

# **The Second Ring of Power Study Guide**

**The Second Ring of Power by Carlos Castaneda**

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# Contents

<a href="#">The Second Ring of Power Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 1, The Transformation of Doña Soledad.....</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 2, The Little Sisters.....</a>	<a href="#">7</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 3, La Gorda.....</a>	<a href="#">10</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 4, The Genaros.....</a>	<a href="#">14</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 5, The Art of Dreaming.....</a>	<a href="#">17</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 6, The Second Attention.....</a>	<a href="#">20</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">24</a>
<a href="#">Objects/Places.....</a>	<a href="#">31</a>
<a href="#">Themes.....</a>	<a href="#">34</a>
<a href="#">Style.....</a>	<a href="#">37</a>
<a href="#">Quotes.....</a>	<a href="#">40</a>
<a href="#">Topics for Discussion.....</a>	<a href="#">44</a>



## Plot Summary

The Second Ring of Power by Carlos Castaneda shows the author meeting his fellow sorcerer's apprentices, surviving plays for power, and learning to live impeccably, to dream, and to pay attention to the other world.

Carlos Castaneda, graduate anthropologist and apprentice to sorcerer Don Juan Matus, returns to central Mexico to learn from colleagues Pablito and Nestor what really happens when they leap into the abyss. He first encounters Pablito's transformed mother, Doña Soledad, who suddenly looks young, tries to seduce and restrain Carlos, and would have choked him to death had a terrible entity not emerged from Carlos head and thrown her off. Lidia, Rosa, and Josefina, whom Carlos had thought to be Pablito's sisters turn out also to be Don Juan's apprentices and an odd set of characters. Rosa is injured when they assault Carlos and he is again saved by that mysterious entity.

La Gorda, Don Juan's most competent and knowledgeable apprentice arrives just as the assault end. Before leaving for the other world with Don Genaros, Don Juan puts la Gorda in charge of the others, pending Carlos' inevitable arrival. In the unlikely event he survives the attacks that Don Juan has planned and ordered, la Gorda is to help him understand and incorporate the many parts of his training that have eluded him. Still struggling with the need to rationalize everything and understand things step-by-step, Carlos must learn or perish.

Benigno, Pablito, and Nestor, called "The Genaros" because they all apprentices of Don Genaros, return from the mountains. There is a deep rift between the male and female apprentices, and individuals see the events surrounding Carlos' arrival in significantly different ways. Carlos realizes that timidity not rationalism is holding him back from being a true sorcerer.

La Gorda proves a skilled pedagogue, patiently putting up with Carlos' foibles, keeping peace in the groups, and introducing teachings at the precise time and place that they will do the most good. She helps balance Don Juan's uncharacteristically heavy use of "power plants" on Carlos. She shows the difference between "looking" at the tonal and "seeing" the nagual. The little sisters demonstrate the second ring of power and Carlos participates in flying, exulting that it is not a hallucinogenic trick. In time he sees the lines of the world and unites with the women on an near-fatal journey deep into the other world. Carlos has much to learn before the apprentices whom he now leads can join Don Juan and Don Genaro beyond the crack.



# Chapter 1, The Transformation of Doña Soledad

## Chapter 1, The Transformation of Doña Soledad Summary

Carlos Castaneda searches for Don Juan in a "particular town" before driving to where Pablito lives with his mother and four sisters. Doña Soledad runs out, too nimbly for an old woman. Her forwardness is discomfiting. She is alone but "the Nagual" (Don Juan) has told to help Carlos. She says that they are "the same," grows angry that he is not "impeccable" (beyond suspicion, flawless), drops her skirt, and says that they must mix.

At Carlos' car, Soledad says that she has waited years to fulfill her promise to help Carlos. A silvery paw makes Carlos run for it, but Soledad is faster and rolls him onto the ground. When the dog attacks her, Carlos flees indoors, trapping himself. Through the door, Soledad explains that Don Juan has ordered her not to let Carlos leave. Sneaking out while Soledad enters, bloodied, Carlos finds the dog in the back seat and knows that he is trapped.

In her room, Soledad is charming and beautiful, because the wind has shifted. Women warriors have a best direction, and hers is north. The floor, oriented to the north, takes her four years to make. Its clay comes from the mountains and she fires it in a north-facing pit. The north wind prevents warping and teaches her the design. She learns quickly because she is old and has nothing to lose. Soledad says that the Nagual is a devil, changing people's bodies without their knowing it. One day, he grabs her chin from behind, twists it, and holds it a long time, changing the direction of her eyes—and her life. Carlos recalls being reoriented early in his apprenticeship, to the southeast.

The Nagual once gives Soledad Mescalito, but it is horrible. A whirlwind is an omen for the Nagual to change her and make her do strange things. The wind moves inside female warriors' bodies, communicating with their wombs, helping them learn faster. Carlos had not known about Eligio, the best apprentice, the only male who has not had to jump into the abyss, about Benigno, Genaro's eldest apprentice, and that Pablito's "sisters" are Don Juan's apprentices, not Soledad's biological daughters. In the Nagual's absence she cares for them. Soledad has been patient with Carlos' "weirdness." Being "empty," Carlos understands only what he wants.

Rather than jump, female warriors menstruate, and during their period, the Nagual trains them intensely to open the crack between worlds. Lidia is his first apprentice, found half-dead in a house. He hires Soledad to care for her. While Lidia is still recovering, the Nagual finds Carlos. In the third year, comes crazy Josefina, who fights with Lidia, who leaves to find a husband but a rescued chick torments her until she accepts her fate. Josefina shreds her hand on a dry leaf and nearly dies before she drops her old ways.



A year later, Pablito rescues Elena ("La Gorda") and sets her up doing laundry. The Nagual sees death approaching and uses the wind to cure or kill her, and she changes more than any. Soledad is afraid that la Gorda gets inside her thoughts, and la Gorda finds Soledad evil. The Nagual entrusts to la Gorda things he teaches no one else. Years later, the Nagual perceives in Eligio unsuspected power and keeps him isolated. A month later, the Nagual finds Rosa chasing a pig. She is reluctant to accept a job, fearing rape, but comes to Soledad's house and now takes good care of her.

Soledad produces wash basins adding mashed green leaves. She lies on the bed, smiling warmly, but with ruthlessness. He declines to lie next to her as she reveals the Nagual's detailed orders for this crucial meeting. She pulls Carlos on top of herself, and some force keeps him from escaping. As she chokes him with her headband, Carlos is indifferent about dying until something snaps behind his windpipe and he finds himself looking down from the ceiling, punching Soledad in the forehead, and watching her fly out of bed and huddle against the wall. She doubts that they both survive the night.

The dog returns to its pen, but unfinished business draws Carlos back inside. Toward dawn, Soledad explains that, following the Nagual's orders, she has lured Carlos in alone to steal for her own journey a "boost" of special power. Carlos somehow disturbs the lines in her floor, however, her shrieks excite the dog, her "trump card," and the Nagual fails to mention Carlos' "horrendous double." Carlos' body is long ago replaced and he has become the Nagual. When Soledad awakens with a north wind blowing, she is dissociated (defensively blocking feelings) but perks up when her girls arrive.

## **Chapter 1, The Transformation of Doña Soledad Analysis**

The first chapter brings author Carlos Castaneda back to an undisclosed location in the bleak but beautiful highlands of central Mexico in search of what really happens to him and his fellow sorcerer's apprentices at the conclusion of their formal training. When and where that occurs is left nebulous. The only thing known for sure is that Don Juan Matus, Carlos' shaman mentor since the early 1960s, while Carlos is performing graduate field work in anthropology and is drawn deeply into Yaqui Indian drug culture, and Don Juan's colleague, Don Genaros, have together gone for good into the "other world." It appears that Carlos has been somewhat of a "commuting" follower, gone for at least two years, perhaps as much as five. He senses in town that Don Juan is absent and that Pablito and Nestor are not at home. With no other options, Carlos drives to Pablito's home.

He finds Pablito's ugly old crone of a mother, Doña Soledad, turned eerily youthful and beautiful, oversexed, and out to seduce him, a Mrs. Robinson character. Her daughter's dog (actually her own) attacks Carlos to keep him from fleeing. Carlos is intrigued by a new floor in the bedroom that seems to defy claims that she has built it herself and so perfectly aligned it to the cardinal points of the compass. Fierce, howling beings are introduced, racing around outside. They recur in the book and are eventually identified as "allies." At this point, they merely evoke terror.



It turns out that Doña Soledad is less intent on sex than on killing Carlos for no apparent reason. She is sitting astride him, choking him with her headband, when Carlos thinks he hears his neck snap, but his hearing sharpens and an enormous being emerges from his head. Carlos hovers at the ceiling in the typical near-death experience and sees himself punch Doña Soledad in the forehead, sending her sprawling. Why Doña Soledad attacks and the nature of the entity, which Carlos preliminarily catalogs as his "double," are explained later, as Carlos gets to know his mismatched assortment of apprentices. Carlos' western training is at odds with the phenomena he sees and he is recalling forgotten bits of his old training. This continues throughout the book.



