit and accused Matt of having Mirasol as a girlfriend. Matt defended himself, but Maria wasn’t sure she believed him. The argument continued until Maria left the holoport in anger. Matt said that Esperanza caused the



argument between him and Maria. Esperanza promised to send him his friends to make it up to him - Ton-Ton, Chacho, and Fidelito.

In chapter 17, Matt went out to the garden to think about his inability to control his anger. In his argument with Maria he lost his temper, and Matt chastised himself for not being good. He thought he should send Mirasol away to make Maria happy, but he was afraid she would be hurt if he did that.

As Matt walked through the garden he caught sight of a small African girl. He frightened her and she screamed and ran away. He wandered through the gardens, and stumbled on a fountain made of statues of children. It was a beautiful work of art; the children's faces were lifelike and joyful. However, Matt also found it strange, because Opium didn't generally have children running around.

Soon Matt found himself in an enclosed room filled with lab equipment. A freezer case held racks of bottles with the names of drug lords inscribed on them. Dr. Rivas appeared and told Matt he should have a tour of the facility where he made clones, but that he should also rest. Matt wished to destroy all of the tissue samples, but that would destroy years of work. Dr. Rivas further argued that the clone cells help find cures for diseases like sickle-cell anemia - sacrifice a few to save thousands.

"The line between good and evil continued to blur" in Matt's mind. He told Dr. Rivas to destroy all of the tissue samples and clone samples for the drug lords, including his own. Dr. Rivas suggested Matt lie down in the nursery, which was closer than his room. They walked out together by the fountain of playing children. Dr. Rivas told Matt that El Patron had commissioned the fountain to remember his own brothers and sisters of his youth; he had used actual illegal children as models for the sculpture.

Analysis

Dr. Rivas is introduced in these chapters. His character is vital to the story and a study in conflicting convictions. He is a doctor that is purely and coldly scientific; he sacrifices everything to advance his studies and holds little value for human life. His career has been dedicated to creating clones for evil drug lords; as he tells Matt, "You get used to being evil." In one of their conversations, Dr. Rivas verbalizes another of the novel's main themes: how much sacrifice of life is appropriate if it benefits an entire country or group? Dr. Rivas sacrificed untold numbers of clones and everything in order to study diseases and make new clones. He served the drug dealers for years to protect his family. Is the sacrifice appropriate? This is one of the author's most pressing questions.

The fact that Matt has scarlet fever is interesting; clones are supposed to be highly immunized against everything so their bodies will remain healthy should their "original" need them. Matt's illness demonstrates the effect the holoport use has on one's body; it weakened his immune system and made him susceptible to germs.

The hospital at Paradise is the ultimate in dramatic irony. It is a beautiful mansion of a hospital, at one time the best in all of the Dope Confederacy. Now there is one doctor



working there, and as the reader finds out, Paradise hosts an evil behind its well-manicured walls and gardens.

In chapter 16 the reader finally meets Maria. Maria played a large part in the first book in this series; she is Matt's best friend and true love. Through here the reader sees Matt relax for the first time; the fact that they argue about Mirsasol is foreshadowing the complex balance between Matt's feelings for each girl. Matt makes the first of several bargains with Maria's mother, Esperanza, continuing to demonstrate the careful give-and-take that characterizes Matt's leadership of Opium. In this case, it's a good trade: he gives her plants and animals so she can begin to rebuild the fragile ecosystems in surrounding countries, and she gives him brain surgeons to study his eejits. She sends these through the holoport, again showing the reader that solid objects can travel through the wormhole at their peril.

Finally, the reader sees their first glimpse of a new character- a small, skittish African girl that darts behind a fountain. The fountain displays seven statues of joyful children. These statues, which Dr. Rivas tells Matt represent El Patron's original siblings from long ago, symbolize destroyed hope and youth; Opium is now a country with no real families, where children are turned into eejits and forced to farm drugs.

Discussion Question 1

Like Esperanza and Matt himself, good and evil coexist in Dr. Rivas. How?

Discussion Question 2

What kind of personal sacrifices did Dr. Rivas make throughout his career at Paradise Hospital?

Discussion Question 3

The fountain of the children shows them in joyful repose but also has a sinister side. What is it?

Vocabulary

initiative, blunder, veranda, pointedly, expendable



Chapter 18-19

Summary

Matt took a long nap in the nursery. When he woke up from his rest, he saw the little African girl from the garden across the room. She was playing with a boy in a crib: a young African boy, who acted like a baby but was at least six years old. He was wearing diapers and drinking from a bottle; the little girl was feeding him and calling him “Mbongeni”. Dr. Rivas sat nearby and commented that Mbongeni will always be a baby, so not to expect him to talk or grow up.

They noticed that Matt was awake, and Dr. Rivas brought the little girl over to Matt so they could meet. Her name was Listen. She was also a clone, like Matt, and Dr. Rivas mentioned that she was very smart because her intelligence wasn’t “blunted” when she was born. Most clones are injected with a drug that destroys part of their brain - both Matt and Listen escaped this fate, but the practice was evident in Mbongeni. Dr. Rivas challenged Matt, that destroying tissue samples meant destroying a child like Mbongeni. Matt argued that Mbongeni is a child, not a tissue sample, and that as patron, he could make the distinction.

The argument ceased in favor of lunch outside. Matt requested that Listen join them. He tried several times to engage Listen in conversation; it required many tries before she responded. During dessert, Dr. Rivas told Matt that Mbongeni was a clone for Glass Eye Dabengwa. Listen was originally a clone for Glass Eye’s favorite wife, but he had decided to allow her to grow up normally so he could marry her when she was grown. Matt was disgusted at the thought of Listen having to marry a hundred-year-old drug lord, and said so. Dr. Rivas agreed that Listen shouldn’t be forced into that fate, but also mentioned that as long as the country of Opium was home to Glass Eye’s clone Mbongeni, he wouldn’t dare attack or invade the country. For a while at least, the two children were Opium’s insurance policy.

In chapter 19, when he was preparing to return to his main hacienda in Ajo, he received a visit from Cienfuegos. The chief (‘jefe’) told Matt that he was suspicious of Dr. Rivas. Matt recalled that Dr. Rivas came to Paradise with his family. Cienfuegos confirmed that the doctor’s father and wife were dead; one son was still an eejit, the two remaining children worked in the observatory. The chief stated that Dr. Rivas’s first priority was protecting his family, not the patron, and that they should be careful.

During this conversation, Cienfuegos warned Matt that Mirasol would be confused if she became too attached to him, and that eejits can break down if they become too confused.

Cienfuegos encouraged Matt to follow him through the gardens. He chattered about plants and animals; he suspected their conversation was overheard and didn’t want to discuss anything important. When they reached the lab they noticed the door was



guarded. Cienfuegos lied to the guards to gain access and ended up stunning them with his gun. He told Matt, “You have to see what Dr. Rivas is hiding,” and took him inside.

Analysis

In these chapters Matt meets two more clones: Listen and Mbongeni. In *House of the Scorpion* the reader sees that Matt did not lose his intelligence at “harvesting.” Here the author shows the alternative in the boy who is six but will always be a baby. Again, he is a symbol of innocence and a happy childhood that really isn’t what it seems; Mbongeni is a clone for Glass Eye and is destined to be sacrificed for his organs. The doctor challenges Matt, calling the baby a “tissue sample” that Matt previously demanded be destroyed. In response Matt echoes the author’s principle argument: the baby isn’t a “tissue sample”, he is a child, an actual human.

Listen is different because she is intelligent, and she hasn’t been raised as a child, but an adult. Dr. Rivas is her only adult companion, and he treats her as lab assistant, showing her all of his scientific pursuits and experiments. Like Matt, she is in constant conflict between acting her own age (Nature) vs displaying the words and attitudes of her upbringing (Nurture).

Cienfuegos tells Matt he believes Dr. Rivas isn’t what he seems. To this point in the story, the doctor has been helpful and kind despite his and Matt’s disagreements regarding eejit experiments. He is the appearance of goodness, but Cienfuegos warns Matt that Dr. Rivas’s first priority is protecting his family, not serving his patron. (His wife and father are dead; two of his children work in Paradise, one is an eejit) This is foreshadowing; the reader will see as the story progresses the lengths to which the doctor will go to keep his family intact.

The reader also hears a warning from Cienfuegos regarding Mirasol, one that is echoed several times as the plot moves along; Mirasol should not become too attached to Matt, or the conflict in her brain could cause her to “go rogue.” The strain could kill her. She is programmed to obey, not to attach to Matt all of the time. This conversation is another use of foreshadowing, deepening the conflict with the eejit population.

Discussion Question 1

What are some signs that Mirasol is becoming confused about her programming?

Discussion Question 2

What is Matt’s insurance policy against Glass Eye Dabengwa? Is it worth keeping Mbongeni and Listen hostage at the Paradise facility?



Discussion Question 3

What are some ways that Listen is childlike? What are some ways she is adult-like?

Vocabulary

arbor, blunt, eager, sullenly, sinister, paralyzed, eavesdrop, appalled



Chapter 20-21

Summary

Matt and the chief entered the building. Inside was set up with a regular room for children, with a playground and food and toys. Mbongeni was inside, in a crib. Listen was underneath a bed. Matt heard screams, and pulled Listen out from under the bed. She was scratched up and scared. Matt handed her to Cienfuegos, then reached under the bed and pulled out a small boy, about seven years old. He was angry and wild, clawing and spitting. Cienfuegos helped Matt wrap the boy in a blanket and tie him up to contain him. The boy yelled curses at them both, yelling, "I'm El Patron!"

After looking at the boy more closely, Matt realized their resemblance. The boy was another clone of El Patron, and thought for sure he was the eventual heir to the empire. Cienfuegos tended to Listen's scratches, and she told the men that the small boy was nicknamed "El Bicho (the Bug)" because he was a clone. In turn she called Matt "El Bicho Grande."

Matt was confused about the boy's existence, and also why the small boy was allowed to harm Listen. Cienfuegos said that Listen was expendable as a child; Mbongeni

was the important clone to Glass Eye.

Dr. Rivas appeared in the room, offering to explain. He reminded Matt that when he was a child he had a dangerous asthma attack and a few illnesses - at that point El Patron ordered to have El Bicho created as a backup clone. (Matt recalled that Celia had been feeding him arsenic so that his organs wouldn't be useful to El Patron - see House of the Scorpion) When he heard that El Patron had died, and he also had heard that Matt was dead, the doctor had to spare El Bicho so that some form of the Patron would not only be alive, but be available to inherit the empire. Although Dr. Rivas was a convincing picture of innocence, Matt was suspicious.

Matt asked why El Bicho was so angry and wild. The doctor replied that most of El Patron's clones were close to the original; Matt was the most perfect. However, El Bicho had no impulse control. Matt had no idea what to do with all of the problems in his lap.

The return trip to Ajo was delayed so Matt could spend some time with the children. In the beginning of chapter 21, Matt was reading to Listen, trying to form a friendship with her. However, she was stubborn and difficult to work with. She told Matt that she enjoyed helping Dr. Rivas with his scientific experiments on rabbits. The little girl saw herself as a scientist like the doctor, and had little value for life.

Matt understood Listen because he was raised in similar isolation. Like Listen, Matt didn't grow up with games and lullabies and hugs. However, he could not find a way to have a normal relationship with El Bicho. The boy was wild and vicious. He tried to visit him, bringing milk and cookies. The boy's response was rude. "When you die, I'm going



to take your place,” he told Matt; Matt wasn’t moved by this threat, and the boy suddenly changed into the picture of kindness and obedience. A normal conversation followed, but Matt could tell that the boy was just acting.

El Bicho asked Matt to take him to visit the observatory. He promised to behave if Matt removed his restraints. The boy was so eager and genuinely enthused about the telescopes that Matt agreed. They drove a hovercraft to the observatory; Matt noticed how compliant El Bicho was when he was in charge.

The observatory had a long telescope pointed into space, and a long section that extended a thousand feet underground. Once inside the observatory they met Dr. Rivas’s daughter - Dr. Angel. She welcomed them kindly but cautioned El Bicho to keep his hands away from the machines. They met Dr. Marcos, Dr. Rivas’s other son. They looked at pictures of planets and stars, but the most interesting sight was of the Scorpion Star: El Patron’s own space station. In the pictures Matt could see, it looked like a floating city enclosed in a bubble, with people walking around. It was an enormous space station with plants and animals and oxygen.

El Bicho looked at the Scorpion Star with longing, speaking about how badly he wanted to visit there. He lost his temper and began destroying things. Matt had to remove him from the observatory. During the hovercraft ride back home, El Bicho screamed himself hoarse at Matt, telling him that he’d kill him. Matt tried to talk to the boy, discuss how they could visit again if he would calm down. The boy’s tantrum exhausted Matt, and when they returned he left the boy at the nursery so he could rest.

Analysis

El Bicho, “The Bug”, is the smallest and newest clone of El Patron. He represents everything that is wrong with cloning. Unlike Matt, El Bicho has not been raised in an atmosphere of love and acceptance. Truly, El Bicho hasn’t been raised at all. Dr. Rivas told him that many clones are similar to their original - Matt is “perfect”, while El Bicho is all impulse and viciousness and no balance. He is power-hungry and controlling and prone to fits of violence. He is allowed to torture Listen so he will not harm Mbongeni; Mbongeni is precious, Listen is expendable. She is sacrificed for a greater purpose. It is ironic that Matt feels a special affection and kinship with Listen, but he cannot relate at all to El Bicho, with whom he is a genetic match.

The reader can’t be certain what El Bicho’s true purpose is: Dr. Rivas has a reasonable explanation, but in the previous chapter the author begins to cast some doubts on Dr. Rivas’s character, so the reader is left to wonder.

The observatory and the Scorpion Star are first mentioned in these chapters. The Scorpion Star, as it is mentioned, cost a quarter of El Patron’s fortune. It is a space station, suspended in orbit above Opium. An observatory on the ground in Paradise exists solely for the purpose of monitoring the Scorpion Star. It is imposing and impressive, and El Bicho is obsessed with it. The mystery of this space station is a picture of its



value to El Patron, which becomes apparent in later chapters. The reader sees El Bicho very intelligently stem a ranging temper tantrum in order to get Matt to take him to the observatory. He will do anything to see the Scorpion Star; this foreshadows El Bicho's role in the climax of the story.

Discussion Question 1

How does Matt feel a kinship to Listen?

Discussion Question 2

Do you believe Dr. Rivas's reasoning for creating El Bicho? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

What is the evidence of the Scorpion Star's significance to the story?