# Chapter 2, The Little Sisters

## Chapter 2, The Little Sisters Summary

Watching Soledad talk with the four women apprentices, Carlos is intrigued but fearful. He has been casually acquainted for years with Lidia and Rosa, both dark and beautiful. When Lidia mentions Carlos stealing Soledad's soul, he is too tired to argue sensibly, and assumes a trial awaits. A wild animal stalks outside amidst flashes of green light. Suspecting Soledad of tricks, Carlos searches and grows angry. Rosa declares that this is "the ally," which only la Gorda can explain. She must also be present for Carlos to unwrap a package from the Nagual. The Nagual has ordered that Carlos sleep in his bed. When he awakens, Lidia and Rosa are on him, protecting him. Lidia reveals that the sisters and Pablito have moved out and do separate tasks. Only la Gorda knows where the Sorcerers have gone. She has a message from the Nagual for Carlos, whom they had expected to be dead. Since he is not, he is the only one that they can trust: the new Nagual.

As Lidia insists that Carlos "double" heal Soledad, Carlos struggles to understand, having been isolated from these apprentices. When he gets angry at secret messages, Rosa strikes with a heavy object, but Carlos hears the sound in his neck and watches himself crush Rosa's hand. Don Juan had described this as the sound of "changing speed." Rosa's "dream hand" is now useless unless Carlos heals it. Examining it, Carlos is sure this is another Don Juan test, forcing him to see that rationality is only a tiny portion of himself. After caressing her hand and willing it cured, Carlos her to bed.

Carlos and Lidia find Soledad huddled against the wall in pain. On her forehead—and on Rosa's arm—are sticky blotches from the energy that Carlos leaves when striking them. When Carlos offers to take Rosa and Lidia home, they declare that they are his wards. He restrains his anger and feels the tickle that shows that he has "stopped the world." Don Juan has tried to train him to this sensation. They drive to the sisters' house and settle on the sleeping platform. Lidia confirms that la Gorda is in charge by the Nagual's orders, and by having the most personal power, knowledge, and the ability to control people. The others have accepted their fates without envy. All have new bodies and new lives and are part of the Nagual. They carry one another. Lidia traces a circle on Carlos' stomach where he is "empty," but leaves explaining to la Gorda. Carlos coaxes her into adding that a woman has "emptied" him. Soledad has an enormous hole and la Gorda used to but has closed it and is complete again. The girls dislike Genaro's crazy "bums." The Nagual has given la Gorda and Carlos the ability to see, while the girls cannot—but still all are the same. They are under orders to look after Carlos.

Lidia and Rosa refuse to talk, watching the eroded hills that oppress Carlos. Josefina arrives, old, feebly carrying firewood and a bundle, perhaps a child. She is disgusting. In the kitchen, Carlos sees Josefina as young and pretty. Lidia and Rosa laugh at the "art of stalking" that the Nagual has taught to keep Josefina safe on the street. When asked



to say something, Josefina goes into a rage. Carlos presumes that she suffers aphasia and recalls Don Juan telling him that a dear friend dying in a hospital can recover if she pushes disease away with her left hand. As the friend is not impeccable, she dies. Josefina is impeccable but cannot move her arm with coordination. When Carlos touches her forehead, Josefina's sounds grow briefly more melodious, but revert to grotesque noises. Carlos is sorry.

As Josefina clings to Carlos, Lidia and Rosa pin him to the ground. He is passing out as the pipe breaks and the tickling begins, and suddenly he watches from across the kitchen. When La Gorda appears, Josefina confesses that they are playing a joke. Carlos feels stupid but also knows that it had been serious. He loathes them, wants to leave, but is too dizzy to drive. He is also still at the ceiling, recalling having received from Don Juan and Don Genaro a sensation of being in two places at once. Floating down, he feels vulnerable and dissociated. As he reunites himself, the girls stare.

## Chapter 2, The Little Sisters Analysis

The second chapter expands the cast of characters, but leaves clarification of who is who, why they are together, and what they are all doing to la Gorda. Three "little sisters" arrive as Carlos is about to escape the madness of Doña Soledad's house. Carlos has seen them before during visits, has formed an opinion of each, but is clearly in the dark, taking them for Pablito's biological sisters and Doña Soledad's biological daughters. Carlos had somehow not known that they are Don Juan's apprentices and that Doña Soledad is something of a den mother to them.

Lidia and Rosa, both beautiful, approach Carlos first, resenting his assault on Doña Soledad and demanding that he heal her. He denies hating Doña Soledad or wishing her ill, but they refuse to listen and send for Nestor, "The Witness," who has healing powers. Holding off explaining what terms like "witness" and "impeccable" might mean helps build tension in the book. Carlos later reflects that Don Juan always finds just the right moment to talk about or show something, and la Gorda proves as effective in maximizing the effects of her lessons.

The sisters' behavior eventually brings Carlos to wrath and the inner entity again strikes out, hurting Rosa's "dream hand." Carlos feels badly but has no idea what to do. He is a failure at healing. Putting Rosa to bed, Carlos and Lidia "see" Doña Soledad huddled against her wall in pain, and Carlos discovers that some odd, sticky substance on Doña Soledad's forehead under a poultice is also on Rosa's arm. Later, it is revealed that Doña Soledad is with la Gorda at the time and Carlos is experiencing "second attention," seeing the reality of the situation. His touch has affected healing and left a remnant, and healing Rosa (and Lidia) has not drained him of energy as the little sisters had hoped and expected, based on what Don Juan tells them.

Lidia introduces a new concept to Carlos: emptiness, a phenomenon that only sorcerers can see, which (wrongly appears linked to sexuality, but whose significance only la Gorda can explain. Her significance to the group is being built up. Before she appears,





however, the third little sister arrives, exceedingly ugly and old. It is quickly seen that Josefina is crazy and an inveterate prankster. Quickly her appearance is revealed as a facade. She is as beautiful as the others, but Don Juan has her use the "art of stalking" (explained at the end of the book) to keep her safe on the street. Having been fooled once, Carlos does not suspect another trick when Josefina feigns aphasia (the inability to articulate words, often brought on by strokes and other physical trauma). It draws on Carlos' compassion. The three femmes fatales jump Carlos and appear ready to rape and/or kill him, when the phenomenon again emerges from his head. Before it can strike, la Gorda appears. The girls claim they are playing yet another prank. Carlos wants desperately to escape this crazy place but is too dizzy to drive.

Group dynamics are developed in Chapter 2, particularly a major rift between male and female apprentices. They inevitably fight when brought together. Lidia in particular considers Carlos stupider than Pablito. Why the women are hostile to Carlos emerges later in the book.



## Chapter 3, La Gorda

### Chapter 3, La Gorda Summary

Carlos first notices la Gorda's dark, calm, scanning eyes. She is taller than the girls, lean, graceful, and commanding, with beautiful hands that she holds over her "umbilical region." La Gorda's inner control calms Carlos as Don Juan's had. Carlos explains that he needs Pablito's and Nestor's help. He is slow about sorcerers' ways, but does not think he deserves to be treated with malice and deceit. La Gorda hurries to say what the Nagual has entrusted to her before Carlos leaves. He allows her to ride along, after she performs the goodbye gesture to the house and valley, a sign that she believes she may never return. Men make it over their hearts, women over their wombs, where they store feelings. Feeling deep kinship with la Gorda, who reads his thoughts about the hills, Carlos confesses apprehension about these terrifying women and these hills. La Gorda says that the Nagual is responsible for both. The three female apprentices are all the same as are the three males, and Carlos and la Gorda will be when he becomes complete. La Gorda knows where the Sorcerers are and is to take Carlos there if she can. She is under strict orders not to reveal the exact place until "the right moment."

La Gorda has instructions that if Carlos survives the two attacks, they must go to a "place of power" so she can reveal Don Juan's designs that he has withheld because Carlos is incomplete. Sorcerers can see the holes in the stomachs of those who have children and a difference in luminosity. La Gorda's holes from two girls are patched and shine yellow like the rest of her body. Don Juan has explained this, but Carlos does not want to know, having a daughter he has never seen and a son whom he loves, swept away by forces that Carlos cannot control. Don Juan scoffs that warriors do not seek solace or leave anything to chance. Losing the son shows that he is empty. Time has mellowed Carlos, but he is still troubled. La Gorda says that they have "an appointment with power."

La Gorda shares her life story: pregnant very young by a violent drunkard, she gets fat and is lured away by an even worse man who makes her beg with a borrowed sick baby. When she home, pregnant again, her family rejects her. She miscarries and is cared for by an aunt. When the police come, la Gorda flees and is taken in by Pablito. Customers pay her with leftover food and she grows massively fat. One day, a scary man grabs her head and holds it for an hour. He does it again and later talks about how emptiness is her enemy. He sends the wind to show her that she must change or perish. La Gorda's spirit returns and she obeys the Nagual by meeting her daughters and snatching away the edge unnoticed. La Gorda lifts her skirt to show that her virginity is restored. Unless Carlos turns from his son, he cannot cross over.

Likewise, Soledad must reclaim her edge from Pablito. To do so, she needs Carlos' luminosity. It should have been easy and she would then have killed at least two of the three sisters and then Pablito. When Soledad fails, the sisters' turn to kill Carlos comes, for with the Nagual gone, they need the male side of luminosity to balance them. In the



effort to kill Carlos, the girls become a single being and fail only because Carlos cures Rosa's luminosity, which makes her jumpy and she bites too hard. Carlos' double is on the point of annihilating all three when la Gorda arrives. It is hard to calm Carlos. He changes colors violently to yellowish white like the sun. This revelation surprises Carlos but he wants not to ask inappropriate questions.