Vocabulary

inhabitants, feral, garrote, serenely, arsenic, momentous, traumatize



Chapter 22-23

Summary

Matt and Cienfuegos prepared to go back to Ajo at last. The chief had cages of animals to take back for Esperanza, including a rattlesnake. When Matt questioned why they would take back a venomous animal, Cienfuegos replied, "No matter how nasty something is, it has some purpose." The chief looked sad that he had to return to his real job; he was much happier collecting plants and animals. The details of how men are programmed were a question for Matt - different eejits showed different levels of control. Matt wondered how much of Cienfuegos's ruthless personality was programming. The chief told Matt that almost everyone in Opium was controlled in some way. Only a few people escaped microchipping.

Matt wanted to contact Maria at the holoport, but he needed to give Mirasol something to do; he took her to the nursery where Listen played with Mbongeni. He left Mirasol there, instructing her to "watch over Listen," and walked back to the holoport. When he contacted the convent, Maria stood in front of the screen. He and Maria declared their love for each other, apologizing for the argument from the week before. Maria told Matt she wished she could be there with him. She didn't trust her mother to do the right thing. She sent Matt her altar cloth through the portal, and then she disappeared.

When Matt returned to the nursery to check on the children, he found Listen and Mbongeni in a crib, and El Bicho sticking thumbtacks in Mirasol's hands. Listen told Matt that El Bicho had tried to hurt her, but Mirasol had 'watched over Listen,' as Matt had instructed, and stepped between them. Mirasol's entire arms were covered in metal thumbtacks. He ordered the remaining eejits to carry Mirasol to the hospital; he was very angry with the doctor, but needed him around to help free the eejits.

Matt, Mirasol, and Cienfuegos left Paradise with the animal and plant samples. They also brought Listen. From the air they looked at the landscape, where people used to live before the Dope Confederacy was established. The chief mentioned how it was a dark period in history, when people fled from Opium to the United States, and many people were killed. He likened it to the plague, during which the dark period in history led to great creativity and prosperity. Hearing the mention of the plague, Listen remarked that Dr. Rivas had a huge supply of the plague, smallpox, and cholera germs frozen in his lab.

A functioning power plant was nearby; it supplied Opium with its power. The hovercraft landed there to change its power, and they stopped there for lunch. After lunch they walked around the power plant, and around the lake. The lake was populated with dozens of animal species - monkeys, crocodiles, gibbons, toucans - it was a real jungle. Cienfuegos told Matt that the actual jungle plants came from somewhere different - somewhere they would visit next.



Analysis

Matt is able to talk to Maria again. For Matt and the story, Maria represents purity, forgiveness, hope, acceptance - all things that help a person free themselves from a dark nature. She immediately gives Matt the benefit of the doubt regarding Mirasol (which the reader isn't sure that Matt deserves) and forgives their argument from before. Seeing her fills Matt with renewed purpose to do good - throughout the story Maria is the drive to do good. If El Patron's voice is a "devil on the shoulder" whispering to Matt, Maria sits on the other shoulder, countering the bad along the way.

While Matt is at the holoport, El Bicho attacks Listen, and Mirasol (at Matt's command to 'watch over Listen') tries to protect Listen. As a result, El Bicho sticks thumbtacks in Mirasol's arms. Matt is livid with Dr. Rivas for leaving the children alone, for even allowing the situation to occur, but he has to sacrifice his anger because he "needs" Dr. Rivas around to help him study the problem of freeing the eejits. This is another example of sacrifices made for some sort of greater good.

A similar theme is echoed in a comment from Cienfuegos. When he and Matt are discussing taking animals from Paradise to give to Esperanza, Matt asks why they would need a rattlesnake. Cienfuegos replies, "No matter how nasty something is, it has some purpose."- this can be applied directly to the existence of El Bicho.

When they leave Paradise, they take Listen with them. They fly over Opium and discuss its dark history. Cienfuegos mentions the Plague from medieval history; that a period of darkness and tragedy led to the Renaissance, a flowering of creativity and prosperity. This historical fact is likened to El Patron's reign over Opium, and how it will give way to progress under Matt's hand.

During the flight back to Ajo they stop at a power plant to recharge the hovercraft. There is a lake nearby with dozens of animal species. The author's focus on ecology is highlighted here with the perfectly preserved jungle with so many varied animals, which are supposedly extinct in other parts of the world. Cienfuegos mentions how much he enjoys collecting plants and animals; this is in contrast to his programmed job as a ruthless patrol guard.

Discussion Question 1

What is the evidence that Mirasol does or does not feel the pain of the thumbtacks?

Discussion Question 2

What is Matt's purpose in taking Listen with him back to Ajo?



Discussion Question 3

Why is Maria so quickly willing to forgive Matt and trust him?

Vocabulary

grimace, relentless, prosperity, meandering, obnoxious



Chapters 24-26

Summary

Cienfuegos flew them north to the Opium border, which was a shimmering curtain like a force field. They landed at the Alacran Biosphere - a collection of long buildings surrounded by a clear bubble. El Patron had copied the biosphere from the United States; during the drug wars he took all of the animals from it and brought them to his own biosphere. It had been established eighty years before. El Patron's main purpose in creating the biosphere was to make a model on which to base his Scorpion Star.

When they enter the biosphere, they all had to be disinfected by robots and dressed in new clothes. Then they are allowed inside the clear bubble. The colors were bright and the air smelled clean; it was raining and there were dozens of species of plants and animals. The people were not eejits; they worked peacefully and quietly. They encountered an older man, "a frogherd", who told them there were no scientists left. The man seemed surprised to see visitors and couldn't understand the concept of a world and people outside the biosphere. The frogherd said the older people had "gone to Gaia" - Mother of All, Earth Herself. He had no concept of Matt as the Patron.

Cienfuegos recognized the inside of the biosphere, pointing out that each section of it is modeled after an ecosystem on the earth. He told Matt that his reason for visiting the biosphere was to get plant samples that would help clean the soil of the surrounding lands.

In chapter 25, the group decided to walk through four biospheres on their way to the mushroom forest. Several workers who saw Listen told her she should be in the 'Brat Enclosure.' The workers maintained the balance of animals and plants, eating the extras and praising Gaia for the food. They reached the Mushroom forest and met the mushroom master. He told them all about the different types of fungi and their benefits. One mushroom called a Shaggy Mane specifically is made to pull poison out of the soil. Cienfuegos was very excited to learn about the plants, and asked if he could fly to the biosphere every week to study mushrooms with the Mushroom Master.

In chapter 26 Matt asked a passing worker why there were no children; she told him that they were in the Brat Enclosure, of course. Matt told them he was from Outside and didn't understand; at first, the people don't believe him because they didn't believe in 'Outside.' Then they told him that children under the age of "Dormancy" (fourteen) lived in the Brat Enclosure to learn to love Gaia and all of its creatures. They are released in Dormancy for a short period of intense education before they are merged into the adult population to mate.

Intrigued by the Brat Enclosure, Listen runs inside. They saw children of all sizes playing and yelling and running around. Adults in white tunics supervised the children. Matt was inspired and dismayed by how the children were loved and happy - not eejits.



The group made their way back to the hovercraft. Cienfuegos had food and water for them, and Listen threw a temper tantrum because she was so tired. The chief tried to comfort her, but he is programmed to not show compassion, so he was unable to help her and disappeared into the forest. The chief was gone for a long time; Matt had to console Listen and Mirasol in his absence. He told Listen some Bible stories for a while, but she argued that she didn't believe them. Listen had been raised by Dr. Rivas and didn't believe anything that wasn't strictly scientific. She made many comments regarding religion and belief as 'crap' because Dr. Rivas taught her better.

Cienfuegos didn't return until after nightfall. Listen and Mirasol were asleep in the hovercraft and Matt was standing watch. The chief complimented Matt on his good 'guard duty' and climbed into the craft to fly them home.

Analysis

The biosphere is copied from an old U.S. biosphere, and built as a model for the Scorpion Star. Again the author shows the lengths to which El Patron went to ensure the building of the space station. Here Cienfuegos calls El Patron "an accidental ecologist." He took animals from the United States and put them in his biosphere, not to protect them but to collect them. The biosphere is another form of irony: on the one hand, it is an ecological marvel, filled with plant and animal species that can help the entire planet recover from its environmental crisis. Cienfuegos points out several ecosystems along the way, the species of which hadn't been seen on earth for years. Furthermore, the people working inside are not eejits. They are real humans that have a sort of "faith" in Gaia, or mother earth. They show all forms of religious devotion to Earth. They are careful about what they eat so that they keep the balance between plants, animals, and humans. Everyone in the biosphere has their place, and knows their place. However, there is a trade off: like eejits, the workers in the biosphere have very little independent thought. There is no room for personal development or choice. A person is taught a job and stays in it for life. There are no marriages or families, there is mating; the children are tucked away in the Brat Enclosure, raised collectively and brought out during puberty to join the adults. In many ways, the biosphere isn't any better than Opium. It is also interesting to note that the people in the biosphere don't realize that there is an Outside world. A few people do, and they keep the rest of the population deceived so they will continue to work within their society. It is worth asking if the trade is worthwhile. Only in the Brat Enclosure does society reflect a desirable innocence - the children are living a real childhood full of play and care. Matt is both pleased and dismayed by this.

The ecology theme is continued as Cienfuegos meets the Mushroom Master, who is a fun character that is obsessed with fungi. He will help the jefe clean the soil in Opium, and eventually everywhere, with his pollution-eating Shaggy Mane mushrooms. The Master is a hopeful character that reflects the belief that hard work and passion can yield greatness.

The question of Nature vs. Nurture is displayed late in chapter 26, when Listen, exhausted from their journey, has a meltdown. Cienfuegos, who is naturally a



compassionate man, would like to show the little girl some care, but he is literally programmed not to. The two fight against themselves in several characters throughout the novel. Cienfuegos is held back from his true talent and nature by his microchipping, which in turn programs him into a ruthless and cruel servant. In his absence Matt tries to comfort Listen with stories Celia told him from the Bible, which Listen discounts as unscientific. The struggle between emotion and reason is consistently displayed in her character. She is raised by Dr. Rivas to be scientific elevate reason above all; but she is a child and experiences emotions. Several times the reader sees her struggle between the two.

Discussion Question 1

Do you think the biosphere would be a desirable place to live? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

What kind of man would Cienfuegos be if he wasn't microchipped?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Listen think that religion is "crap"? What is her religion?

Vocabulary

profusion, distorted, transparent, paralleled, emanating, midstride, refine, generation, ecosystem, shoal, colonies, contagious



Chapter 27-29

Summary

Matt temporarily opened Opium's borders, long enough to allow trains of doctors, nurses, equipment, medicine, and new bodyguards. They were sent to Paradise for training with Dr. Rivas. One doctor was brought to Ajo, and Nurse Fiona was reassigned to washing dishes and babysitting Listen. The trains returned to Aztlan, to Esperanza, bearing plants, animals, and opium.

Extra opium was still stacking up outside the factory, and drug dealers from Africa, Europe, and Asia were growing impatient. One drug dealer, Happy Man, was especially eager, and after stalling as long as he could, Matt finally answered Happy Man's holoport call. He was in Marijuana, near the eastern border of Opium. Happy Man was living in squalor. He was surprised to see Matt and asked for El Patron. Happy Man told Matt that the city was in flux between the Farm Patrol and its inhabitants. Glass Eye had been destroying the city. Matt was appalled and closed the holoport, vowing not to give them any opium. Using the holoport, Matt saw similar scenes in the countries surrounding Opium. His passion to do right was renewed. Weeks passed with loads of mundane work - lessons in horseback riding and piloting a hovercraft, driving his car with Daft Donald, and planning a party for his friends. Matt was excited for their visit and planned a circus, soccer, rodeo, music, and food unlike anything the boys would have seen.

Celia mentioned that all of the new doctors and bodyguards that were training in Paradise had to be microchipped - made loyal to the Patron and his commands. Matt was angry because he didn't want that to happen to the new people. Celia told Matt that in order to achieve the greater good of stamping out the drug trade, he had to make some short term sacrifices, and one of them was ensuring the new staff was loyal. Cienfuegos was programmed against feeling pity or love, and he was angry that they were microchipping more people.

At the opening of chapter 28, Matt sat at the holoport screen watching the new visitors arrive across the border: musicians, rodeo cowboys, soccerplayers, circus performers, wrestlers, and finally, Ton-Ton, Fidelito, and Chachos. The boys came off the train fighting, and were followed by Sor Artemesia, the nun. For a few moments Matt hoped that her presence signaled Maria's, but Maria was not with her.

The boys arrived at Ajo, where Matt's hacienda was located. Matt and Listen waited to greet them. Sor Artemesia told Matt that Esperanza and Maria's relationship was deteriorating. The boys were excited at all of Matt's wealth and splendor.

Matt's friends noticed the servants, but not that they were eejits. They assumed eejits were 'zombies' that wanted to eat their brains. The boys were overwhelmed by the art and machines that El Patron had collected throughout the years. Matt felt like he should



keep the boys there forever, and hire tutors and teachers so they could do what made them happy. Ton-Ton especially was interested in machines. Matt allowed him access to a few of El Patron's music boxes, so he could take them apart and study them.

The group met for dinner in the dining hall. Sor Artemesia asked after the remainder of the Mendoza family, and with Cienfuegos's urging, Matt prepared to tell her what happened at the funeral. However, Listen broke in with characteristic bluntness and informed the nun that they were all dead.

In chapter 29, Cienfuegos escorted Sor Artemesia to the chapel to pray for the Mendozas. Matt chastised Listen for being insensitive to the nun, but Listen didn't really understand. After being raised with Dr. Rivas, Listen wasn't very sensitive, and she would require some patience and training.

Matt, Listen, and the boys continued their dinner without the chief and the nun. When Mirasol entered to serve them second helpings, the boys suddenly noticed that she was an eejit. The realization caused a stir among the country-raised boys. Matt tried to explain being an eejit - how Mirasol could only obey simple tasks, and how if he told her to eat, but didn't tell her to stop, she would eat until she died. He explained about microchipping and how he wanted to stop the whole thing. He showed them how Mirasol paused and almost smiled while eating caramel custard. Ton-Ton encouraged Matt, telling him that if anyone was able to free the eejits, it was him.

T

hat night, Matt heard Listen awaken with a nightmare. When he reached her he found the boys awake as well as Sor Artemesia. Fiona was in Listen's bedroom, shaking her, accusing her of being possessed by the devil. Despite the efforts of everyone to comfort Listen, she couldn't wake from the night terror. Matt dismissed Fiona back to her dishwashing duties and sent for a doctor.