La Gorda offers to show Carlos her faint light. She squats, puts her hands under her skirt, and snaps out sparks, each time larger until they turn into long, luminous fibers. With a cry, she grabs one, soars into the sky, and descends, exhausted. Carlos feels a strange pain below his navel and is also worn out, doing nothing. They are opened to face the four forces, the allies that now belong to them. Carlos has met Don Juan's dark, rectangular mass, and Genaro's long-faced, bald, tall, glowing man with droopy eyes. The other two he has seen only once: Don Juan's coyote and Genaro's jaguar.

La Gorda and Carlos cross a rocky plain, tied in a figure-eight by her shawl. Carlos senses a massive shape and tries to imitate la Gorda in urinating sparks. In despair, la Gorda climbs on Carlos' shoulders and the entity halts. Using her shawl as a harness, la Gorda rides as far as Carlos can go. Hearing the jaguar, la Gorda strips and rides Carlos piggy-back, waving her dress atop a branch and whistling like an owl. Soon bird calls are heard all around. Carlos recalls similar events with Don Juan. They cannot use Don Juan's "gait of power" because the glowing man is straight ahead. The jaguar and coyote flank them and the rectangular shape comes up behind. Carlos makes an odd sound that Don Juan once teaches him and the allies answer. They advance in a pack to the road, where Carlos makes a moth call. Carlos and la Gorda drive in silence to Don Genaro's house, where she vomits and tells Carlos to do likewise.

Carlos leaps with euphoria, realizing that the allies are real entities and not hallucinations. He is ready to revamp assumptions and stop being a "quasisorcerer." The Nagual has told la Gorda that allies can be controlled only by being enticed inside tiny, invisible gourds. When they again hear the jaguar, la Gorda asks him to describe what he has seen and then says that allies have no form, just a presence and colors. Carlos sees them as monsters because he has not yet lost his human form. One can only protect oneself against prowling allies by losing human form.

La Gorda is amazed that Carlos does not know about the molds and forms. Molds are entities imbued with power that most people see only at death. They allow assembling a shape. Everything exerts a push or a pull, but those with a hole in their luminosity cannot be moved. Once la Gorda is complete, she sees a radiant being—God—and becomes a sorcerer. By contrast, the human form is a sticky force that has no form; it cannot be seen but can be felt in the body. During (probably) a massive heart attack, la Gorda's form leaves her body, she quits trying to be her old self, she becomes a warrior, new in all ways. Eligio has also lost his form.

Warriors without form see an eye in front of them that allows them to dream without sleeping. La Gorda explains her flying as hooking onto the lines of the world. She does not know how the lines pull her, but learns it while dreaming. She spends years looking for her hands in dreams. When she lies to Don Juan, Don Genaro farts in her face, she



stops eating for 23 days, and sees her hands. The rest is easy: finding houses and buildings in dreams and keeping them from dissolving, and then being pulled by the eye to specific places. Menstrual periods are best for opening the crack to the other world and stepping through.

La Gorda says that the allies have to come to Carlos seeking Don Juan's luminosity which he has received. La Gorda performs the moth call perfectly with no results; when Carlos does it, the answer is immediate, followed by an ominous growl and pounding. La Gorda has Carlos embrace her, makes movements that look opening heavy sliding doors, and a wind pulls them through the wall into an open field. Carlos feels like his insides are being pulled out. They drive quickly to the sisters' empty house and bathe in cold water. La Gorda says that they are lucky to have escaped. She had not opened the eye before. She and Carlos have each seen something special in the other.

### Chapter 3, La Gorda Analysis

The third chapter introduces la Gorda, Don Juan's deputy who is charged with teaching Carlos the things he has refused thus far to see — provided that Carlos survives the two carefully-planned attacks. Carlos immediately perceives in this beautiful, thin woman qualities he has admired and depended upon in Don Juan. He finds her comforting. La Gorda reveals that she knows many things—including the location of Don Juan and Don Genaros, which seems to preoccupy Carlos greatly—but is under strict orders to reveal them only when Carlos is optimally ready to understand.

La Gorda begins explaining "emptiness." It comes from having children. For a sorcerer, focused on reaching the other world, the overriding need is to reclaim the "edge" that children steal. Even after a sorcerer patches the hole, the difference in luminosity is clear and it must be corrected. It is all tied into an ill-defined warrior's cult of "impeccability." It is revealed that Carlos has two children, a daughter about whom he seems indifferent, and a son whom he dearly loves but rarely sees. The latter, it appears, is what causes his hole and keeps him from wanting to hear the truth. Carlos later will declare the concept barbaric. La Gorda describes how sorcerers sees people in rich, visual terms, helping to build for the reader an appreciation for the "second attention" that will be revealed at the end of the book. She shares her story to illustrate points and describes Doña Soledad's conflict with Pablito as a kind of cannibalism natural to sorcerers.

Declaring that they must go to a "place of power" so she can reveal Don Juan's designs that have been withheld because Carlos is incomplete, la Gorda demonstrates her ability to flash sparks from her fingertips and to fly. Immediately afterward, "allies" attack from whom they are lucky to escape. Carlos sees them as dark, malevolent monsters, but la Gorda assures that comes from his own limitations, being still present in human form. The need to lose form comes to prominence going forward. The description is chilling and exciting, but also marks a milestone for Carlos, as he realizes that the allies are real entities and not hallucinations. He is ready to revamp assumptions and stop being just a "quasisorcerer."



La Gorda continues her instruction about topics that interest Carlos, amazed though she be that he knows so little about basics like molds. She reveals to Carlos that the "moth call" he has learned from Don Juan summons allies. She has him call them to build sufficient tension to open the door and fly, following her leading eye—a feat she has tried to accomplish before but without success.



# Chapter 4, The Genaros

## Chapter 4, The Genaros Summary

In the morning Carlos learns that Soledad is leaving and the girls are avoiding a Genaros' visit. When Don Juan puts Pablito in charge he turns insufferable. La Gorda wants to help but knows that he is too childish to be the Nagual. As soon as the Nagual leaves, Pablito decides that he is strong enough to take all three sisters as wives, but when Benigno and Nestor pin Lidia for Pablito to mount her, she head-butts and nearly kills him. Because the six cannot work together, they cannot shake off human form. Pablito arrives, panting, pale, and weary, calling Carlos "Maestro" (Teacher). Carlos wants know whether they jump bodily into the abyss. Pablito recalls Don Juan and Don Genaro saying goodbye and disappearing, his own courage failing, and Carlos carrying him to the edge, but there he blacks out and wakes up at Genaro's.

When la Gorda returns, Pablito shifts from sadness to anger. Don Juan has predicted Carlos' visit and allows four outcomes: 1) powerful males saving him; 2) weak males finding his corpse; 3) weak males finding him enslaved; or 4) Carlos surviving and becoming the Nagual. The witches have driven Pablito from his house and made his life miserable. Carlos is like the Genaros in luminosity and should not believe what the women tell him. Reference to Toltecs making them catches Carlos' attention, but only the Witness knows details. Pablito actually likes la Gorda but puts on an act because she is the Nagual's woman. As sorcerers they could stop bickering but do not want to. When he tries to do what is expected of the Nagual's successor, Lidia nearly kills him. Pablito sobs that horrible Soledad is what remains of his beautiful mother, Manuelita. Carlos recalls Don Juan talking about an old man's death having no significance—even to himself.

Pablito meets Don Genaro while filling in building clothing booths. He falls in love with an owner's daughter and makes his booth big enough for secret love-making. Genaro "sees" this and flushes Pablito out into the Nagual's arms. Pablito hires Don Juan as his assistant and Genaro convinces Pablito that he is feeding Don Juan a strength potion that also works as a love potion. He proposes that they partner in marketing it. Although he loves his partner, Pablito plans to dump him once he learns the formula. Carlos is depressed.

Nestor enters loudly, no longer shy but a cross between Don Juan and Don Genaro—agile and mesmeric. Benigno sneaks in as Nestor asks how Carlos has survived. They are not surprised to hear about Carlos' double appearing three times, but Nestor says that it is his "nagual," the menacing, double-sized shape that Don Juan can produce on demand and has "stuck" Carlos with. Doubles, by contrast, are gotten in dreaming, and the Genaros lack them. Carlos assures them that his naïve questions are not teasing, but an attempt to know all that Don Juan has withheld from him.



Since the sorcerers' departure and Pablito's failure to lead, the Genaros have felt pursued and are at ease only when all together. Pablito blames it on the witches' curse. After the fight with Lidia, Pablito goes to Veracruz, gets a job and engaged, but the "mannish freaks" track him down, torment his fiancée, and put him on a bus home. He escapes, but nearly dies and currently wants to die "because his pecker doesn't work." Don Juan had ordered Pablito to have sex with the sisters, but he fails on the first attempt. The sisters are serious and gloomy like the Nagual and Josefina is insane. She has to be tied to her bed when she first arrives and Pablito cares for her. Benigno, they say, is shy and eccentric and will change only when he loses his form, as they all will some day. They follow Genaro's advice not to hurry but to enjoy life, rather than Don Juan's insistence on impeccability. The girls expect everyone to be like the Nagual, but la Gorda is the only one who is unruffled like him—and that only because she has lost her form.

When Nestor proposes visiting a ravine where Carlos often goes with the sorcerers, Carlos is uncomfortable. Nestor says that they will employ "the art of stalking." Declaring that witnessing is his path to knowledge, Nestor recalls Carlos and Pablito holding one another, running to the edge, and soaring like kits. Having no option but to jump, they jump. Receiving this validation of his perception, Carlos finds that his intellect is not absolved of doubts and he grows more worried. He realizes that his shortcoming is not rationalizing but timidity. Don Juan says that sorcery is about perception and the jump is staged as a great "cathartic drama." The sorcerers make him thank everyone who has helped him and lead him to jump. He does not notice Pablito's mood at that point, even though a warrior must observe everything.

Nestor sees Pablito disintegrating before the jump. Carlos scooping him up is a costly error. After they disappear, Nestor passes out, mourns lost friends, howls like a coyote, turns into one, and leaps. He feels himself twirling, lands softly, disintegrates, is put back together, and finds himself in a Mazatec sorcerer's hut. Porfirio teaches him about unfamiliar plants, Nestor's nagual animal tells him that he is not dead. Nestor goes back and forth between tonal and nagual eleven times, receiving instructions from Porfirio. After Eligio and Benigno jump, Nestor feels that Benigno's time is not yet up. As Soledad has said, Eligio is with the Sorcerers. Nestor interprets Carlos dream of a phosphorescent plain and a huge, dark dome where they are all too meet one day. The Genaros humor Carlos' claim that no such structure could exist on earth. Eligio does not die, he simply never returns from his jump. This thought staggers Carlos.

Nestor reminds him of another vision: being chased by an unseen creature in an unfamiliar world. When the earth shakes, Carlos grabs a branch that turns out to be an animal's tentacle, which grabs him, hauls him aloft and drops him into a cavernous mouth where he is mashed. Nestor declares that Carlos has died and is experiencing a "long vision." After his last visit to Porfirio, Nestor visits a friend and then makes it to the hills before realizing that he is back in the world. La Gorda arrives, unexpected, claims not to have been eavesdropping, and says that the sisters are on their way. She does not let him go with the Genaros on their hike, for she she must complete his instruction.





## Chapter 4, The Genaros Analysis

The fourth chapter finally presents in person Don Genaro's male apprentices, Pablito, Nestor, and Benigno, who have been in the mountains somewhere and run back, day and night, to see Carlos. They are pleased that Carlos has survived, but quite surprised. They had held little hope that he would not be dead or enslaved. Seeing that he has, he is given the title "Maestro" (Teacher). Pablito is the first to arrive, but he cannot answer Carlos' question about what happens at the abyss, claiming he black out. He does, however, tell about how the sorcerers rob him of his beautiful, doting mother Manuelita, and leave behind evil Doña Soledad. The sacrifices she makes caring for him seem to go unnoticed.

Chapter 4 describes the colorful and unexpected ways in which the male apprentices come to follow Genaro and Nestor, called The Witness because he has accompanied the two sorcerers everywhere in order to tell about them, describes as best he can events at the abyss. Seeing his friends disappear, Nestor too undergoes a crisis which he ably describes. Elgio, who jumps with Benigno, remains throughout the book an enigma, the most perfect apprentice who has also disappeared to somewhere. Carlos has a vision of a great dome where they are all to rendezvous someday. He is still enough of a rationalist to know that a structure of such proportions could not exist on Earth.

The chapter shows a deep rift between the Genaros and Don Juan's female apprentices, offers alternate scenarios for the events that have happened thus far, and helps Carlos realize that timidity rather than rationalism is holding him back from being a true sorcerer. It introduces the ideas of the "art of stalking" and the tonal/nagual dichotomy, but leaves their elucidation for later.





# Chapter 5, The Art of Dreaming

## Chapter 5, The Art of Dreaming Summary

Next evening, la Gorda says that they are too complacent and self-absorbed since the Sorcerers leave. Don Juan expects Carlos to be able to bring out his double only twice, so healing Soledad and Rosa should have drained him. Instead, it restores his power and he experiences true "seeing." Sorcerers "look" at the tonal but "see" the nagual. The Nagual is a stalker, turning into prey even his weaknesses, as la Gorda's 23-day fast stalks her overeating. A warrior must also have a purpose, and hers is entering the other world.

Josefina pretends to be a strange man sleeping next to Carlos as a prank, for the sisters dislike the changes in their lives. La Gorda recalls dreaming of Carlos in the city and with the sisters searches next door to his hotel. Had they found him, things would be different. Carlos knows that the awareness of death is the only deterrent to despair and has braced himself to die, but not to disappear to who knows where. Sorcery is too drastic and final. La Gorda sees Don Juan as cruel because in leaving human form he loses human feelings. One must accept one's fate. Why the Nagual makes such elaborate arrangements to save Carlos is unclear. Carlos must beware others' webs.

La Gorda perceives that Carlos' being just like the sisters and the Genaros is what subconsciously angers them: he is the Nagual while indulging his own ways as they do. La Gorda describes the "consuming ticklishness" that Carlos has felt and calls sudden knowing a form of seeing. Carlos needs to verbalize processes and misses Don Juan's explanations, but la Gorda holds Don Juan inside her new luminosity. Animals glow yellow, humans white, and sorcerers, including these apprentices, are amber. Average humans are egg-shaped while sorcerers are tombstone-shaped. Carlos has an ugly dull patch in his middle which keeps him from flying and from dropping human form. Carlos finds it foolish to think that one can regain completeness by rejecting children and pursuing a vague "other" world.

La Gorda retorts that completeness is for Toltecs only. Soledad is a fine witch but incomplete. When her daughter dies, she gets back that edge, but needs to close Pablito's hole Carlos is horrified. He objects to equating the world of the nagual with the kingdom of heaven and claims that nuns and priests live like warriors, but admits that this is a family prejudice. Don Juan says that fighting the church brings no well-being, while being an impeccable warrior brings vigor, youth, and power. La Gorda sees Carlos admiring but fighting with great people. Since they are peers, he cannot fight her. La Gorda that after their final appointment with power, when the sisters' demonstrate the "art of the dreamer," Carlos must leave or stay—forever. Carlos should ask not about Toltecs ("sorcerer" in Don Juan' benefactor's language) but about how sorcerers' "attention." They stand outside all, unnoticeable, never wasting power. If one stops focusing on the images of the world, the world collapses. Females have open attention



and males closed. Menstruation breaks concentration, allowing women wait days for the crack to open.

Lidia, Josefina, and Rosa appear at intervals, in Indian dress and with odd formal greetings. La Gorda then has Carlos call the allies. Their answer terrifies the sisters until he gives an unknown dispersal sound that he sees in his head. Suddenly, Rosa and Josefina grab Lidia, spin around the table, and collapse in silence. They roll and crawl to the next room. La Gorda sits Carlos sit with his fingers laced over his navel. The girls roll around the room and each stop beneath a lantern in the center of a wall. Lidia stands and glides silently around the room, accelerating and angling up the wall until she runs perpendicular. Exhausted, she collapses in her place. Rosa then leaps onto the wall and swings like a money 30-40 times around the room, dangles from the open beams and floats down. Josefina moves to the center, raises a forearm and gradually block Carlos' view of her entire body. Carlos is nauseous.

When Carlos repeats the moth call flawlessly, the women rush him and he feels the "wind of the eyedoor" pulling. They spin, weightlessly, and land painfully on a barren hill a half-mile from the house. Josefina is feverish and Rosa icy, but putting them together restores them. Carlos cannot rationalize this and is delighted to have flown. Back at the house, la Gorda says that the allies will bother them no more. The girls in high spirits tell Carlos why they dislike him. Lidia rejects Carlos as the Nagual because he is too dumb. Rosa and Josefina seem to agree, but all are persuaded by la Gorda's earlier "seeing" that Carlos is like them. When Carlos recalls confronting la Catalina as a "worthy opponent" on Don Juan's behalf, la Gorda explains that sorcerers have two cycles, the human, when they do whatever is needed to leave human form, and a second when they accept apprentices. La Catalina uses "power plants" on empty people. The Nagual's pipe twice and it knocks la Gorda "off her rocker," while he patches her body. Carlos requires more doses. Complete people do not need drugs.

"Smoking" refers to pulling off one's luminosity and drying it with smoke to see hidden things or to effect healing. Step-by-step instruction works only in the tonal; in the nagual, the sorcerer shows a mystery and waits for the warrior to claim knowledge as power. In the tonal one talks, in the nagual one acts. Carlos understands this perfectly, but fails to see the lines of the world and the crack between worlds in the little sisters' demonstration of powers. Suddenly, however, his senses grow acute and he sees the reddish fibers and wonders about subconscious selective recall as distant events come clear. He considers this a "transcendental key." These are not a metaphor but a difference in levels of attention.