The doctor, a young Korean man, arrived and confirmed Listen was having a night terror. He advised being patient and allowing her to wake up on her own. A night terror, he told them, came from deep inside and was caused by trauma. The doctor asked if Listen had experienced trauma, and Matt thought of El Bicho.

Nobody else was able to go back to sleep, so Matt fed the boys a midnight snack and took them for a walk outside in the gardens. The boys looked for stars and remembered childhood stories of stars and constellations. They point out the red star - the Scorpion Star. Matt told them it was like a big city inside a bubble.

Everyone grew tired, and before Matt sent the boys back to bed, Ton-Ton mentioned that the eejits' microchips worked together like the parts of a music box.



Analysis

The story progresses with Matt's realization that the world is falling apart around him, and that the drug dealers are closing in on Opium. The reader sees development, however, in that Matt responds well to this pressure, with renewed vigor against the drug trade. The character of Happy Man, Glass Eye's "second", will resurface later in the story. The author gives the reader this short glance at him to remind that there are external conflicts outside of Opium with which Matt will eventually need to deal. Matt takes this passion to do good and throws it into his friends - Ton-Ton, Chacho, and Fidelito. This is a display of doing what you can; Matt is unable to solve the eejit problem on his own, but the good he can do is making a visit worthwhile for the little boys. He prepares Opium with a host of food and entertainments to enrich the boys' experiences.

The conversation with Celia reinforces one of the book's main themes. Cienfuegos struggles because the new doctors and nurses are being microchipped in Paradise-programmed to follow the Patron. This feels like a step back, and Cienfuegos is torn between obeying the system and his conviction that the microchip progress simply isn't right. Celia mentions sacrificing some of one's conviction to take greater leaps forward, a sentiment that the reader sees over and over.

The boys arrive with Sister Artemesia, who represents faith in the story, and also a strict adherence to good. The reader won't hear the message to "compromise" from Sister Artemesia. Most children in this story are some representation of childhood innocence, or loss thereof, and the boys from the factory are no different. They display this constantly in their awe of Ajo and Matt's hacienda, El Patron's wealth and riches; after the initial shock is over, they are almost uncomfortable in it. Through their innocent eyes the reader gets a different view of Mirasol. Through Matt all the reader can see is her beauty, and his own hope of being successful at freeing her and the other eejits, the boys see her as a girl with empty eyes and empty thoughts, yet they don't discount her as less than human. Like a child isn't tainted by racism until it's taught, the factory boys don't discount Mirasol's worth because she's an eejit. Instead they are fascinated by her, and when Matt explains her eating to them, they catch on to Matt's vision of freeing her.

The midnight star gazing is a special part of seeing the boys and their innocence, as they recall stories from their own childhood; the author doesn't fail to point out the Scorpion Star again as a gentle reminder that it is always above Opium, always looking down on the country.

When Listen experiences a night terror the reader is reminded that with all of her knowledge and adult-like ways, she is still a child. Furthermore, because night terrors generally caused by trauma, readers see that her innocence has been compromised by the terror of living with El Bicho.



Discussion Question 1

Why might Ton-Ton working with the music boxes be significant in the future of the novel?

Discussion Question 2

Why is Glass Eye destroying the nearby cities?

Discussion Question 3

Why is having the factory boys around good for Matt?

Vocabulary

relent, prancing, evoke, warily, solemnity, bustle



Chapter 30-31

Summary

The next morning, Listen had no memory of her night terror. Matt and Sor Artemesia sat at breakfast, and Artemesia noticed Mirasol. She warned Matt of not letting his pity for Mirasol turn into anything else. Matt asked in frustration why everyone thought he was a monster. "Because you're El Patron reborn." The nun warned him that power corrupted stronger people than him. He had his own clone. El Patron, she reminded him, was tempted to live forever and have all he wanted, and he ended up killing thousands to get what he wanted. Matt thought for a long moment: he saw how afraid Artemesia was. He could have easily had the nun killed. Instead, he told her he wasn't angry, and that he would heed her cautions.

It was the day of the party. Matt had to keep the boys away from the house while the preparations were happening. He showed the boys the horses in the stable and took them for a long drive in Hitler's car. They passed a Farm Patrolman leading a group of eejits. The boys were stunned at the eejits' lack of response to the car or the heat or anything. The group stopped near the oasis that Tam Lin used to take Matt to. The boys enjoyed the beautiful setting, and they all had a picnic.

They talk briefly about Tam Lin. Because El Patron had ordered him to attend the funeral, Tam Lin couldn't disobey because of his microchip. However, Daft Donald had not been ordered to come or drink the wine, so Tam Lin was able to save Daft Donald by warning him about the wine. The realization that Tam Lin hadn't actually committed suicide made Matt sad. He started sobbing, and the boys gathered around to try to comfort him. Their attempts at comfort devolved into laughing and crude jokes, and they succeeded.

In chapter 31, it was time for the party. Matt thought about how different his party was from El Patron's parties, which would have hosted drug lords and dignitaries. First was the soccer game, followed by the circus performers. Listen left for a nap, but returned in time for the rodeo. The wrestling match came after that. The boys were overjoyed at the events. When the sun started its descent, they feasted on ribs and tamales and crabs. After dinner they enjoyed classical guitar music. The show was a great success and afterwards the remaining spectators went on a tour of the guitar factory. Eusebio the guitar artist was there, working. The musicians recognized him as a long-lost famous musician - Orozco.

When Chacho entered the factory he recognized Eusebio as his father. The realization caused a stir; the musicians were disgusted that Matt had Mexico's most famous guitarist housed as an eejit, and Chacho was angry and upset. He refused to leave his father's side; Cienfuegos had a bed set up for him in the factory.



Mr. Ortega played guitar music just for a moment - long enough to 'wake up' Eusebio. For that moment, the man came to his senses and recognized his son. But Mr. Ortega cautioned Chacho that if they did that to him again he might die. For an eejit to undergo such confusion was bad for them.

Matt offered to bring Chacho back to the house, promising they could visit his father every day. The boy told Matt to go away, that he didn't need any of Matt's fancy stuff. Matt was hurt and bewildered and how his plans had gone so wrong.

Analysis

Chapter 30 opens with a stern and bold warning from Sor Artemesia. She verbalizes the struggle Matt has felt throughout the story: he is El Patron in the flesh, and El Patron was an evil man that killed thousands of people to get what he wanted. She points out that he started out wanting to do a good thing by organizing the party for the boys; but it had turned into a huge display of wealth, with all types of entertainers coming from all over to do Matt's bidding. She warns that power corrupts, and that it has succeeded in corrupting people stronger than Matt. For a moment in the balance the reader sees Matt struggle with this exact reality; as El Patron, he could easily have the nun killed for speaking against him in any way. The thought is silent, without even El Patron's voice to goad him. The reader triumphs with Matt as he decides to listen to the nun's warnings, and stamp out his anger.

Matt and Daft Donald take the boys for a drive, and the reader is reintroduced to one of the main symbols for peace and focus for Matt - "Tam Lin's oasis." This is the place where his former bodyguard, the now dead Tam Lin, took him camping when he was a boy. It is a place of beauty where all who visit it tend to feel a breath of relief and freedom from pressures. The oasis will help Matt remember who is really is - Matt, not El Patron - and will help him find wisdom when he needs it.

The party is mostly a success; Matt muses that El Patron's parties would have been populated by drug dealers and their bodyguards, rather than children's entertainment. This is a positive step in Opium's development.

However, next the reader sees the sacrifice that is made for Opium to be great. Matt's guitar maker, the eejit named Eusebio Orozco, is found to be Chacho's long lost father. Of course, Eusebio doesn't recognize his son or have any idea what is going on around him. Matt's momentary triumph deflates at Chacho's sadness and frustration at what has become of his father. Even though Matt didn't actually make Eusebio an eejit, Matt represents the power that did, and for a time, Chacho is angry. The author uses this occurrence to add to the pressure Matt feels to free the eejits, because now it's even more personal.



Discussion Question 1

What is some evidence that El Patron's power was corrupting Matt, as Sor Artemesia said?

Discussion Question 2

How was Daft Donald saved from drinking El Patron's poison wine?

Discussion Question 3

Did Matt have a reason to feel bad about Chacho seeing that his father is an eejit?

Vocabulary

frail, predicted, shimmer, shrill, fragile, desolation, compulsion, inventive, welter, trophy



Chapter 32-33

Summary

The day after the party, Chacho was still staying with his father in the guitar factory. Sor Artemesia warned Matt not to wait too long to try to fix the friendship.

Matt went to visit the new doctor that was in Ajo to cure the eejits. Dr. Kim told Matt that he'd been trying to get the microchips out, but he hadn't been successful and he had to kill an eejit. Matt was appalled that the doctor was killing eejits in the process. He warned Dr. Kim firmly that he was to kill no more eejits, only cure them. His voice, when he gave the directive, came out chilling and violent, like El Patron's voice. When Matt left Dr. Kim's office, he heard the patron's voice in his head: "You showed him!"

Dr. Kim had told Matt that Fiona was helping him find eejits to sacrifice, so Matt had Cienfuegos move Fiona away from the hospital to a different job. The doctor had also said that they only used eejits that were 'close to their expiry dates.' He asked Cienfuegos about the expiry dates.

Cienfuegos explained that before Matt started feeding them better, eejits only lasted about six months. An eejit's expiry date was tattooed on the bottom of their foot. If an eejit had few microchips, their life would last longer. Matt and Cienfuegos went for a horseback lesson in the fields, and when Matt saw the fields of eejit workers, he calculated how many people had died for his empire. The number was more than two hundred thousand. The living eejits stayed in putrid pens.

Matt looked across Opium and thought about the polluted places, and about how what used to be the Colorado River was dried up. The world was God's Ashtray, polluted and worn out. He walked the horse into the hills and left him there so he could walk. He walked to the oasis, and told his dead friend what had been going on in Opium. He was telling Tam Lin that he sometimes heard the old man's voice in his head, and suddenly he heard Tam Lin's voice: "Not here," the voice said. Matt was startled, and then it said, "Heed the high cliffs, lad. They keep things out."

In chapter 33, Matt was at dinner with Mirasol because everyone else was at the guitar factory. He told her all about the problems with the boys, even though she couldn't hear or understand. After dinner he asked Mirasol to take off her shoes so he could look at her expiry date. It was three months past. Although she looked healthy, Matt was afraid she could die at any time. He thought of the ways he had seen her 'wake up,' then remembered that music had worked for Eusebio. Mirasol followed Matt into the music room; he played a dance song and she reached for his hand. Mirasol began to dance the steps of the song. When the song was over, she dropped to the floor like a puppet. Matt kissed her, and then commanded her to wake up, and she did.



The next day Matt watched the holoport and talked to Dr. Rivas. The doctor said they needed more equipment. People were calling for their drugs, and Matt didn't want to talk to them. Ton-Ton and Fidelito told Matt that Chacho was still sad about Eusebio, and that Matt should go talk to him. Weeks went by with little variation in Matt's routine. Cienfuegos went to see the Mushroom Master every week. Matt spoke to Maria a few times in the holoport. The doctors made no progress with the eejits. Slowly, he allowed some of the opium to be traded out of the country. In this slow and steady way, summer left and fall arrived.

Every so often, Matt danced with Mirasol. He only kissed her two more times. One day, six months after her expiry date, Listen caught him in the music room with Mirasol. Listen asked what Matt was doing and he told her he was trying to wake up her mind. The girl was very observant and had noticed Mirasol. They discussed how Dr. Rivas had made people 'brainless' - eejits like Mirasol, clones like Mbongeni. In the conversation, Listen mentioned "the other Mbongeni". Matt pried, learning that there had been another clone for Glass Eye, and that Listen had lost this friend when he was sacrificed for the drug lord. The little girl was upset; Matt comforted her and took her horseback riding to take her mind off the bad memory.

Analysis

Matt's development takes another dip when he meets Dr. Kim. He allows the angry, cruel side from El Patron to show as he threatens the doctor with his life if he sacrifices any more eejits. The reader can tell that this happened because soon after, El Patron's voice congratulates Matt on his triumph over Dr. Kim. This conversation leads to another, in which Cienfuegos mentions that before Matt, eejits were treated so poorly they actually "expired" in six months. This fact is more evidence about how little El Patron valued human life, and how the eejits aren't actually considered human. They are stamped like an animal or a product. Matt's conversation with Listen about how Dr. Rivas viewed eejits and clones - "brainless" - further demonstrates this opinion.

The ecology theme is carried through as Cienfuegos shows Matt where the eejits are "stored". The pens are filthy and leak pollution into a nearby stream. The state of the world is a further external pressure on Matt that he feels responsible to fix.

He returns to the oasis to talk to Tam Lin, except this time, Tam Lin responds to him. He tells him that the voice of the old man couldn't get through in the oasis. Tam Lin's statement is foreshadowing, as the author will reveal further information about the cliffs and Tam Lin. For now, Matt feels the comfort of his old friend's voice and the release of confessing everything that had been going on.

Mirasol, with all of her beauty and quiet presence, is a symbol for Matt's quest to cure the eejits. Every small victory he has with her provides more conviction to see his promise through. Watching her dance of her own accord, being "awake" with the music, shows this. He is so moved by the experience, he kisses her at the end. Later in the chapter, Listen watches the process of Mirasol dancing and waking up. As Matt warns



Listen never to play music for Mirasol without him, the author reminds the readers what happens to eejits with too many attempts to "wake them up."

Discussion Question 1

Why does music have such an affect on eejits like Mirasol and Eusebio?

Discussion Question 2

Why is Matt so reluctant to try to restore his friendship with Chacho?

Discussion Question 3

What is the significance of the phrase "God's Ashtray"?

Vocabulary

orientation, immunization, restrained, homogenize, exquisite, layman, verification, neutralize, fetid, miasma, putrification, illusion



Chapter 34-35

Summary

Matt took Listen for the horseback ride, and found himself near the guitar factory. He noted to himself that when he was feeling cruel, he did several cruel things. Likewise, when he was feeling generous, he did several kind or generous things. From the guitar factory they could overhear children singing a Christmas hymn. Listen asked who they were singing about and Matt told her: Jesus. Listen assumed he meant the 'saint', Jesus Malverde. When Matt corrected her Listen stated again how Dr. Rivas said religion was false.

In the factory, it was awkward for a time, but Matt asked Chacho to visit him at the house. When they arrived at the house, Ton-Ton was taking apart a music box in the kitchen. Celia shooed them out so she could cook, and the boys all wander into the other rooms of the hacienda. Ton-Ton mentioned that the parts of the music box worked like the microchips in the eejits' brains.

Matt took the boys to the greenhouses. They discovered a new greenhouse Matt hadn't seen; one where Cienfuegos had been busy growing mushrooms. The Mushroom Master himself was there with Cienfuegos, admiring their work. Cienfuegos told Matt how the mushrooms would clean the soil and the eejit pens. Matt and the Mushroom Master discussed the civilization in the biosphere: the Dormancy period, the Brat Enclosure. The people of the biosphere created their own type of civilization apart from the rest of the world. Nobody in the biosphere understood they were imprisoned there. The Mushroom Master proclaimed that it was useful for him to leave his home because the rest of the world needed his help.

For a moment, Matt was annoyed that all of this had carried on without his knowledge; then he considered how El Patron had run the country like a vicious machine and fed on people's freedom, and the addictions and needs of the surrounding countries. In El Patron's empire, people didn't marry or have children or families. Matt decided it was okay to surrender power.

At the beginning of chapter 35, Chacho was depressed that his father couldn't leave the guitar factory. Mr. Ortega had told him that eejits needed to keep to their routines or they would get upset. Listen talked Matt into letting her watch Mirasol dance. They watch her in fascination, Mirasol dancing from memory with an unseen partner. Matt unthinkingly told Listen that Mirasol was 'past her expiry date,' and found he had to describe that concept to the little girl. She checked her own feet and found she had no expiry date. Listen asked to see Matt's foot; when she looked closely she found a date on his foot—the date of his 13th birthday. Matt was more than fifteen, and he wasn't microchipped, so what could the date mean?



They went for a horseback ride; when they reached the guitar factory, Listen wanted to go inside, but Matt didn't. He let her go inside and he rode further. People waved to him and shouted his name as he rode by; he pictured himself as the old Patron and thought of the ugly empire the old man had created. He wondered if he was somehow programmed to become just like El Patron. Driven by anger and frustration, Matt purposefully rode to the polluted pits where the eejit waste was dumped; he was certain it would result in an asthma attack but he didn't care.

As he walked he thought of the things he could do, that microchipped people could not: he could leave Opium, he could love... but what of the voice in his head? Celia and Cienfuegos had both said Matt was just like El Patron, back from the dead. Matt vowed to be different from the Patron. To not follow in the old man's footsteps. He walked on towards the polluted pits, which were covered in plastic sheeting to grow the soil-cleaning mushrooms.

The horse led Matt to the oasis, his special camping place. He watched the birds and considered how peaceful the spot was. It was surrounded on three sides by tall cliffs, and the fourth side was the lake. Tam Lin had once told him that the rocks kept things out; that it was the only place in Opium he felt free.

Analysis

Matt does a lot of soul-searching in these chapters. The author is cementing Matt's development towards goodness in preparation for the rising action to come. He thinks about how he acts like El Patron, how he has the choice between acting good or cruel and how each choice seems to snowball into similar choices. These thoughts are juxtaposed with the singing of hymns sounding from the guitar factory; like Jesus Malverde, Matt has a lot of people placing their faith in them to do good. But unlike a false, drug dealer saint, Matt is real and has the choice to use his newfound power to do good things. His conversation with the Mushroom Master is a reminder; people need him to do hard things that will be helpful. Matt experiences the moment, like with Sor Artemesia, when he is angry that Cienfuegos has carried on the mushroom project without his knowledge. The things he remembers are variations on the novel's main themes: El Patron trampled on untold numbers of people to build his empire, sucking up their freedom and ruining the surrounding nations with his drugs. The mushroom project is good and will help people; Matt decides that giving up a measure of power for good things is a worthwhile sacrifice. The reader sees Matt mature with each small challenge.

There are further developments with the eejits. The author reminds the reader again that eejits get agitated when taken out of their routine: Chacho can't take Eusebio out of the guitar factory, and Matt shouldn't let Mirasol dance.

After a long conversation with Listen about expiry dates, Matt is driven out for another horseback ride with the little girl. He experiences more internal struggle on whether or not he is destined to be exactly like El Patron. Like Cienfuegos, is he programmed to be cruel like the Patron, or does he have a choice? This is an expansion on the author's



Nature vs. Nurture theme. Matt considers all of things he can do that microchipped people cannot. He decides that he will be better than the Patron through the sheer force of his will. The horse leads him to the oasis, which always symbolizes a return to freedom and peace.

Discussion Question 1

Describe Matt's feelings about Cienfuegos and the Mushroom Master.

Discussion Question 2

How is Opium similar to the Biosphere?

Discussion Question 3

What is the significance of the date on Matt's foot?

Vocabulary

afterthought, frenzy, squelched, enclosure, grubby, parasite, surplus, photosensitive, noxious, suffocating, communal, expendable



Chapter 36-37

Summary

Matt was coming home through the poppy fields when he saw Cienfuegos rushing towards him on horseback. Mirasol had 'gone rogue,' meaning she had been pushed too hard to 'wake up', and had ceased to function. When they arrived at the hacienda, the boys told Matt that Listen had started playing music for Mirasol. Listen and Mirasol were in the music room, with records and music boxes littered about. The eejit girl was huddled in the corner, weeping and shouting, "Father! Father!"

Dr. Kim was there to help, and although he offered to sedate Mirasol, he informed Matt that it wouldn't help her in the long run. Matt, Mirasol, Cienfuegos, Sor Artemesia, and Listen load into a hovercraft to fly to the hospital in Paradise. During the flight, Listen told the story to Matt: she took Mirasol into Matt's office with all of the music boxes. When the song "You Are My Sunshine" played, Mirasol started screaming.

Matt was angry with Listen, but Sor Artemesia tried to calm him down. Mirasol's sedative wore off; she sat up in the hovercraft and started hitting Cienfuegos, yelling, "He killed my father!" She couldn't calm down until they applied another sedative.

Cienfuegos admitted that he had killed hundreds of people over the years, and so Mirasol might be correct. A storm was rocking the skies, making flying difficult. Matt left Cienfuegos to fly the craft and went to Listen. He told her that he wasn't angry with her. Listen told him that Mirasol had said her father used to sing "You Are My Sunshine" to her.

When they arrived at the hospital, Matt asked Dr. Rivas what he planned to do to Mirasol. When the doctor replied that he planned to open her brain and pull out the microchips, Matt refused. They conclude that the best option is to do nothing, because Matt didn't wish to have Mirasol harmed. Mirasol was left to sleep, with sedatives to keep her comfortable. Matt sat by her side for a while. At one point she sat up and screamed; her eyes seemed to clear as she looked at Matt. He kissed her and told her he loved her. She responded, "I am called Mirasol," and died.

During chapter 37, Matt was despondent at losing Marisol. Sor Artemesia came into the room and prayed over Mirasol; Matt wished to give Mirasol a Catholic burial and a true funeral. When Cienfuegos appeared to dispose of Mirasol's body, Matt declared that she would be buried in the family mausoleum.

Matt went to the nursery to find Listen. She was lying with Mbongeni in his crib, and was sad to leave him. The baby was trying to say her name. Matt pulled her away and they board the hovercraft to fly back to Ajo. The chief tried to show Matt the sights of former Arizona as they flew home, but Matt was numb to his surroundings. That evening they



had a burial for Mirasol; they produced a highly ornate, carved coffin for her, and she was placed in the Alacran family crypt.

Analysis

All of the author's foreshadowing about keeping the eejits aligned with their daily routines comes around in these chapters. Listen tries too hard to wake Mirasol up and Mirasol's brain can't handle it. For Matt, the loss of Mirasol is complicated. She seemed like his only true friend, she was always by his side, she never questioned his actions or his motives, she was pretty, and what's more, she represented the pressing need to cure the eejit population.

The reader does see Matt deal appropriately with his frustration towards Listen. He is able to tell her that he's not angry at her.

The poignancy in Mirasol's death is that, after months of responding "I am called Waitress," when Matt called her Mirasol, she finally corrects Matt when he calls her Waitress; her last words are, "I am called Mirasol." The reader is left with hope that the girl had some inkling that Matt cared for her.

It is significant that Matt wishes Mirasol to be buried properly and not tossed in an eejit shallow grave. In fact, he requests she is placed in the family crypt along with all of El Patron's descendants. This is wonderfully ironic, that an eejit girl, a symbol of the thousands of lives that El Patron casually tossed aside, is buried alongside him and his family.

Discussion Question 1

Do you think Matt loves Mirasol as he claims to love Maria? How do you think his feelings for each girl compare?

Discussion Question 2

What does Mirasol's death do for the plot of the novel?

Discussion Question 3

Describe the process that caused Mirasol's mind to break down.

Vocabulary

sedative, lethal, infuser, exasperated, monsoon, buffeted, nullify, mutilation, anguish, mausoleum, beckon



Chapter 38-39

Summary

After Mirasol's burial, Matt refused to work in his music room again. He smashed a music box; Ton-Ton had to hide the rest of them. The room was closed and nailed shut, and Matt moved his office to another part of the hacienda. His time was occupied by sending ecological samples to Esperanza, keeping the opium dealers happy, and clearing the new fields that Cienfuegos had fixed with his mushrooms.

One day Cienfuegos told Matt that someone was calling him from the convent. Matt didn't want to answer, because it was probably Esperanza and not Maria, and he had no love left for anyone. He further told Cienfuegos that he wished to be called Don Sombra (Lord Shadow) rather than El Patron. He continued to ignore the holoport calls.

The Farm Patrol was beginning to plant corn instead of opium, but it was difficult to retrain the eejits to harvest the corn. The mushroom experiment was a huge success: formerly polluted soil was growing grass. The waste from the treatment plant was devoured by the Shaggy Mane mushrooms.

One day Matt happened on the Mushroom Man, holding an umbrella. He always carried the umbrella because he was unaccustomed to the large sky and needed to feel covered sometimes. He was so amusing that Matt invited him to dinner at the hacienda. This short conversation seemed to improve Matt's mood, which had been dark since Mirasol's death. He felt guilt for trying too hard to wake her, and for being unable to save her. Realizing he had no picture of Mirasol, he feared he would forget her. He would ask Chacho to draw a picture of her.

That evening the boys, the chief, and the Mushroom Master gathered at the house for a dinner on the veranda. The discussion turned to the Scorpion Star, and what its possible purpose was. Listen and the Mushroom Master discussed space and the stars, the possibility of traveling to the Scorpion Star, and whether there was anything interesting on the other planets.

In chapter 39, Matt and Chacho had patched up their friendship. Matt asked Chacho to paint him a picture of Mirasol. He would hang it next to his painting of Maria. As he gazed at his painting of Maria, he thought of her and how much he missed her. In the holoport room, he found Sor Artemesia there; she accused Matt of neglecting his relationship with Maria. When Maria appeared on the screen, she started to cry. She asked Matt if he had left her for Mirasol. He told her no, that Mirasol had died. Maria told Matt she was sorry; she knew he had wanted to save her. She showed Matt much generosity and sympathy.

Matt asked Maria to join him in Opium. Maria was afraid of her mother; Esperanza was trying to arrange a marriage for her to an older man in the UN. Maria asked Matt to find



her father and sister, to help support her - she still didn't know that they were dead. Matt finally told her what had happened to her father and sister, and Maria was angry at her mother for not telling for the truth. She told Matt to call her again from the Paradise holoport in a few days; by then she would have a plan to escape the convent.

They made plans to fly to Paradise the next day - Matt took Cienfuegos, Listen, Fidelito, Sor Artemesia, and the Mushroom Master. They thought the older man would enjoy seeing a new place.

Analysis

Matt falls into a deep depression after Mirasol's death. He feels that, in failing to save her, he is failing all of the eejits. There is still a desperate need for them to be fixed; it's difficult to plant new crops because they are trained to farm opium. The mushrooms are cleaning the polluted soil and it is ready to grow food, but they don't yet have the manpower. It is the Mushroom Master that finally improves Matt's mood. The character is the picture of the optimism and joy, a foil for Matt, who is regularly plagued by doubt and despair. The dinner at the hacienda with him and the boys is significant because the conversation turns to the Scorpion Star again. A few chapters have passed since the author has mentioned it, but here she reminds the readers that it is still there. Listen and the Mushroom Master discuss how they could travel there, which should be noted because El Patron has a rotation of scientists going up there every few months; it's an aspect of his new empire that Matt doesn't have his hands on, which signifies danger.

In the holoport room, Sor Artemesia criticizes Matt for letting so much time go by without contacting Maria. Matt is afraid of calling for Maria and seeing her mother instead; furthermore, his feelings for Mirasol are so complicated, and his heart still tender after her death, that a conversation with Maria would have added to that emotional stress. However, he contacts her on the holoport and finds her crying. In this story, Maria is the picture of forgiveness and acceptance, and she showers Matt with affection, and sympathy for the loss of Mirasol. She clears away the cobwebs of his feelings by stating that he must feel so badly because he wanted to save her. For Matt, this crystallizes his guilt and he is able to move out of his dark mood.

A few days later, a group takes a hovercraft to Paradise to meet Maria at the holoport there. Cienfuegos is unaccountably tense; his mood foreshadows the growing action coming in the climax of the story.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Matt finally choose a new nickname for himself? What is its significance?

Discussion Question 2

Why do you think Esperanza never told Maria about her father's and sister's deaths?



Discussion Question 3

Why can't the eejits harvest corn?

Vocabulary

embodiment, haze, structure, dwarfing, staggering, revelation, surly, nearsightedly, eccentric, focal, imitation, whirred, alcoves, pasty, scornfully, insolence, bravado, gouged, lurid



Chapter 40-41

Summary

There was an air of tension and fear in the craft, as if the trip to Paradise was bound to be dangerous. When they arrived in Paradise the Mushroom Master asked Matt if he could see the lab where Matt was 'grown.' In the lab, they saw that one of the glass cages was occupied by a cow, walking on a treadmill - a cow that was 'growing' a clone inside.

Matt started to ask "who?" - but Cienfuegos, with a finger over his lips, chattered on about the room and the freezers like there was nothing amiss. The Mushroom man thought everything was amazing - the cow was revered in other cultures, he told Matt. Matt argued that being a clone was not revered in his culture; he showed the man the mark on his foot. Cienfuegos told Matt that his date isn't an 'expiry' date, but a 'best by' date, when the organ transplants would have the best chance of succeeding.

In their look around the labs, they also found the trays of germs from large-scale diseases such as the plague and smallpox.

Once outside, Cienfuegos suggested loudly that they go to visit the observatory. But instead of walking towards the craft to fly them there, they start walking into the woods. Finally, they stopped. The Mushroom man asked if the place really was bugged, and Cienfuegos confirmed that it was. Matt asked who Dr. Rivas was probably growing in the cow; the chief thought it was his son, and that Dr. Rivas planned to do a brain transplant from the clone to his actual son, the eejit.