## Chapter 5, The Art of Dreaming Analysis

The fifth chapter opens with the revelation of how complex and well-plotted Carlos' nearly-fatal welcoming has been. Carlos is surprised that Don Juan would want to kill him, but la Gorda says it is nothing personal. If Carlos is to be the new Nagual, he must have survival skills. If not, he is expendable. Don Juan, who at some point in the past joins Don Genaro in splitting Carlos head to release a fearsome, lopsided power entity,



had expected Carlos to be strong enough only to summon it up twice. Doña Soledad goes first because she is desperate to collect the energy needed to make herself whole. If she draws enough off of Carlos, she can kill Pablito and her way is clear. Don Juan had not expected Carlos to be able to withstand the force of the flooring that he has designed and told Doña Soledad how to manufacture and install. Don Juan figures that if Carlos somehow prevails, the three odd sisters should be able to distract and assassinate him. Rosa's sudden attack causes Carlos to defend himself earlier than planned, so the girls get cocky. Guilting him into healing Rosa should further drain his resources. When they strike, Carlos is not depleted and his double is about to strike them all down when la Gorda intervenes. What earlier appears as eccentric, bizarre behavior is revealed as a conspiracy, with Don Juan at its head.

La Gorda deepens Carlos' (and the reader's) knowledge of basic sorcery precepts, including the difference between "looking" at the tonal world and "seeing" the nagual world. Tonal means everyday reality and nagual means the other worldly. The book's title comes from Don Juan's label for the latter. La Gorda knows little about why the group calls themselves Toltecs, beyond the fact that Don Juan's mentor had claimed to be one, but she clears up for him that the tickling sensation is one that sorcerers covet. She believes that she can teach him better than Don Juan because they are peers. Carlos has no compunction to argue with authority as he is prone to do. She begins introducing the topics of "attention" and the "art of dreaming," but full explanations are put off until the sisters demonstrate palpably the "Second Attention."

Carlos' description of the women rolling about and taking precise positions on the cardinal points, then one-by-one demonstrating feats that defy the laws of nature is suitably rich, detailed, and filled with awe. Afterwards, Carlos repeats the moth call flawlessly, the women rush him, and he feels the "wind of the eyedoor" pulling. They spin, weightlessly, and land painfully on a barren hill a half-mile from the house. Carlos cannot rationalize this experience and is truly delighted to have flown. La Gorda says that the allies will no longer bother them but also cannot be called on for help.

That Carlos' training has concentrated on mind-bending drugs begins to be emphasized. For the other apprentices, drugs are held off until the end, to give a "boost" into the other world. Carlos has little experience — or at least little remembrance of having heard — of "normal" teaching in sorcery. In this and the last chapter, he gets a crash course, which seems to go remarkably smoothly. He learns why Don Juan has had him stand so often and so long downwind of fires for the smoke to irritate. "Smoking" is a means of seeing hidden things and healing. He suddenly "sees" the lines of the world and the crack between worlds that the little sisters have used to demonstrate their powers. He begins recalling distant events and teaching and understanding them for the first time.

Group tensions among the sisters diminishes as they demonstrate the second ring of power and Carlos participates in flying. He no longer sees it as a hallucinogenic trick, as in *The Teachings of Don Juan*. He fails at first to understand how the sisters perform their tricks, but then sees the lines of the world. Letting sun in the eyes and dreaming are barely introduced, but are developed in the final chapter.



# Chapter 6, The Second Attention

## Chapter 6, The Second Attention Summary

La Gorda has a few things to teach Carlos only in light of his decision to stay with them. Having lost their old purpose, the women must become breezy like the hot wind and need a few days to settle affairs. Carlos must leave for a few days to contemplate his two bouts as omens and, if he is impeccable, gifts of power. When he returns, the Genaros will demonstrate the "art of the stalker" and they will depart. Crushed by the prospect of leading but told that impeccability is freedom and scares away the human form, Carlos narrates his understanding of Don Juan's teaching. During a hike, a boulder falls 20-30 yards from where they have paused while Carlos ties his laces. Had they continued walking, they would have been crushed. Don Juan proposes that in another ravine at another time, stopping would have gotten them crushed. When one cannot control the forces of destiny, one can only do what one does impeccably. La Gorda wants to tell him something, but must await the perfect time for it to have effect.

La Gorda and Carlos go out to sit against thick poles that serve as a way of gathering "second attention"—that of the nagual. Carlos' second attention has been warped by power plants, so he must change direction and learn balance. He can no longer ride on Don Juan's power but must learn to dream in a non-menacing way. Several times Carlos has come close to dying through indulgent dreaming. Like Eligio, a fabulous dreamer, Carlos has his second attention in the other world, but for Carlos it is a nightmare. Eligio makes the jump easily. Carlos has to be found, roaming aimlessly, and brought back by Don Juan. Carlos is "dangerously crazy" and unmanageable, but if he can control this, he can be a great warrior.

To prepare for a busy day, La Gorda shows Carlos how to energize from the sun. The sisters join them and move their heads back and forth, synchronized, with eyes half-closed, for half an hour. When Lidia senses that the Genaros are coming, the girls go indoors. La Gorda says that it is too early because Carlos must first "round up" his attention for the women. Because of power plants and different training, Carlos is mysterious and Don Juan wants him to change to the paths of dreaming and stalking. Human beings are frail, composed of layers of luminosity that can be jolted apart, peeled like an onion. This causes death. Carlos' nagual gets out twice when his layers separate. La Gorda's task is to tighten Carlos' layers as death pushes against him. Dreaming tightens layers and ties the two attentions together so the center does not need to push out.

La Gorda learns that true sorcerers never die only recently. Don Juan had taught them about the tonal/nagual dichotomy before taking them on a 40-mile hike into the mountains, carrying a heavy table and a bundle of odd items. At their destination, Josefina spreads the items on the table. Each must study the layout at a distance and close-up. Don Juan tests their recall by removing an item and they all do well at this tonal task. When he tests them on the rocks, twins, etc., under the table they fail



because that is vast, nagual space. When he sweeps everything off the table and has them lie on it and study the ground beneath, they focus and do better. The two attentions become one. The demonstration helps la Gorda clean her life but she must lose human form to unify her attentions. The sisters gaze to trap their second attention. They start out on a dry leaf, then stacks of leaves, and learn to stop the world. The obstacle is quieting the thoughts. It takes la Gorda four years to become a gazer and a year to see her hands in dreaming.

They next gaze at small plants, trees (which explains why Don Juan has Carlos focus on crows and eucalyptuses while smoking), insects, and rocks. A second series involves rain and fog. Carlos recalls seeing a fog bridge that Don Juan says he may have to cross some day. A third series of exercises involves letting the second attention go to where one is gazing, in the distance or at cloud. Josefina is nearly killed gazing at thunderheads, but Genaro is a "thunderbolt sorcerer," who singles out Benigno and Nestor through lightning strikes and then "hooks" them. The last series is fire, smoke, and shadow gazing. All are bright and colorful to gazers. Sorcerers who lose human form can star- or water gaze. The girls are all terrified by water and Carlos has injured his second attention by going beyond his limits with running water.

Before la Gorda can tell the final things, Carlos must round up his second attention for the sisters and her. She seats him on a cushion, has him relax, and scan counterclockwise without moving his head, seeking a "power spot" in the distant hills. Gazing requires coordinating four activities, which requires some practice; when he sees the "blotch" he must nudge her. Carlos recalls similar exercises with Don Juan, playing at perception without analyzing. Carlos had failed, but this time he feels ready. A blotch grows almost black. La Gorda tells him to breath carefully and open his eyes if he feels it advancing to swallow him. The goal is to go gradually on his own. He sisters practice this for days. In an hour, Carlos finds himself doing the impossible, advancing to the spot and distinguishing features. La Gorda shakes him to bring him out, laughs, and calls the sisters to gaze into the Nagual's power place. As they go rigid, he follows, zooming in and out to quiet his thoughts rather than to open him as Don Juan had taught. Carlos finds reversing his training difficult but sees the usefulness.

After 30 minutes, they go inside to receive the Genaros. While la Gorda fetches them, Lidia explains how she now gazes only at shadows at a distance and learns all she wants to know from their colors and temperature. One must dream and then look for the dreams in gazing. This takes much practice. Rosa gazes at trees, Josefina at clouds, la Gorda being formless gazes at anything, but is also a rain gazer. They joke about Pablito gazing at women's crotches before saying he is a rock gazer; Nestor is a rain/plant gazer and Benigno a distance gazer. When they lose their form, they will cease to be stupid—and Carlos will stop asking questions. Lidia states that Carlos and Pablito are partners and asks if Carlos truly likes him. Thinking, Carlos replies that he trusts Pablito and feels kinship. Lidia says accusingly that Carlos fouls Pablito up during the jump. Sorcerers do not help one another, because each is capable. They are now tied together. Lidia hates to think he will try to "help" them too. Rosa and Josefina agree. They hate that he is staying. Carlos frightens himself by yelling at them in a strange voice.





La Gorda steps in and scold them about stepping into each other's webs. They must respect one another as warriors. Carlos' presence turns them into "slobs." La Gorda will not let Carlos do to them what he has done to Pablito, and Carlos says that had he known it was wrong, he would not have held Pablito. La Gorda assures him that Nestor would not exaggerate, because he is a perfect Witness. Warriors cannot have compassion, but must let others be, even when that is hard. One must support the other as they are, trusting them to be impeccable. Only one who sees and is formless like Don Juan can help another. Carlos recalls the lesson he learns by moving a snail to safety off a sidewalk and perhaps subjecting it to poison. Moving it back is no solution. The snail must slowly make its way to whatever its new fate is.

La Gorda arranges them in the "Toltec warrior's power stand," with Carlos packed tightly in the women's midst. As the binding force he must rearrange their positions without unlocking by putting on the "second face." Carlos slumps, realizes there is no floor, abandons himself, and they float. As Carlos dreams disconnectedly, they exit into blinding sunlight. When La Gorda, who is behind Carlos, breathes into his mouth he is terrified but cannot break away. Believing that he is at the point of death, he feels unequaled joy. They pull apart, in shifted order, midair, exhausted. Everything is yellowish and glowing. La Gorda is again behind him and Rosa licks his face. Carlos sees clearly that he must sleep again to guide them back to the house. They wake up, sprawling in the yard, being doused with cold water. La Gorda announces that Carlos has gotten them lost by indulging in fear, but now has two faces. He still must regain completeness and lose form. Everyone is delighted.

La Gorda concludes her teaching. Power plants drive Carlos deep into the other world, beyond the Nagual's spot. The women must help him control his second attention. There are no hallucinations, just gathered attention, and the giant gnat he once sees is for him the guardian of the other world. He cannot yet bypass it. Carlos alone among them has seen the yellow sulfur world where the sorcerers live and await them at the dome. The other world is no metaphor but a state of being. Their joint task is to focus the second attention. Carlos must figure out what to do without delay. What the sorcerers will do after rendezvousing with them cannot be said in so vast a universe.

## **Chapter 6, The Second Attention Analysis**

The book concludes with the last essential teachings that La Gorda has been charged with passing on. Carlos also must learn "the art of stalking," promised since Chapter 2, which is the Genaros' specialty, but this will wait until after he has gone away to consider how he intends to lead the group as the new Nagual. Carlos is terrified of leadership. La Gorda takes him outside to explain and demonstrate the basics of drawing energy from sunshine. Sitting in front of the house, Carlos has initial difficulty coordinating the four essential elements, but soon enjoys the exercise. La Gorda introduces the idea of layers of luminosity and how they are related to mortality. With her story of the hike into the mountains with table and bag of odd objects, she makes clear to Carlos for the first time what is meant by the tonal/nagual dichotomy. She helps



him focus on a manageable area and uses commonplace images, something all parable tellers do.

La Gorda next describes the organized discipline of learning to gaze at various objects, waiting for a breakthrough that can best be described as making the world stop. Once this happens, the learners continue up the hierarchy of objects but also develop specialties. Only when one has lost form can one gaze at clouds and stars. Water is dangerous. Having instructed her pupil, La Gorda sets him up to apply his new knowledge. He gazes at the distant hills, using the techniques acquired earlier in gathering sunshine power, and amazes himself at his quick ability to master the techniques and see details of objects far away. La Gorda says it takes her four years to stop the world gazing and a year to see her hands in dreaming, a related discipline.

In anticipation of the final lesson, La Gorda goes to invite the Genaros to join them. In her absence, Lidia accuses Carlos of harming Pablito by helping him at the abyss, for sorcerers do not help one another, because each is capable. Returning to find them squabbling, La Gorda rebukes them, clarifies a bit the essence of impeccability, and announces that they are about to perform the "Toltec warrior's power stand," with Carlos packed tightly in the women's midst. Carlos describes this exercise in the most intricate detail, evoking the symbolism of a mythic warrior, and specifying the goal: rearrange their order without letting go of one another. Terror and effort put Carlos into a trance or sleep in which he feels that they are floating. Unclear images intervene before he knows that he must get them back to the house, again falling into unconsciousness. The Genaros are on hand to throw water over them and relate how they have dissociated bodies until the water hits. La Gorda after recovering says that during that unclear time, they had wandered deep in the other world and had nearly perished. None of them is ready for such immersion in "second attention." As the designated leader, Carlos has much to learn before the group can join Don Juan and Don Genaro beyond the crack in the world.



# Characters

## Carlos Castaneda

The author and chief character in the book, Castaneda introduces himself in *The Teachings of Don Juan* as a graduate student at the University of California, Los Angeles, who finds himself undergoing an apprenticeship to the Yaqui Indian sorcerer, Don Juan Matus. The methodology depends heavily on the use of hallucinogenic drugs, which Carlos comes to fear, and ends the relationship. The present book suggests that the apprenticeship later resumes, primarily in the central Mexico highlands, and reaches the point that Carlos and other apprentices of Don Juan and his partner Don Genaro must graduate by jumping into an abyss. Shortly afterward, the two full-fledged sorcerers enter the other world. Carlos returns to the highlands to validate the jump with his colleagues. He does not remember doing it. Carlos does not seem to have been a full-time learner like the "little sisters" and the Genaros, whose training is drug-free.

*The Second Ring of Power* begins with Carlos seeking Pablito and Nestor. He senses that they and Don Juan are not present. He first meets Doña Soledad, Pablito's mother, no longer an old crone but a seductive woman whose dog keeps him from fleeing, and whom he has to hit in the head to keep from choking him to death. Carlos next meets the strange "little sisters," Lidia, Josefina, and Rosa, who also attack him, and for a second time something inside Carlos' head lashes out at Rosa. Don Juan's official assistant, la Gorda, steps in and begins explaining the odd happenings to him. With her, Carlos is re-introduced to the fearsome "allies" he meets in his first apprenticeship and learns if not to control them, at least to keep them at bay. He hears from Nestor, "The Witness," an account of the leap, in which Carlos tries to help weaker Pablito, an effort that bonds them forever and goes against the code of the self-sufficient warrior. Having made the jump, Carlos is a sorcerer, but he is still incomplete (because he has children) and has not lost human form. Until he remedies that, his powers are limited.

Rapidly initiated into the disciplines of dreaming and gazing, Carlos must serve as the binding force in the "Toltec warrior's power stand," packed tightly in the women's midst and having to rearrange their positions without unlocking by putting on the "second face." Carlos' previous use of "power plants" nearly gets them killed when they go too far into the other world. Given the choice of leaving his fellow sorcerers forever or remaining with them as the new Nagual forever, Carlos chooses the latter. La Gorda urges him to figure out quickly where he will lead them.

## Don Juan Matus

Author Carlos Castaneda's Yaqui Indian mentor, a full-fledged sorcerer, Don Juan never appears in this book, but memories of his teachings and on-going instruction through his other apprentices make him a major character. Don Juan is most often referred to as "The Nagual," which author Carlos Castaneda takes as an honorific title, but learns is a





reference to his ability to split and release a fearsome entity from his head. Don Juan gives Carlos the same ability.

Much of the book shows how the force of Don Juan's personality causes Carlos to gloss over the details of others' appearance and personalities. Don Juan is described as fearsome and a devil. Don Juan never compromises: either Carlos learns about hidden resources or perishes. Don Juan has fathered three sons and a daughter, teaches that having children makes a person incomplete, but somehow has restored himself. Don Juan insists on "impeccability" whereas his friend and colleague Don Genaro encourages his followers to enjoy themselves.

For some reason, Don Juan depends on hallucinogenic drugs, particularly peyote, while training Carlos, a graduate student at the University of California, Los Angeles. This puts Carlos at odds with the other drug-free apprentices. The difference in perspective allows them, and particularly la Gorda, to help clarify things that Carlos has failed to understand because it is not in the rational form her needs. Carlos also remembers much that he has forgotten and "sees" the hidden things that make everything come together. The Teachings of Don Juan suggests that they part company, but this book shows continued work in central Mexico, partly in company with additional female apprentices.

The core of Don Juan's teaching is that reality is divided into two rings of power. The first is "tonal," consisting of everyday life, which ordinary people take for granted, and the second is "nagual," available only to sorcerers. In it, sorcerers impart order to the non-ordinary world as ordinary people impart order to the ordinary world. Sorcerers "look" at the tonal but "see" the nagual. Before going to the other world, Don Juan arranges for the "little sisters" to test Carlos and, if he survives, make him participate in "second attention," slipping in and out of that crack between worlds. Don Juan and Don Genaro wait on the other side for their apprentices.

## **Elena (La Gorda)**

The most powerful of Don Juan Matus' apprentices, La Gorda (meaning "Fat" in Spanish - her other nickname is "Two Hundred and Twenty Buttocks") has received a series of teachings from Don Juan that she is to impart to author Carlos Castaneda when he comes looking for answers. Before they meet, Carlos is nearly killed twice and is saved when his ferocious double emerges and knocks the attackers—fellow apprentices—away. During the course of the book, la Gorda clarifies much of what Carlos has learned—or at least been told—by Don Juan, helping Carlos to put aside his rational Western mindset and truly "see."