The Mushroom Master mentioned that Ton-Ton, in his looking at the music boxes, thought that the eejits' microchips were controlled by an outside energy source. It was a good theory. The men all looked at the landscape with the observatory, which was built for the purpose of watching the Scorpion Star. They wondered if the Scorpion Star was the outside energy source that controlled the eejits.

In chapter 41, they made their way to the observatory, where Dr. Angel Rivas greeted them cordially. She clearly disliked Cienfuegos, and thought the Mushroom man was just an eccentric old fellow. A technician found them and showed them the tube that made up the base of the massive telescope. It ran a thousand feet underground, and had to be constantly monitored. And because the tube was absorbing the sun's rays, the trip underground was uncomfortably hot. Cienfuegos suggested they take the trip to the bottom of the shaft, but Matt was afraid. The chief goaded him into standing up to his fear.

The elevator took them down underground, many hot minutes of descent. They walked out and saw a concrete pad and tubes running up the walls. On the far end of the chamber was a red light illuminating the door in the wall. It was in the shape of a



scorpion. The old man nearly touched it, but Cienfuegos yelled for him to stop. He guessed it probably required the Patron's handprint and didn't want the man to get hurt. They considered having Matt open it, but he was afraid it would be something dangerous.

Analysis

There is mounting tension in these chapters, which is evident in Cienfuegos's demeanor in the hovercraft. The three men are protective of what they say in front of Dr. Rivas, and are careful to avoid having any important conversation in any of the labs. Dr. Rivas's main priority is revealed in the clone growing in the cow - he wants to save his son. The reader can sympathize with Dr. Rivas's wish to fix his son, but must wonder what to what lengths he is willing to go to achieve this.

The author finally reveals that the Scorpion Star possibly is connected to the eejit control - there have been hints dropped throughout, with Ton-Ton mentioning that mechanical parts fit together like microchips. The visit to the observatory is characterized by tension and foreboding, with the characters sneaking around and trying to snoop without being caught. They find the long tube into the earth, which has a long, shaky, hot elevator ride. Cienfuegos basically has to goad Matt into getting on the elevator. The author surrounds this journey with discomfort, fear, and a claustrophobic feeling of being pressed in; this is the part of the story where all of Matt's external pressures will come to rest on his shoulders and require action. It will feel hot and uncomfortable, like the elevator ride into the underground chamber.

The chamber reveals a large wall with a door; on the door is a glowing red scorpion. The scorpion is El Patron's symbol, so the reader knows that this button will do something significant and probably insidious. Indeed, the Mushroom man rushes at it and nearly presses it, but Cienfuegos stops him. The reader will have to wait to see what it does; Matt isn't ready to open the door just yet. This creates more suspense for the reader.

Discussion Question 1

The Mushroom Master mentions that cows are revered in other cultures. How does that relate to the cow's usefulness in Dr. Rivas's lab?

Discussion Question 2

Why is the Scorpion Star a reasonable assumption for the source of eejit control?

Discussion Question 3

Why do you think Dr. Rivas has germs for plague and smallpox stored in his lab?



Vocabulary

embodiment, haze, structure, dwarfing, staggering, revelation, surly, nearsightedly, eccentric, focal, imitation, whirred, alcoves, pasty, scornfully, insolence, bravado, gouged, lurid



Chapter 42-43

Summary

They ate lunch outside under the grape arbor. The young kids quarreled and the adults seemed tense. After lunch Matt went to the holoport to talk to Maria, taking Cienfuegos with him. When the screen focused on the convent, Matt could see a UN peacekeeper in battle dress, with riot gear and a helmet. The soldier immediately hurled himself into the wormhole. Cienfuegos screamed to close the portal, that it was certainly a suicide bomber, but Matt wouldn't do it. The chief was sure that it was a killer sent from Esperanza. The old man's voice whispered to Matt, "wait and see."

The body was covered with ice. It was Maria. Matt and the chief quickly found drying and heating elements to warm her body. She wasn't breathing until Matt forced air into her lungs. They carried her to a hospital. Doctors helped her breathe again and warm up, but she wouldn't wake, and the doctors didn't know when she would.

The doctors said her brain activity was good, just that she was in a deep sleep. Matt spoke to her while she slept and told her of his troubles. He didn't eat or sleep himself. Finally, Matt dozed off in the hospital room. When he awoke he saw Dr. Rivas standing over Maria with a syringe in his hand. Matt asked what the syringe was, and the doctor replied that it was a stimulant. Matt leapt forward and knocked the syringe out of his hands. The doctor promised he wasn't trying to harm her; as Matt responded, they men saw Maria stir in her bed. The argument forgotten, Matt rushed to her bedside and watched her try to wake up. The doctor slipped out of the room.

In chapter 43, Matt rushed around the hospital trying to find someone to help Maria. He saw Sor Artemesia, who informed him that Dr. Rivas was acting strangely- destroying equipment and yelling at other doctors. She told Matt that he had gone mad at the lab and killed an eejit. During this conversation about the doctor, Maria opened her eyes and started talking. She seemed completely fine, and Matt wondered if Dr. Rivas had actually been planning to help her.

The nun and Matt were trying to help Maria from the bed when they heard machine gun fire and hovercrafts overhead. It came from the observatory. The hallway of the hospital was deserted. The nun formed Matt that she had already sent Fidelito to a hiding place, but Listen wouldn't leave the nursery. They should get Maria away as soon as possible.

They moved slowly out of the hospital because Maria was so weak; she didn't have a grasp on what was going on. After a long walk through woods filled with wildlife, they came upon the chapel of Jesus Malverde. It was a large building with storerooms and a kitchen. Sor Artemesia had filled the kitchen with food and water, and sleeping bags for beds.



It was time for Matt to go back and investigate what was happening, although he didn't want to. He told the women he was tired of fixing El Patron's awful mess of drugs and eejits. Maria reminded him that if he could free the eejits, he would have an army of thinking people to help him against the evil. Sor Artemesia brought up the Scorpion Star again as a possible source of the eejit microchip, and that he had to destroy it.

Analysis

The tension continues in the following chapters. Dr. Rivas joins them for lunch and nobody is easy. The author is laying the mood for what is coming. At the holoport, the author's warnings about the holoport are borne out when Maria hurls herself into the wormhole and comes through unconscious. For several pages the reader wonders if Matt is going to lose Maria as well as Mirasol, and what that would do to him at this, the climax of the novel. But Maria's brain function seems good. Dr. Rivas's presence in her room is a mystery; although the doctor has been suspect to this point in the story, he has yet to show himself as evil as much as overwhelmed and confused. This is taken with one of the novel's main themes of good and evil coexisting in a person. One wonders if he was actually planning to hurt her. In the next scene, Dr. Rivas has lost control, which allows the reader to believe he is just a man under too much pressure.

The promise of action is kept with machine gun fire and hovercrafts over Opium. It is significant that Sor Artemesia has been somehow prepared for this eventuality, and has sequestered her flock in Jesus Malverde's chapel. Although the nun is a staunch Catholic, she will take the muddled saint's chapel and protection over Maria and Fidelito. The novel uses the nun as a picture of wisdom; she always has words for Matt that cut through the mire of emotions and don't spare his feelings. In the end of these chapters Matt has a small breakdown, finally tiring of the pressure and wishing he could hide in the woods with the women rather than engage in whatever is happening back at the hospital. Sor Artemesia dismisses Matt's pleas for rest and commands him to go fix his empire.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think the old man's voice told Matt to "wait and see" when the soldier hurled himself into the portal?

Discussion Question 2

What do you think Dr. Rivas was going to do to Maria?

Discussion Question 3

Compare and contrast Maria's coma with Mirasol's.

Vocabulary

agitated, uneasy, brooded, drivel, undercurrent, agonizing, directive, circulation, revolted, trancelike, deserted, functioning, stimulant, ventured



Chapters 44-46

Summary

Matt crept through the gardens of Paradise. He came to the holoport room, intending to call Esperanza and ask her about the Scorpion Star. However, he unexpectedly found El Bicho/the bug, sitting in front of the screen. The little boy's hand had basically melted from trying to use the holoport screen. Dr. Rivas had told him to go and open the holoport screen, promising a trip to the Scorpion Star in return. With the boy's hand being too small for the scanner to fully recognize, it melted his hand in the process.

The lockdown had been changed; that the entire country was open. Matt closed the borders immediately. Leaving the boy in the holoport room, he fled the hospital. The old man's voice whispered to him all along. Inside the main hospital he saw a line of nurses and doctors dressed in white scrubs, masked and gloved. The door of the operating room opened, and they went inside. Matt followed and was immediately captured by an African man in military dress. They exploded beads of tranquilizer gas that made him fall asleep.

In chapter 45, Matt woke up in a hospital room. Listen was in the room with him, along with two guards. Listen informed Matt that the two guards were Russian and didn't understand much. Dr. Rivas had said in her hearing that the border had already closed again before more troops could enter the country. The guards sat and talked in their language, eating and smoking.

The guards were from Glass Eye, and he needed an eye replacement from baby Mbongeni. To pass the time, Matt told Listen the story as Samson from the Bible. Eventually night came and they all fell asleep. A few days passed in this manner. Matt and Listen sat in the room with the two Russian guards and nearly went crazy. They were treated well, but had no idea when they would be freed.

A knock came on the door in the beginning of chapter 46. It was an African man dressed like a military general, who ordered the Russian guards around with obvious authority. He took them out of their room and down the hall. Listen asked him if he was African. Matt recognized the man as Happy Man Hikwa, the drug addict that was occupying the city in Cocaine.

They entered the hospital room where Glass Eye waited. He was enormous, and terrifying, covered in wrinkly gray skin and scars. His eyes were covered in dark glasses. Dr. Rivas was also in the room, as well as a few soldiers and nurses. Glass Eye asked for Matt to come closer so he could look at him. He wasn't impressed with Matt and called him a boy.

Dr. Rivas told Glass Eye that Matt still had loyal men in Ajo; he addressed Glass Eye as 'patron.' Listen asked where Mbongeni was, not understanding that he'd been killed for



his eyes. Glass Eye began a conversation with the little girl about his former wife, after whom Listen was cloned. He was amused by the little girl and proclaimed her as cheeky as the original. She asked why his eyes didn't blink and he told her that they were mostly machines, made by Dr. Rivas. His body wasn't working as well as it should, he told her, but he would be in perfect shape soon enough.

The doctor stated that Glass Eye needed rest, and ordered Matt and Listen back to their room. As they left Glass Eye told Matt that he wished the borders open the next day.

Analysis

The questions and mysteries set forth throughout the novel are answered in these chapters. The boy, El Bicho, is used by Dr. Rivas to open the holoport and open the borders to allow the guns and hovercrafts into Opium. The reader feels sympathy for the boy because Dr. Rivas promised him a trip to the Scorpion Star if he would do this thing. The reader begins to discern that Dr. Rivas may be more than just addled and under pressure; he may actually be cunning and insidious. For his trust, the boy's hand is melted by the scanner. El Bicho is all that has gone wrong with the cloning process, and his ruined hand is evidence of this. When Matt is captured by an African man, the reader is given a glimpse as to who might be behind this attack, who Dr. Rivas might be working with.

When they are imprisoned in the hospital room, Matt tells Listen the story of Samson from the Bible. In the story, Samson sacrifices himself to destroy his enemies. The reader wonders if the author is foreshadowing who or what might be sacrificed in the service of good.

They are brought before Glass Eye. He is hideous inside and out. Matt learns that Dr. Rivas has given Glass Eye new eyes, and the reader can infer that Mbongeni was sacrificed for his eyes. Like most children in this novel, Mbongeni was a symbol of innocence, and he is killed. Matt experiences a similar metaphorical death; he has had to shed his childhood and become a man in order to effectively run his country. Dr. Rivas attends Glass Eye in the room; he calls him 'patron' and the reader sees just how deep the doctor's betrayal goes. The reader may wonder what value Listen is to this scene; she talks to Glass Eye about Africa, and he is delighted with her, proclaiming that she is very 'similar to her original', and that he'll allow her to live so he can marry her later. Her purpose in being there will be evident in the following chapters. Finally, the author gives readers a hint; Glass Eye proclaims that his body isn't working well and needs rest. His eyes are machines that buzz and whir, and he needs to get used to them.

He leaves Matt with a threat - the next day he will expect Matt to open the borders. His words are simple, but the writing is chilling, and the reader is left wondering how Matt will get out of this.



Discussion Question 1

What is some evidence that Dr. Rivas was bad from the very beginning?

Discussion Question 2

Do you think El Bicho's experience will help him to calm his temper and think through his actions?

Discussion Question 3

Is El Patron's voice helpful to Matt in these scenes?

Vocabulary

stealthily, fluttered, instinctive, rally, tranquilizer, jabbering, erratically, ajar, abject, cheeky, terminate, artificial



Chapters 47-48

Summary

As they were escorted back to their room and their Russian guards, Listen asked Matt why Dr. Rivas called Glass Eye 'patron.' Matt explained to her that Glass Eye was trying to take over the country. Matt was the only one who could do it, and he was fairly sure Glass Eye would find a way to torture him into compliance. Once in their room, Listen lost her composure and began to cry in fear of the people they love that were gone or missing. The Russian soldier agreed, 'Glass Eye bad.' Matt helped calm her by telling her stories.

The next morning Dr. Rivas showed up and took Matt and Listen to the nursery. Once outside they saw that the part of the lab with the freezers was burning. All of the samples of deadly diseases were destroyed. When they reached the nursery, Listen asked where Mbongeni was and Dr. Rivas told her. The little girl was upset because the doctor had promised not to hurt the baby. He told her that lucky for her, Glass Eye didn't want Listen to be used for parts; he wanted her to grow up to become his wife. And although Listen had said all along that she wanted to be a drug queen, she was livid with the doctor.

The doctor started acting less and less sane; he told Matt that Happy Man was killing animals, and that soon the Africans would control the entire Dope Confederacy. He said it was worth it to see Matt suffer, because he was El Patron. Matt was, the doctor said, the most perfect copy of El Patron he'd ever made.

They were interrupted by soldiers. Glass Eye had suffered a relapse, and needed the border opened right away. Matt tried to injure his hand so it wouldn't work on the scanner, but the soldiers got to him in time. As they marched him toward out of the nursery, Matt told Dr. Rivas he would rather die than betray Opium. Dr. Rivas replied that Listen would suffer, not Matt.

In the beginning of chapter 48, El Patron's voice spoke to Matt: You're in a fine mess, aren't you?