La Gorda weigh 220 lbs. (she claims 236) when Don Genaro's apprentice, Pablito, rescues her from the streets and set her up doing laundry. Don Juan visits, sees moths circling la Gorda's head, and takes it as an omen of approaching death. Chewing on a sponge during 23-day fast and then learning to eat like a warrior and walk, la Gorda no longer lives up to her nicknames. Don Juan uses the wind to either cure her or finish la



Gorda off. She changes more than any apprentice, going from empty to powerful. Doña Soledad is afraid of her because la Gorda can get inside her thoughts, and la Gorda thinks that Soledad is evil. Don Juan has taught la Gorda things that he entrusts to no one else, not pampering her, but trusting her.

When Don Juan goes to the other world, he leaves la Gorda in charge until Carlos survives his mortal bouts. If he does, she is to give him special instructions to enable him to be the new Nagual. La Gorda also has the most personal power among the apprentices, knows everything, and has been taught to control people. The others accept their fates and do not envy her. Carlos sees much of Don Juan in la Gorda, noticing first her dark, calm, scanning eyes. She is taller than the "little sisters," currently lean, graceful, and commanding, friendly without smiling, has a nicely shaped face, small mouth, thin lips, broad nose, high cheekbones, and long, jet-black hair. She has beautiful, muscular hands that she clasps over her umbilical region. She is calming, as Don Juan had been. While not as pretty as Josefina, la Gorda is more beautiful than any of the girls. Her strong religious background originally makes accepting sorcery difficult, but she has reconciled the two, seeing nuns and priests as perfect flying sorcerers if they would allow themselves. She feels sorry for those who have only her to help lose their form rather than Don Juan.

## Benigno

Benigno is the eldest apprentice of the sorcerer Don Genaro, found when his bicycle gets stuck in the mud during a storm and he struck by lightning. More scared than injured, Benigno gets "hooked" during recovery. Author Carlos Castaneda first meets Benigno and four other Indian youths roaming the Sonora Desert with Don Juan Matus, searching for "power objects." Carlos and Benigno instantly become friends. Benigno is from southern Mexico and delights in making his personal life a mystery. Benigno has small teeth, full lips, high cheekbones, a small nose, and big ears. He seems like a child whose feature have not matured. Benigno does not know where his booming voice comes from, but Nestor claims that that he inherits all of Don Genaro's noises, including his massive farts. When not clowning, Benigno has a melodious voice. Benigno a distance gazer.

## Eligio

Never seen in the book but much talked about, Eligio is an apprentice of the sorcerer Don Genaro. Eligio is the only one other than author Carlos Castaneda to be accepted by "Mescalito," the personification of peyote. Because Eligio is the best apprentice, he is no longer in the world. He does not have to jump into the abyss as a trial, but is taken away while working in the field. When Don Juan Matus runs into Eligio, whom he had known since childhood, going to visit Carlos, he perceives great, unsuspected power keeps him isolated from other apprentices. Doña Soledad's "little sisters" hate and fear Eligio but he is indifferent to them. He has lost his human form by becoming a marvelous dreamer, and gathers sufficient power to withstand going through the crack



between worlds. Don Juan Matus and Don Genaros give Eligio a final boost with "power plants" and he goes wherever he is now.

## Don Genaro

A full-fledged sorcerer like Don Juan Matus, Don Genaro has taken part in author Carlos Castaneda's instruction and, with Don Juan has gone permanently through the crack into the other world. "The Genaros" refers to his three apprentices, Benigno, Pablito, and Nestor. Don Genaro encourages his followers to enjoy themselves while Don Juan insists on "impeccability." Don Genaro is a master of dreaming and can pay attention for as many activities as are found in daily life; the two domains of attention have the same value for him. He spends most of his time in dreaming and can go in and out of the crack between the worlds as through an ordinary door.

## Josefina

One of the "Little Sisters" apprenticed to sorcerer Don Juan Matus, crazy Josefina is brought to him by Vicente, a curer from the north. She has to be tied to her bed when she first arrives and Pablito cares for her. Josefina and apprentice Lidia hate one another and fight. Josefina shreds her hand on a dry leaf and nearly dies before resolving to drop her old ways. Viewing Josefina as the most capable of taking care of herself in all eventualities, interim boss la Gorda chooses her to find Nestor in the mountains.

Josefina first appears to Carlos as old, ugly, smelly, toothless, and partially paralyzed but turns out to be pretty, with a face more Latin than Indian, with a light olive complexion, small mouth, chiseled nose, small white teeth, short, black, curly hair, and a dimple that makes her look cocky. She has friendly eyes, sweet and innocent. After showing her true physical appearance, Lidia pretends to suffer aphasia (the inability to formulate words). Always a prankster, Lidia wraps up her menstrual rags and presents the package to Carlos, pretending it is Don Juan's heirloom pipe. Josefina's Toltec arts are hiding behind things and flying. Josefina is a cloud-gazer.

## Lidia

The first of Don Juan Matus' apprentices, called "Little Sisters," Lidia lies half-dead in a house in the desert when Don Juan finds her. He carries her to Don Genaro, a medicine man, and hires Doña Soledad to care for her. While Lidia is still recovering, Don Juan apprentices author Carlos Castaneda and crazy Josefina. They hate one another and Lidia leaves to find a husband. On the road she rescues a newly-hatched chick that breaks loose in her blouse and scratches her all over. After four days of being tied up with ravings, Lidia accepts her fate and recovers. She and Josefina reconcile and no longer fight.



Lidia is "wispy, pixie-like" in her early twenties, aloof, with black, shifty eyes, high cheekbones, and a chiseled nose, flat at the bridge. She used to have sore eyelids. Carlos has known her many years but they rarely exchange words. Don Juan says that Lidia is talented, Pablito regards her as dangerous, and Carlos sees her as shy. Lidia's fate is to be the breeze, a dreamer, and a warrior. She no longer envies la Gorda's being in charge. Lidia regularly angers fellow sister Josefina without meaning to. Don Juan has her pretend to be Pablito's wife for appearances' sake, but when he is ordered to have sexual relations with her, she head-butts him off. Lidia's Toltec art is walking on anything.

## Nestor

Nicknamed "The Witness," Nestor is an apprentice of the sorcerer Don Genaro, whom he follows on the sly to learn where he harvests "power plants" to avoid paying for them. On a clear day, lightning strikes the ground in front of Nestor, singes his legs and genitals passing through, and striking a rock behind him. Don Genaro heals him and Nestor gets "hooked." Nestor is the reputed healer among the apprentices, summoned to care for Doña Soledad after author Carlos Castaneda's double injures her. Before they go into the other world, Don Juan Matus and Don Genaro take Nestor everywhere as a witness to everything. Nestor appears taller and stronger than Carlos recalls, lean and feline. Having been shy, embarrassed by crooked teeth, he now seems a mixture of Don Juan and Don Genaro—agile and mesmerizing. Nestor is a rain/plant gazer.

## Pablito

An apprentice of the sorcerer Don Genaro, Pablito is the natural son of beautiful, kind Manuelita, who morphs into sorceress Doña Soledad, from whom he is estranged. Pablito is held in contempt by all of the apprentices as a coward for wanting to be a normal person. Pablito fears the now-vanished Don Juan Matus more than death. His peculiarity is always carrying and sitting on his own chair. Don Juan makes him Lidia's husband for appearances' sake, but Pablito is scared to death of her. Assigned to lead the group in Don Juan's absence, Pablito fails at his first task: having sex with each of the little sisters. Lidia hits him in the forehead to get him off of her and word spreads that he is impotent. They joke that gazing at women's crotches is his specialty, but then admit he is a rock gazer.

Pablito meets Don Genaro while filling in building clothing booths in the city market. He falls in love with an owner's daughter and builds his booth large enough to accommodate unseen love-making. Genaro notices odd shaking, "sees" people making love, and flushes Pablito by barking like a large dog—straight into Don Juan's arms. Seeing how strong Don Juan is, Pablito hires him to carry lumber, tells the boss that Don Juan is his grandfather, and takes a percentage of the old man's pay. Don Genaro convinces Pablito that he is feeding his friend a strength potion that also works as a love potion, and proposes that they partner in marketing it. Pablito begins eating "tons" of



"green stuff" (probably psychotropic plants), and though he loves his partner, Pablito plans to dump him once he learns the formula.

## Porfirio

An old Mazatec sorcerer in whose hut sorcerer's apprentice Nestor finds himself after his jump into the abyss, Porfirio is glad to see him and teaches him about still unfamiliar plants. When Nestor has learned enough, he disintegrates. This happens several times and they become friends.

## Rosa

The last of the "Little Sisters" who apprentice to the sorcerer Don Juan Matus, Rosa runs into him while chasing a runaway pig. Don Juan likes her fighting spirit and when the pig walks approaches him, takes this as an omen. Rosa is suspicious about a job offer, fearing rape, but agrees, and everyone at Doña Soledad's house likes her. Rosa takes to Soledad slowly but now takes good care of her. Rosa is "wispy, pixie-like," in her early twenties, boisterous and frank, bad-tempered but friendly, bold, and funny. Rosa reacts to author Carlos Castaneda's anger over the sisters exchanging foot signals by swinging at him with a heavy object. His fearsome "double" emerges more swiftly and strikes the back of Rosa's magical left hand. Late in the book Rosa's Toltec art is shown to be dangling from anything, and her specialty in gazing is trees.