Glass Eye's hospital room was a wreck. Things were broken and out of place, soldiers were cowering in corners, nurses were crying, and Glass Eye was swaying about with his fists raised. He ordered Matt to open the border; Matt refused. The drug lord roared at Matt, and Listen came between them, ordering the big man to leave Matt alone. Glass Eye told Listen the story of how he killed her 'original'. The little girl told Glass Eye that The Bug was always breaking things, too. Glass Eye didn't know who The Bug was, and so Dr. Rivas hastily said he was a dead clone. But Listen said no, The Bug was alive and running around, opening all kinds of secret doors full of gold and treasure.



Dr. Rivas did not want Listen to tell Glass Eye that information; he tried to intervene, but Listen continued: there was a big room at the base of the telescope in the observatory, filled with treasure. Glass Eye stared at Dr. Rivas in anger, and then struck him so hard he fell against the wall and didn't move again.

Happy Man limped in at that moment supported by an eejit. He reported to Glass Eye that they lost most of their men in the woods. He'd found an eejit to help him get away.

Glass Eye and Happy Man were both injured and running out of guards. They ordered Matt once again to open the border. Once again, he refused. Glass Eye lifted Listen by the throat. Matt thought for a long moment, and decided he wouldn't open the border. He would let Glass Eye kill him, but with the border closed, they couldn't escape or let more soldiers in. Opium, he hoped, would survive without him.

And then, Matt remembered what the old man's voice had whispered to him: "Just because you don't have weapons doesn't mean you're not armed." He felt the flashlight in his pocket, and shined the highest beam on Glass Eye's face. The drug lord dropped Listen; his body seemed to shake and break down. The light temporarily blinded Matt as well, but a hand grabbed him and pulled him out the door. He ran as much as he could. When his vision came back he saw the eejit carrying Listen. The eejit was Cienfuegos. "Nobody notices eejits," he said.

Analysis

The reader finds Matt coming to grips with what has happened, and what he may be facing. Like Samson, who allowed himself to die to destroy his enemies, Matt is asking himself how much torture he can take from Glass Eye before he would be willing to open the border. When the doctor takes Matt and Listen to the nursery, Matt sees the doctor's betrayal is complete and thorough. He shows no remorse that Mbongeni is dead - to answer the author's question of "how much sacrifice is worthwhile in the service of good", the doctor sees no problem with sacrificing the baby to see his goals realized. However, the reader also sees that the closer Dr. Rivas gets to seeing his plans come to fruition, the less sane are his mannerisms. The strain of his life, his duplicity, the things he has done, are starting to unravel him.

Happy Man is killing animals out in the wild; because one of the author's themes is ecological protection, she adds this affront to the list of the bad things that are happening that day.

When they reach Glass Eye's hospital room, he has also gone a little bit crazy; as if the author is showing the reader that it takes a lot of energy to hold an evil plan together, and the novel's antagonists are losing their grip. This is further evidenced in his hastily killing Dr. Rivas when he finds out about El Bicho's existence. When Happy Man enters the room to report that most of their guards were dead, the moment of decision for Matt arrives with him. He decides that he will die in the service of Opium. He will refuse to open the border; he will sacrifice himself for the service of good. The author has asked



this question in so many different ways throughout the novel, and her main character answers that it is worth his life to do good.

The question of why Listen is there is also answered here, as the author uses her as an appeal to Matt. Glass Eye picks her up around the neck and threatens her life instead of Matt's, and the question changes. Matt is very willing to sacrifice his life, but is he willing to let the little girl die? Luckily he doesn't have to answer that; the voice of El Patron reminds him of Tam Lin's high-powered flashlight in his pocket. The flashlight has barely been mentioned in the novel; yet this smallest of weapons allows Matt to free Listen and cripple Glass Eye long enough to escape the room. Cienfuegos is there, posing as the eejit that helped Happy Man to the hospital from the battle outside. Nobody noticed him because eejits so easily escape notice - this statement refers back to the author's constant question of the eejits's humanity.

Discussion Question 1

Dr. Rivas says that “a clone isn’t a person. It’s just a collection of cells.” Do “real people” have something that clones don’t?

Discussion Question 2

With Cienfuegos’s words, “Nobody notices eejits,” what message do you think the author is trying to send?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Dr. Rivas blame Matt for all of his hardships?

Vocabulary

vigorously, optimism, consciously, relapse, stoically, swaying, shambling, convulse, dazzled



Chapter 49-50

Summary

Moving once again like an eejit, Cienfuegos led Matt into the gardens. They head towards the observatory. Along the way, Cienfuegos told Matt that everyone in the chapel, including The Bug, was alive and safe. With no hovercrafts in which they could fly to the observatory, they realize there is a long, hot walk, and they also have Listen. Cienfuegos wandered off the path and found a small building. They put Listen down to sleep and found water to drink. While Listen rested, they discussed Glass Eye and Dr. Rivas and what had happened since they last saw each other.

As darkness fell, Matt and Cienfuegos discussed their next step. They planned to walk to the observatory under cover of dark and head for the room at the base of the telescope. They found a map of the Scorpion Star, and Cienfuegos took it to show the Mushroom Master. It had several words written on it - Matt noticed 'couple' and

'uncouple.'

At the beginning of chapter 50, Matt, Listen, and Cienfuegos left their hiding place for the observatory. In the observatory they found much business as usual.

As before, the elevator ride was hot. When the elevator landed at the bottom, they stepped out into the same room as before - the wide concrete circle with the massive metal door. They could see Dr. Angel Rivas and Dr. Marcos Rivas with a long line of eejits. Happy Man was there as well, with several armed soldiers. They were trying to open a door, sacrificing eejits one by one to make them try. The door electrocuted each eejit as they put their hands on the door.

The next eejit lined up. Cienfuegos pulled his stun gun and shot Happy Man. He commanded Listen and Matt to run for the elevator, but it had disappeared. They tried to climb the fence, but the soldiers noticed them and began to shoot. Cienfuegos managed to take a few soldiers out before he is shot several times. They soldiers were about to shoot Matt and Listen when Dr. Angel stopped them. She recognized Matt as the only one who could actually open the door.

Dr. Rivas's children were planning to raid the treasure room and take over Opium themselves. She told Matt that his flashlight beam actually killed Glass Eye. Dr. Angel told Matt that they wanted to use eejits to break into the room, but since Matt had closed the border and started treating the eejits well, there were less eejits available. She called him 'Matt' instead of 'patron' and promised to take over the country.

Matt put his hand on the scorpion symbol on the door. It opened, revealing a dark hallway filled with gold coins. Several soldiers made their way in to explore. There was a wall of statues of Mayan warriors. Dr. Angel and Dr. Marcos rushed down the hallway, where more treasures were stored. Art, amber, diamonds. On the wall there was a metal



diagram, similar to the one Cienfuegos had taken from the hiding room the day before. Matt remembered the words written on the diagram: 'couple' and 'uncouple.' Beneath the diagram there were two glowing scorpions below the words 'couple' and 'uncouple.' Matt pressed his hand to the scorpion that read 'uncouple.' He left the room and closed the door behind him.

Analysis

Matt and the reader are relieved to see Ceinfuegos alive and well. The two plan their raid on the secret door in the observatory. The map to the Scorpion Star is key and gives the reader an idea of what is coming- the words 'couple' and 'uncouple' are highlighted for the reader to see.

The room at the bottom of the observatory, as before, is tense and hot and uncomfortable, except now there is the added stress of the Rivas children, Happy Man, and a host of soldiers. The author displays the ultimate evil in these characters; they have dozens of eejits there to try to open the secret door. Each one that tries is electrocuted and killed; furthermore, when Angel Rivas finds Matt, she callously comments that because Matt stopped the process of the Farm Patrol making new eejits, they had less to use in their nefarious pursuits. This comment highlights the callous and cruel nature of her personality.

Like Samson, Cienfuegos is shot several times in his attempt to protect Matt and Listen. This action just increases the tension of the scene; Cienfuegos has proven to be an honorable and likable character, and to see him gunned down is unbearable.

The red scorpion symbol beckons; Matt opens the door and the room is flooded with the greedy Rivas children and their soldiers. Among the treasure in the room is several artifacts from great civilizations gone by- the Mayans, Mohenjo Daro. This is interesting to note because this story takes place post-United States, post-Western dominance of the world. In this story, America is a great civilization gone by. The reader can wonder if the author is tying her many questions about humanity, sacrifice, racism, and environmental protection to the current leading civilizations.

Matt sees more buttons on the wall; the reader recalls the map in the previous chapter with the words 'couple' and 'uncouple.' After pressing the 'uncouple' button, Matt closes the door behind him. The Rivases and their soldiers will stay with their treasure, but they won't be able to get out.

Discussion Question 1

What does 'couple' and 'uncouple' mean in relation to the Scorpion Star?



Discussion Question 2

Angel and Marcus Rivas seemed to have different aims from their father. Do you think they were all working together?

Discussion Question 3

What do you think the author is saying about greed and corruption?

Vocabulary

sediment, rabid, degrade, erupted, passively, succession, residual, dominant, collective



Chapter 51-52

Summary

Matt returned to where he left Listen and Cienfuegos. The girl reported that Cienfuegos wasn't moving, but she insisted he was alive. While Matt was deciding what to do, he noticed that the surrounding eejits were very animated, even talking. He wondered if he had actually successfully broken the connection with the Scorpion Star. Listen yelled at a group of eejits, asking them to help carry Cienfuegos.

The eejits were very awake, but confused. With Cienfuegos loaded on the elevator, they began to ascend. He woke with a sputter and a gasp. When they left the observatory, they saw eejits wandering around in confusion. Matt chose a few and asked them to organize the others, getting them food and water. He found a hovercraft and loaded Cienfuegos inside. They landed at the hospital. Matt found people to bring Cienfuegos inside while Listen ran to find a doctor. They started working on him right away. They were all pleased to find that he was wearing a bulletproof vest; he was going to be well.

The gardens were filled with 'awake' eejits. Matt gave orders for them to be fed, but he was too tired to do anything else. He and Listen walked the long trek through the woods to the chapel. The grounds around the chapel were filled with former eejits, Farm Patrol, and bodyguards. All of Matt's friends were alive and well: Sor Artemesia, Matt, Fidelito, even the Bug, who stood nearby on a leash.

The gathered men were crying, weeping, and praying. Sor Artemesia told Matt this was because he resembled the saint Jesus Malverde. Worshiping Jesus Malverde was the only religion they'd ever had, so for the time they must honor it.

Matt slept on a pew inside the church. Sometime in the night, he awoke to another meteor crashing through the night sky. When he pressed the 'uncouple' button in the bunker, the Scorpion Star had indeed uncoupled; each building separated from the other, and the orbit failed. Each section had fallen. Matt figured that like El Patron, he had shot down a passenger plane to maintain the safety of his people.

In chapter 52, Matt reflected on the good things that happened in the months following the Scorpion Star. Many of the former eejits left, with money from Matt to start new lives. Many remained to build new lives in Opium. Matt managed to work with Esperanza to help the freed eejits.

Many of the soldiers stayed, and Cienfuegos slowly recovered from his wounds. Mushrooms continued to clean polluted soil, and Matt uprooted the opium to plant useful crops and food. Maria found her passion in helping the former eejits find homes and families.

Eusebio the guitar master woke from his eejit sleep, and found his son a teenager instead of a toddler, and his friend Mr. Ortega a deaf old man.



Everyone seemed to find a place except for Ton-Ton. While he was a very smart young man, he wasn't interested in farming, teaching, art, or music. Finally, Daft Donald got him working on the car parts, and then other machines were fixed by his deft hands.

One day Matt took Listen to Tam Lin's oasis. She was as awestruck by the place as he was. It was surrounded on three sides by mountains, but Listen immediately noticed an outcropping of rocks that had a different color and texture. Matt scratched at one with his pocketknife and discovered it was a type of metal ore. Listen remembered that Dr. Rivas had a box made of similar material; he used to lock eejits inside of it when they were starting to 'go rogue.'

Matt reasoned that the metal in the rocks somehow blocked the energy from the Scorpion Star, which was why Tam Lin always said "the oasis is the only place I feel free." At the oasis, he was free.

The Bug didn't improve after the ordeal. He was still vicious and mean, and finally, Matt asked the Mushroom Master if they could send him to the Brat Enclosure, at the biosphere. After telling the child that the biosphere was similar to the Scorpion Star, and if he was good he could grow up to be a scientist like those that lived there, El Bicho seemed to go willingly with the other children.

One night, when Matt and Maria were flying over the dunes near the border, the full moon illuminated scores of skeletons, bodies of illegals that had tried to cross over. Matt saw the lost souls and decided someone else must share the power to open the border; it should not rest in only one person. Cienfuegos would train police, and Sor Artemesia would help people grow kinder, and Matt wanted Opium to be its own biosphere.

Then Matt asked Maria to marry him, even if they were only fifteen years old. She said yes.

Analysis

The closing chapters of the novel neatly tie up several loose ends and leave the reader satisfied with where Opium is headed. After Matt leaves the secret room he finds Listen insisting that Cienfuegos is alive. This is a wonderful irony; throughout the novel Listen has been a staunch realist with no room for faith. However, in this moment she has blind faith that Cienfuegos survived several gunshot wounds, and Matt believes her. The reader sees the first evidence that Matt freed the eejits, but it is bittersweet. They have lost decades of their lives; their families are dead or have moved on. While they are certainly better off "awake", the reader is reminded what El Patron's success has cost thousands of others.

All of Matt's friends survive the ordeal. The author, with her protection of innocence and children, is careful to keep all of the children in the story alive except for Mbongeni; as a symbol for this innocence, his character is sacrificed, just as Listen and Matt have lost a bit of their innocence through these events. Matt experiences elation at this success tempered with exhaustion and a little bit of disappointment. Many of the newly freed



men weep when they see him due to his resemblance to Jesus Malverde. More than ever, Matt feels their faith is misplaced, and the staunch Catholic nun agrees with him. However, she sees to their religious needs and allows them to worship the saint, "honoring" their faith for the time being. Their faith, even if it may be misplaced, will aid in their healing.

The Scorpion Star crumbles and falls to the ground. Matt recalls the story of El Patron and the passenger plane, and reckons he is no different. The reader may point out that Matt's actions killed bad people to save good people, but did El Patron feel any less certain of his motivations when he was alive? The reader gets to see relationships healed, eejits freed, and humanitarian progress make its way through Opium. The author leaves the story with a last visit to the oasis, Matt's place to find peace and freedom, and reveals one final detail: the rocks at the oasis were made of a metal alloy that blocked the Scorpion Star's signal to Earth. Therefore, an eejit truly would feel free in that place; free from his or her microchipping and programming.

The novel ends with Matt and Maria cementing their relationship, and with Matt resolving to allow others in his country to share the power to open the border. Instead of power corrupting him, he has risen above his feared "nature". He has done good and plans to continue doing good.

Discussion Question 1

Do you think a small sacrifice is worthwhile for a greater good?

Discussion Question 2

What did Sor Artemesia mean when she said they must "honor" the people that worshiped Jesus Malverde?

Discussion Question 3

How do you think El Bicho will fare in the Brat Enclosure?

Vocabulary

bewildered, persistence, abandoned, consoling, embraced, incandescent, intensity, negotiation, homicidal, floozy



Characters

Matteo Alacran

Matt is the 14-year-old clone of the drug lord El Patron, who died at more than 100 years old. Matt was grown for his organs, but events conspired to keep him from the fate. With El Patron dead, Matt is the lord of Opium, a slip of land between the United States, Aztlan, and a host of other lands devoted to growing drugs. Matt's empire is run by microchipped humans, "eejits." Most of the country of Opium is built on these slaves, and Matt has to face his nature as the clone of El Patron, as well as his natural inclination to be good.

Throughout the course of the novel, Matt tries to change the principles on which Opium was built: fear, manipulation, slavery, oppression, and drug addiction. However, he is fighting against the grain in all of these areas. In some cases it is easier for Matt to try to be cruel and oppressive like El Patron was, even though he also wants to be good. This struggle is the heart of Matt's character.

Celia

Celia is Matt's 'foster mother.' Because Matt was created in a lab, he didn't have an actual mother, but he was placed in Celia's care as a child. She raises him with unconditional love, protects him from his intended fate, and supports him as he comes the new Patron and has to run an entire country alone. As Matt grows through the difficulties of leading the drug empire, Celia pulls back from her affection, creating a boundary between servant and served. However, she also advises him in his dealings and mis-dealings and helps him know his true self. Matt's character is shaped by her love for him as a child; her Bible stories, her care and attention, are what sets him apart from his predecessor, El Patron.

Maria Mendoza

Maria is Matt's best friend from childhood, and the love of his heart. When Matt was mistreated as a child, Maria was a faithful friend. As they grew together into young adulthood, they declared their feelings for another. In Lord of Opium, Maria is away from Matt, in a convent in Aztlan. Matt falters in his role as Patron, sometimes altruistic and sometimes petulant, but for the most part Maria is patient, understanding of his troubles and a supportive friend. She is characterized by compassion, which is demonstrated by her devotion to Saint Francis of Assisi. At the end of the story, she is in the perfect place to help organize food, shelter, and family care for the freed eejits.



Cienfuegos

Cienfuegos, or the chief 'jefe,' is the head of Matt's Farm Patrol, a group of men in charge of the opium fields and the eejits. While true eejits are microchipped beyond normal thought, Cienfuegos is programmed to always protect and support the patron. A trained killer, he is cunning and can be brutal, but he is patient while Matt learns the ways of the empire. It often falls to Cienfuegos to challenge Matt's opinions on leading Opium, and to help Matt see things from a different perspective.

Before Cienfuegos was caught and turned into a soldier, he was on his way to study agriculture; he is a scientist at heart, and desires to make Opium a country of useful crops. He is one of Matt's closest allies.

Waitress/Mirasol

Waitress is an eejit, a beautiful young girl programmed to serve Matt his meals. He takes a liking to her simple beauty almost instantly and renames her Mirasol. Although the girl is a true eejit and can scarcely think beyond a few simple commands, she sometimes shows glimmers of true thought and comes to represent Matt's crusade to free the thousands of eejits that are enslaved in his country. Certain musical pieces 'wake her up,' and cause her to slip momentarily from her programmed state into a place of real thoughts. She is oddly devoted to Matt, at one point even going to get help when he falls ill, which is very unusual for a programmed servant.

Dr. Rivas

Dr. Rivas is the head doctor in Paradise, a city in Opium a few hours away from where Matt lives in Ajo. At its height, Paradise was the most important hospital in the region, where drug lords from all around had their clones created, grown, and harvested; Dr. Rivas was in charge of them all. In his youth the doctor found himself at the mercy of the drug lords, and one of his own children was turned into an eejit. Losing his son has been the controlling factor in his actions; this contrasts his strict adherence to science and his scorn for religion and any matter of heart or emotion. Throughout the doctor's career he makes clones for many infamous drug dealers and their family members; he also studies famous diseases and has them housed in his lab. Dr. Rivas is charming and intelligent, yet cunning and a little bit unhinged.

Glass Eye Dabengwa

Glass Eye Dabengwa is an African drug dealer, more than 100 years old, who is ruthless and controlling. He was El Patron's greatest rival when the old man was alive. In the story, he is Matt's biggest threat outside of his borders. When Matt refuses to open Opium's borders to further drug trade, Glass Eye schemes to bring the fight to



Matt's door. He has two clones being housed in Paradise - the baby Mbongeni, and the little girl Listen, who was cloned after Glass Eye's wife.

Esperanza Mendoza

Esperanza is Maria's mother, and she works for the United Nations. As a politician, she sees vast forests but very little trees. She is extremely useful and successful in getting things done, but she overlooks the needs of individuals. When she learns that her husband and daughter were poisoned at El Patron's funeral, she simply says, 'that makes things awkward.' She uses her daughter Maria as a pawn to get what she wants from Matt. She is a necessary part of what Matt is trying to accomplish in his country.

Chacho

Chacho is a boy near Matt's age that he met in the plankton factory, during the events of The House of the Scorpion. In this story, Chacho is housed in the convent in Aztlan with the nun Sor Artemesia. He and his friends Fidelito and Ton-Ton are the closest to actual friends Matt has; they knew him as a regular boy, not as a clone or as a drug lord. He comes to live with Matt during the story and finds that his father, Eusebio, is a microchipped eejit. This fact puts a strain on his and Matt's friendship, even though it wasn't Matt's direct doing, but they eventually see past that difficulty.

Sor Artemesia

Sor (Sister) Artemesia is a nun from the convent in Aztlan that houses Esperanza and Maria Mendoza. She is the caretaker for Maria and the boys Chacho, Fidelito, and Ton-Ton. She comes with the boys to stay with Matt in Ajo, and is the only person who verbalizes Matt's struggle to him: that he was born like El Patron, but he had a choice to be a new and better man, and make Opium a country that served and loved its people. She issues this challenge to Matt without knowing what the response will be. The nun cares for all of the young people in the story and looks after them as an extra mother.

Listen

Listen is a seven-year-old African girl that lives in the nursery in Paradise. She is a clone, created by Dr. Rivas in a lab and patterned after Glass Eye Dabengwa's favorite wife. The child's name is appropriate; she is very intelligent and hears and internalizes everything, even if she doesn't understand it. She hasn't had a real childhood; Dr. Rivas allows her to watch his scientific experiments, but she has no real mother or father, and the baby Mbongeni is the closest she has to a brother. As a character, she represents reason. She was raised by Dr. Rivas to shun emotion and embrace scientific reality, and her perspective is a foil to Matt's emotional side.



Symbols and Symbolism

Jesus Malverde

This patron saint of drug dealers was fashioned out of an image of the old Patron, and was enshrined in several places in Opium. In this story he represents faith and belief, even if that faith is in something different.

Mirasol

Mirasol is the eejit girl that Matt takes a liking to. She represents his quest to free the eejits from their enslavement. All of the pressure of success he feels seems to be wrapped up in this one girl.

The Scorpion Star

The Scorpion Star is El Patron's expensive and expansive space station that sits high in orbit. Because it controls the eejit population from afar, it represents the fragile control El Patron had over his empire and the steps he took to maintain it. This balance of control vs freedom is one that Matt has to wrestle with throughout the novel.

The oasis

The oasis was a favorite camping spot of Tam Lin, who was Matt's bodyguard when he was young. Tam Lin was killed at El Patron's funeral at the end of The House of the Scorpion. The oasis represents freedom from cares. Tam Lin was like a father to Matt, and when he visits the oasis he remembers the times when he was younger, before El Patron died, before he became the new patron. Matt also learns at the end of the story that there is a peculiar type of metal rock at the oasis that blocked the signal from the Scorpion Star, so Tam Lin always felt free there as well, because he wasn't being controlled.

The eejits

In the story, eejits are actual human beings that were captured by Opium's soldiers and injected with small computer microchips that are controlled from the Scorpion Star. They do all of the work in the opium fields and in the house. They are programmed by the microchips to do simple tasks. The eejits are numerous and expendable - their bodies are piled up by the thousands, their life expectancy only a few months. Until Matt takes control of Opium they are fed cheap plankton pellets. The eejits represent the ethical question of devaluing human life in order to benefit a supposed greater good.



El Patron's voice

Several times in the novel, when Matt is under particular stress, he hears the voice of El Patron speaking to him. Sometimes the voice is helpful and suggests something useful; at other times it is cunning. This voice in Matt's head represents El Patron's evil nature, woven into Matt's DNA, against which Matt needs to fight throughout the story.

The Scorpion

The scorpion as a symbol is certainly more prevalent in *The House of the Scorpion*, as a representation of the Alacran family and El Patron himself. In this novel it is used at the climax when Matt decides to be brave and do the thing that could help thousands of people. There is a door nobody can open with the scorpion on it, and later, there are two buttons, each with a scorpion on them, that command the fate of the Scorpion Star. Matt is the only person that can press those buttons, because he has the DNA of the old Patron, the Scorpion.

Listen

Listen is the seven-year-old girl that was created as a clone of Glass Eye Dabengwa's favorite wife. She is very intelligent, and is raised in the odd confines of Paradise with Dr. Rivas as a sort of father figure. He lets her tend to his lab experiments and play with the baby, Mbongeni. She is very rational and doesn't know how to deal with complex emotion: because of this, she represents the cold, hard reason that Matt often has to consider when making decisions in his role as the Lord of Opium.

Mbongeni

Mbongeni is a six-year-old boy with the mind of a baby. He is the clone of Glass Eye Dabengwa and so his intelligence was blunted at 'harvesting.' He will always be a baby, always innocent and unknowing of the cruelty into which he was born. As a symbol for innocence, he depicts Matt's youth and inexperience, the loss of a carefree childhood as he is thrust into a position of power as an adolescent. Mbongeni is sacrificed at the end of the story so his eyes can be donated to Glass Eye, and likewise, Matt's innocence is sacrificed as he makes difficult decisions to preserve his country.

The fountain

In the gardens at Paradise there is a fountain; it is 7 statues in a circle, depicting children laughing and playing joyfully in the spray. Dr. Rivas tells Matt that the children were based on El Patron's original siblings, and that he made the fountain to immortalize them filled with joy, because their true childhood was anything but joyful. There is a distinct loss of innocence across the novel: for Matt, for Listen, for the young

boys from the factory, for Maria, and this fountain is a reminder of the time when life was simple.



Settings

Ajo, Opium

Opium is Matt's drug empire, a thin strip of land between the United States and Aztlan (the former Mexico), that is surrounded by other drug empires. Ajo is the city in which Matt was raised, the city where El Patron's hacienda is located. The hacienda is surrounded by opium fields and is Matt's main place of residence.

Paradise, Opium

Paradise is a city located in the mountains of Opium. It is a few hours away from Ajo by hovercraft flight. Paradise is the location of a very important hospital, at one time the most famous and advanced in the region. In Paradise, all of the region's drug lords have their clones stored, and they visit for organ transplants. Beautiful gardens dot the landscape, as well as natural wildlife. Paradise is also where the Observatory is located, as well as a fountain dedicated to El Patron's childhood that depicts seven laughing children.

The Biosphere

The Biosphere was created by El Patron as a model for his space station, The Scorpion Star. The biosphere contains all of the major ecosystems found throughout the world, but at the time of the story many of these ecosystems had suffered and were destroyed. Hope for a new tomorrow lies inside the bubble, as they grow all of their own food, are self-sustaining, and have found a way to clean polluted soil. The people who live there don't understand that there is an outside world.

The Scorpion Star

The Scorpion Star is El Patron's space station. It is constructed of several different buildings held together by connecting bridges. It is self-sustaining, with a rotating staff of scientists. The space station is the source of the computer signal that controls the microchips in the eejits' brains. Most of the work in the country of Opium is done by the eejits, and the computer signal is El Patron's way of controlling them.

The oasis

The oasis is a place near Matt's hacienda that is situated in the mountains. When Matt was a boy, he went camping there with his bodyguard, Tam Lin. It is a place where Matt goes when he feels the need to reflect and gain perspective; it is special to him because it was special to Tam Lin, who has died at the beginning of the story. Matt learns late in

the story that because of some peculiar metal rocks near the oasis that block the signal from the Scorpion Star, the eejits' microchips don't work in the oasis.



Themes and Motifs

Nature vs. Nurture

The main character, Matteo Alarcan, is a clone of an old and vicious drug lord. He has El Patron's exact DNA and is patterned after the old man. In his life, El Patron was cruel and cunning: he enslaved and killed thousands to run his drug empire, and carried out a plan to murder hundreds at his funeral. He wielded power brutally and caused fear and awe in his subjects. During the story, Matt often feels the influence of his predecessor: cruelty, selfishness, and paranoia. Matt wants to command respect just as El Patron did. This is his Nature.

However, Matt was raised by in an environment of love and acceptance. Although some of the children treated Matt poorly because he was a clone, in his youth he was surrounded by adults that showed him affection and favor - Celia, Tam Lin, and Mr. Ortega. All of these adults sought to steer Matt in a direction governed by honesty, kindness, temperance, and justice, despite the fact that these attributes were lacking in the old Patron. Matt also had a constant ally in his friend Maria, who was consistently caring and understanding. This is how Matt was Nurtured.

Throughout the story, Matt is at war between these two ideas - he wants to be powerful like the patron, but he wants to do good things with his power. He deals with anger when his commands are questioned, and then he sees the wisdom in doing things differently. He acts cruelly and wonders if he will ever be better than his predecessor.

This battle is demonstrated in the story by the old man's voice, which presents itself in Matt's mind at various points in the plot. Sometimes the voice is helpful, but it is usually an appeal to Matt's darker nature. Several times in the story Matt tells the voice to 'be quiet' so he can make his own decisions.

The eejit population is a perfect example of this theme. They are changed from natural humans to a human bodies that are literally programmed to do one thing only. They cannot live outside of their programming; they are a product of their microchipped brains. Even the advanced eejits, like Cienfuegos, struggles with this dichotomy. He is programmed to be a ruthless taskmaster, and when he displays any amount of caring or sympathy, he struggles against it.

Value of Human Life

The value of humanity, and what defines a human, is an important question in Lord of Opium. The author deals with the issue of clones in The House of the Scorpion, where the reader sees children that are created in a lab and grown specifically for the purpose of providing organs to aging drug lords. Although these children are in effect exact copies of their originals - grown from a strip of skin that provided the original DNA - they are seen as a lower form of society. Whether this is because they weren't created or



born in the traditional way, or because their purpose in life degrades their value, the author lets the reader decide.

This question is further discussed in *Lord of Opium*. The country of Opium, the drug trade as a whole, is carried by a ten-thousand strong army of microchipped humans, or 'eejits.' These were people that were rounded up trying to cross the border. They were injected with computer microchips that slow brain function, so that they can only understand and respond to a few simple commands. Many eejits are trained and retrained by electrocution. Some eejits are literally reduced to completing one simple task, while others - like Cienfuegos and Tam Lin - are put in charge of people or jobs, but are programmed to be loyal or stay in one place or kill on command.

Both clones and eejits are treated as less-than human, although their value in society should be regarded as great. Both groups provide useful services to the country as a whole - just as slaves did in 19th century America - and yet the powers that be regard their lives as disposable. Clones and eejits are sacrificed for science and operated on without a second thought, and several main characters use words to that effect: "It's just a clone. It's not even human."

Matt's commitment to "freeing" the eejits and destroying the samples is a controlling element in the story and in his character development. The author is demonstrating her opinion that what makes us 'human' shouldn't be defined by our origins.

Conservation of Natural Resources

In the future world depicted in *Lord of Opium*, much of the Earth's natural resources are depleted. The reader sees that The Dope Confederacy - the former Mexico, a string of small countries devoted to growing one particular drug - is reduced to rubble in the cities. The fields are polluted and incapable of crop rotation. The animals have left their natural habitats. The United States is a wasteland.

Although Opium grows only that - opium - Matt's country fares better than its neighbors solely because the old Patron had an odd penchant for collecting plant and animal species, and forcing his scientists to help them thrive. As a result, Opium displays a wide variety of resources, coupled with a few very polluted and wasted places.

In the course of the story, Matt commits to finding a way to fix the ruined soil in Opium and surrounding countries. The soil is ruined by so many years of growing drugs irresponsibly. He wishes to find a way to clean the polluted ground so he can start growing crops that are useful - corn, grain, and vegetables.

The Biosphere plays an important part in this goal. The Biosphere was created by El Patron as a model for his space station, The Scorpion Star, the manner in which he controls his eejit army. However, although El Patron didn't mean to do any good with his biosphere, he accidentally created a place in the world where ecosystems are preserved: plants and animals, long thought destroyed, that can be transplanted to the outside world to make a fresh start.



It should not be ignored that by the time this story begins, the Earth's natural resources has been depleted by greedy and thoughtless humans. The state of the fictional future is one the author wishes the reader to notice.

Religion and Spirituality

The topic of religion is particularly interesting in this story. The setting is in the former Mexico, so old traditions of Catholicism are apparent in the fabric of Opium's society - one of the main characters is a nun, there is a convent where Matt's friends stay for a while, many of the names of the characters are Latinized versions of Biblical names.

There is also a thread of science vs. faith apparent in the young clone girl, Listen. She has been raised by a doctor and scientist, who teaches her principles only based on cold 'facts' and not matters of the heart. He tells her that 'religion is crap' and only science is reliable. However, in times of emotional need, Listen is comforted by Matt's old Bible stories of truth and justice and triumph, and not by her facts and reality.

Perhaps the most interesting allusion to religion comes with the fake 'saint' of Jesus Malverde. This created saint was based on an old rendering of the Patron himself, and had since, in the history of Opium, been used as a kind of patron of drug lord and farm workers. Several times in the story readers see shrines to Jesus Malverde, who is at one time portrayed carrying a gun and a bundle of drugs. However, the reader can see true devotion in Malverde's followers- prayers, offerings, letters asking for favor and protection. Because Matt looks exactly like the patron, he is also a close rendering of Jesus Malverde, and readers often see farm workers bowing to Matt himself. In the end of the story, when the eejits are freed and are starting their lives anew, they all turn to Jesus Malverde for comfort. The faithful Catholic nun, Sor Artemesia, tells Matt that although their faith is misplaced, their faith is real, and they should honor the religion that is before them.

Civil Liberty

Although there are several minute details involved in the plot's progression, Matt's main struggle is with becoming a leader that is worth following. For reasons beyond his control, he was put in charge of an entire country - its people, its land, and its resources. The country of Opium had long been powerful, but at the cost of many lives, and of the personal freedoms of its residents. Matt struggles with weighing the cost of lives vs. the country as a whole on several occasions - is it acceptable to sacrifice a small number of lives for the good of the entire country? What about squelching freedom of movement and thought in order to preserve order and safety (demonstrated in the tightly closed and controlled borders of the country, that only the Patron can open)?

This question is also explored in the Biosphere. The scientific community is four generations old, old enough so that the original inhabitants that remembered the outside world had passed. What had grown over the years was a tightly controlled and regimented society with little free thought - there were no families or true relationships,



only mating, then collective child rearing. An adult is given a mate of the opposite gender, then told to reproduce. There is a limit on the amount of children that can be born. This plan keeps the population stable, but removes any sort of emotion or feeling—the very things that make us human.

The children are not raised with their parents, but in the Brat Enclosure. They are happy and loved by the adult caretakers, not their parents (nature vs nurture again), until they are pulled from that society and thrust into another. Puberty marks the time when they are given a job based on its need, not based on their talents or preferences. This procedure ensures that all of the needed jobs are filled, but at the cost of people doing well at a job that interests them.

The biosphere was a safe and ecologically healthy society that exchanged individuality for progress.

Nature of Sacrifice

The author asks the question several times in the novel: is it acceptable to sacrifice a number of lives for a greater good? Is it acceptable to let a few bad things slide to achieve a few good things? Matt feels like he is constantly compromising his pursuit of good things by allowing evil to take place: the drug trade, the eejits, making deals with Esperanza are just a few examples. The theme begins early in the novel when Cienfuegos tells Matt that the old Patron shot down a plane full of innocent passengers that accidentally strayed into Opium's airspace. For the patron, he was just protecting Opium's borders and keeping people out, but Matt is appalled at the killing of innocent lives in this pursuit.

In one scene, Matt and Cienfuegos are both dismayed that the new medical staff has to be microchipped. Celia actually tells Matt that sometimes you have to compromise your ideals to allow some good things to happen. Matt asks himself, "How much evil can you do in the name of achieving something good?" The author doesn't leave the reader with a concrete answer. Some people die, and because of their deaths more people are freed. The new doctors are microchipped to keep the peace, and they are there to work for Matt's "greater" cause of healing the eejit population. Cienfuegos even mentions the plague of the Middle Ages, how the many deaths gave way to a period of great creativity and progress.

In the end of the story, Matt destroys the Scorpion Star, a space station that is home to three hundred people, in order to free the eejit population. Thousands and thousands of eejits were freed from mental slavery and allowed to carry on their lives, but the three hundred scientists on board the space station were killed. As Matt ponders this he feels he is no better than the Patron. The reader must decide whether or not they agree with him.



Styles

Point of View

In *Lord of Opium*, the author uses the third-person perspective. The author is telling the reader what is happening, including what is happening inside of Matt's head - his thoughts, worries, fears, and emotions. However, is not third-person omniscient, as the reader doesn't see what is happening all over the story. The reader isn't seeing what is happening in other characters' minds, nor are other locations described.

The point of view is third-person limited; the reader is looking into the story, but is limited to what is happening around the main character, Matt. The reader is only walking where Matt is walking and seeing what Matt is seeing. In this way the reader can get glimpses into other characters and their perspectives, but not actually inside their thoughts. So much of the plot moves based on Matt's development and his changing perspective, that this type of POV helps readers see his motivations and his growing maturity.

Language and Meaning

The main character of this story is actually a 14-year-old boy. Although he has been unwittingly pushed into his role as drug lord and leader of a small country, he is really just a teenager that is in the height of a difficult adolescent period. The author uses very simple and straightforward language to reflect this. The sentences are not long and complex, however, she occasionally uses longer, more advanced words, just as throughout the story Matt is growing through his adolescence into a young adult with complex feelings and attitudes. Just as an adolescent doesn't always know how to explain exactly what they are feeling, the author uses a mix of simple and elaborate vocabulary to display that Matt is not a straightforward character. At times he is at war within himself.

Opium is a place of terrible beauty - it consists of hills and mountains and opium fields; the author's lyrical descriptions of the land help demonstrate that land itself is significant to the story. When a character happens upon a place of distinct beauty - a jungle, a field, a mountain meadow - the author's portrayal of those places are particularly vivid to show the vital importance of conservation and appreciation of the earth.

Structure

The structure of the novel is straightforward; there are 52 relatively short chapters, all equal in tone. The chapters are largely separated by events in the story; each short section describes something that happens, or an important conversation or revelation. Each chapter is titled to give the reader a glance at what might happen or where the chapter is set.



Quotes

It isn't easy being good, is it?

-- Cienfuegos (chapter 5 paragraph 3)

Importance: This rhetorical question, made early in the story, foreshadows what is going to be Matt's struggle to find balance between power and goodness, liberty and protection, doing good and saving lives.

You should have seen him Celia! It was like having the old man back again!" "I don't like the idea of having the old man back again.

-- Cienfuegos and Celia (chapter 9 paragraph 2)

Importance: This quote demonstrates the struggle Matt continually has: between being enough like El Patron to successfully run the country, but not so much like El Patron that he is cruel and evil.

You're too young for all the problems you have inherited. But God arranges these things for a purpose. What was I but one of a hundred thousand women El Patron enslaved throughout his long life? Yet Fate decreed that I arrive at the moment you needed me. Maria befriended you when no one else would. Tam Lin gave you strength to escape when the time came. Without us, you would merely be a heart beating in the old man's chest. You are meant to end the evil of this place, and you can't run away.

-- Celia (chapter 11 paragraph 4)

Importance: This quote touches on a bit of destiny or fate that has entwined Matt in his situation. He was never actually meant to rule the country, only to provide organs for the old Patron. However, he was handed into the lives of people who cared enough about him to make changes - Celia, Tam Lin, and Maria - and those changes resulted in his impossible situation. Celia encourages Matt with these words, telling him that there was a good reason for all of it - for him to unravel the evil on which Opium is built.

You get used to being evil.

-- Dr. Rivas (chapter 15 paragraph 1)

Importance: These words depict how much the doctor has compromised in his profession. He has completely disregarded the moral dilemma of producing clones for 'harvesting'; he has become immune to answering those sort of questions. Later in the story, when the doctor's true character is gradually revealed, this quote comes back to mind.

The others, except for you, were merely collections of cells.

-- Dr. Rivas (chapter 15 paragraph 4)

Importance: This sentiment is echoed throughout the novel by several different characters and is one of the author's major themes: what makes us human? Is Matt,



who was created in a lab and grown rather than created through regular reproduction, "less" human, even though his body works in the same way and contains all the same parts and cells? Dr. Rivas and many others in the story have reduced their view of humanity to allow them to do the things they want to do.

The longer he was in Opium, the more the line between good and evil blurred. Of course it was good to save people who, through no fault of their own, were suffering. You cut corners, made compromises, and soon you were in the same position as El Patron, shooting down a passenger plane to avert a war.

-- Matt (chapter 17 paragraph 3)

Importance: These words represent one of Matt's greatest fears: compromising his goodness bit by bit for a greater purpose, only to find himself an empty shell when it's all over. He believed this is what happened to El Patron, who was reportedly a good man when he was young.

(Mirasol) was trained to obey everyone, not make choices about who to obey. The cooks say she jitters when she's away from you. That's a danger sign. Eejits break down if they're under too much stress, and they can die.

-- Cienfuegos (chapter 19 paragraph 2)

Importance: This warning from Cienfuegos to Matt is a foreshadowing of what will eventually happen to Mirasol. The eejits' brains get confused when they remember too much of their former life, and it competes with their microchips. Matt continually tries to 'wake her up', and the jefe is warning Matt of the possible results.

I think that people have an instinct for a family. You look until you find a mother, a father, a sister, a brother. They don't have to be blood relatives. They just have to love you. And when you find them, you don't have to look anymore.

-- Matt (chapter 21 paragraph 4)

Importance: Matt's words describe the only family he was allowed to have. Because he wasn't created and born in the traditional way, Matt had to find a family along the way - Celia, Tam Lin, Maria, Chacho and the boys, even Cienfuegos. Because those people loved Matt in their own way, he could consider them his family.

How much wickedness could you do in the service of good before it turned into pure evil?

-- Matt (chapter 27 paragraph 3)

Importance: Said in response to Celia's assertion that sometimes you have to let a few bad things slide in order to achieve a greater good, this quote is evidence of the fine balance Matt is feeling between good and evil. Even further, Matt is feeling the sacrifice of good, doing good things and having them slip away and disappear in the wake of the evil that sometimes accompanies the small sacrifices. This fine line is one of the main themes of the novel.



Get off your butt and do the job God gave you to do.
-- Sister Artemesia (chapter 43 paragraph 3)

Importance: The nun never shies away from telling Matt exactly what she thinks he should be doing. This is said at the beginning of the main climax, when Matt is tired and afraid of doing what needs doing to fix his empire and stop the tide of evil. By bringing God into it, Sister Artemesia is pointing out that Matt's role in the empire has something of fate or destiny associated with it, and that he shouldn't deny what he is somehow 'meant' to do. Does attaching God to his job guarantee success?

Heed the high cliffs, lad. They keep things out.
-- The voice of Tam Lin (chapter 32 paragraph 2)

Importance: These words refer to the oasis, which is a place of special importance to Matt because Tam Lin used to take him there when he was alive. For the novel it is a symbol of peace and freedom. Tam Lin's voice comes mysteriously to Matt in this chapter and says these words. It is later revealed that the rocks in the oasis are literally a place of freedom, as the metal contained in them blocked the controlling signal from the Scorpion Star.

I am called Mirasol.
-- Mirasol (chapter 36 paragraph 4)

Importance: Matt had struggled to get her to respond to Mirasol throughout the entire story. He would call her Mirasol and she would respond, "I am called Waitress." The girl is a symbol of Matt's passion to free the eejit population. The reader sees only small glimpses of true thought in the story. However, in her last breaths, when Matt tells her, "I love you, Waitress," she responds with, "I am called Mirasol." Just before she dies, the reader sees her settle peacefully into the name Matt had tried to give her all along. It is a poignant ending to her part in the story.