## Doña Soledad / Manuelita

An apprentice of the sorcerer Don Juan Matus, Doña Soledad is author Carlos Castaneda's first contact in this book as he goes to visit her son, Pablito. Carlos needs confirmation that they have jumped together into the abyss at the culmination of their training. Arriving at their house, Carlos finds Soledad, not the weak, ugly, fainting, heavy old woman he remembers (cruelly nicknaming her "Mrs. Pyramid"), but slim, strong, and vital, with black shiny eyes. She is uncomfortably forward sexually in the absence of her children. Pretending to help Carlos escape from her daughter's ferocious dog (actually hers and under her control), Soledad lures Carlos into her bed, which is aligned with the north wind and situated on a special floor that should have ample power to control him. As Soledad strangles Carlos, a fearsome entity emerges from his head and knocks away.

It is subsequently revealed, once the focus is off Soledad, that she had once been a beautiful young woman named Manuelita, mother to a daughter, now deceased, and Pablito, a sorcerer's apprentice with whom she is "mortal enemies." She has been with Don Juan for seven years, attracting his attention when he sweeps a bowl of soup off the table and it lands on her foot without spilling. Before going into the other world, Don Juan gives Soledad a chance to gain the power she needs to enter the other world by killing Carlos and claiming his luminosity.

## Vicente

A curer from the north, Vicente brings to Don Juan Matus crazy Josefina, who fights with Don Juan's first apprentice, Lidia, and they hate one another.



# Objects/Places

## Allies

Allies are entities controlled by a sorcerer. The concept is fully developed in *The Teachings of Don Juan*, but in this book, author Carlos Castaneda and La Gorda, Don Juan Matus' designated interim successor, face four forces who are on the loose after Don Juan and Don Genaro go to the other world. Carlos has met Don Juan's dark, rectangular mass, and Genaro's long-faced, bald, tall, glowing man with droopy eyes, but only once glimpsed Don Juan's coyote and Don Genaro's jaguar. Carlos leaps with euphoria, realizing that allies are real entities and not hallucinations as he had earlier believed and is ready to revamp all of his assumptions and stop being a "quasisorcerer."

La Gorda informs Carlos that allies lack form, but have a presence and colors. Carlos sees them as monsters because he has not yet lost his human form. One can only protect oneself against prowling allies by losing human form. Capturing allies always involves twirling; they seek out good warriors but inferior ones have to beg for years. Sorcerers keep allies in special gourds.

## Double

The body that one gets in dreaming, the double is identical with oneself. The Genaros lack doubles since the sorcerers, Don Juan Matus and Don Genaro, disappear into the other world. They feel like they are being pursued and are at ease only when they are all together. Author Carlos Castaneda believes he has a double when a grotesque presence emerges from his head to defend him when his life is in peril, but he is told that is the "nagual." Sometimes they speak of it as a double because it is double-sized the individual.

## Mescalito

Mescalito is Don Juan Matus' personification of peyote, the hallucinogenic drug derived from the alkaloid mescaline used in Yaqui Indian rituals. In *The Teachings of Don Juan*, Don Juan gives author Carlos Castaneda large numbers of peyote buttons, and Mescalito favors him. This is referred to often in the course of *The Second Ring of Power*, where only one other apprentice is given drugs, and then only at the end of his training. Doña Soledad, who is instructed to tell Carlos certain things after Don Juan has departed, tells him that "Mescalito is the Nagual's guaje" (gourd), through which he can acquaint one with anything. It is the key to his power.





## Mexico City

In Mexico City, Don Juan Matus pushes author Carlos Castaneda into an office to dispel Carlos' attention on the tonal (everyday), but Carlos slips through the crack between worlds and Don Juan has "a hellish time" finding him again.

## Nagual

Author Carlos Castaneda assumes that "Nagual" is an honorific applied to his mentor, the sorcerer Don Juan Matus, by his apprentices, but is told by Nestor that it is a horrendous, menacing shape that looks like a person but is twice the person's size—hence not strictly speaking the person's double—that takes much energy to sustain. Don Juan has this ability and gives it to Carlos by splitting his luminosity so one eye and ear are aware of everything and can react in an emergency. When Don Juan goes to the other world, Carlos inherits the title, although the women apprentices see him as stupid as anyone.

## Rings of Power (the Tonal/Nagual Dichotomy)

Reality is divided into two rings of power. The first is "tonal," consisting of everyday life, which ordinary people largely take for granted. The second ring is "nagual," available only to sorcerers. In it, sorcerers impart order to the non-ordinary world as ordinary people impart order to the ordinary world. Sorcerers "look" at the tonal but "see" the nagual. The little sisters demonstrate the second ring to author Carlos Castaneda by defying gravity and disappearing. This shows that "the art of the dreamer is the art of attention." Holding the image of dreams takes years of practice, repeating until one feels the "lines of the world." Carlos had understood Don Juan Matus' talk about a crack between worlds metaphorically, but now sees it as a difference in levels of attention.

## Sierra Madre

The flat, barren region of central Mexico, the Sierra Madre is where the action of The Second Ring of Power occurs. Author Carlos Castaneda gives no more information than this.

## Sonora

The state in northwestern Mexico, bordering the United States, where author Carlos Castaneda normally begins his search for his mentor, Don Juan Matus. If that fails, Carlos drives a "particular city" in central Mexico.





## Toltecs

Don Juan Matus never mentions to the apprentices that the Toltecs are ancient people living in central Mexico, but only Nestor, the Witness, knows any details. "Toltec" means sorcerer in the unknown language of Don Juan's "benefactor" or teacher, and Don Juan's apprentices adopt the term to designate their group. Author Carlos Castaneda self-deprecatingly says he lectures la Gorda on the history and culture of this pre-Aztec race. The book ends with the four women apprentices forming the "Toltec warrior's power stand," with author Carlos Castaneda packed tightly in the women's midst. As the binding force he must rearrange their positions without unlocking by putting on the "second face." Carlos' previous use of "power plants" nearly gets them killed when they go too far into the other world.

## Veracruz

Veracruz is the city on the Gulf of Mexico to which Pablito flees after fighting with Lidia. There he finds a job and becomes engaged, but the "mannish freaks"—Soledad, Rosa, Lidia, and Josefina—track him down, torment his fiancée, and put him on a bus home. Pablito escapes but nearly dies in the desert.

## The Wind

The wind is an entity that moves inside female sorcerer-warriors' bodies, communicating with their wombs. They learn faster when they cling to their specific wind. There are four winds: 1) the East breeze of morning, bringing hope and brightness and heralding the day; its personality is "gay and sleek and shifty;" 2) the North, hard wind, hot, cold, or both, blasting with energy and blindness; only strong sorcerers can tackle the hard wind; its personality is energetic, commandeering, and impatient; 3) the West, cold wind of the afternoon, sad and trying, but so deep that it is worth seeking; its personality is moody, melancholy, and pensive; and 4) the South, hot wind, protecting and enveloping; its power goes together with the darkness; its personality is happy, abandoned, and bouncy.



# Themes

## Impeccability

Impeccability is a words much used by the sorcerers and their apprentices in *The Second Ring of Power*, but with little indication of its root meaning: incapable of sin, in the original Latin; beyond suspicion, flawless in secular usage. It clearly lies at the very core of Don Juan Matus' teaching and implies some form of asceticism, for his associate, Don Genaro, advise instead that apprentices not hurry but enjoy life. The apprentices bandy it about as a given, much as author Carlos Castaneda takes his understanding of rationality as a given. Much of the tension in the book comes from givens falling short of universality. The closest anyone comes to a clear characterization of impeccability comes when Carlos' anger at the church flairs. Don Juan says that this attitude brings no well-being, and suggests concentrating on being an impeccable warrior, which brings vigor, youth, and power.

Various aspects of the concept can be seen in the contexts in which it is mentioned. Attempting to seduce Carlos, Doña Soledad grows angry that he is not impeccable. She offers no explanation of what she means and pulls him into bed. Concerned that apprentice Josefina suffers aphasia, Carlos recalls Don Juan telling him that a dear friend dying in a hospital would not be sick if she were impeccable but also declaring that she can recover if she pushes disease away with her left hand. As that friend is not impeccable, she dies. Sure that Josefina is impeccable, Carlos tries to cure her, but she cannot move her arm with coordination. It turns out that Josefina is faking.

When Carlos decides to remain with the apprentices and assume the mantle of leadership, he is told by la Gorda, the sage interim leader, to go away for a few days to contemplate his two recent bouts as omens and, if he is impeccable, gifts of power. Impeccability is freedom and scares away the human form. Carlos recalls a hike with Don Juan, when a boulder falls nearby, but they have stopped so Carlos can tie his laces. Don Juan concludes that since one cannot control the forces of destiny, one must do whatever one does impeccably. Warriors must support one another as they are, trusting each other to be impeccable.

## Reason

Reason is author Carlos Castaneda's greatest obstacle to becoming a full sorcerer. *The Second Ring of Power* shows how little this product of Western education has profited from the training in Yaqui Indian shamanism given to him by Don Juan Matus. He still assumes that by "reason" everyone means rational thinking and comprehension, but sorcerers see instead "attention," declaring, "The art of the dreamer is the art of attention." Carlos is told that "average" people attend to just the tonal, everyday life, and take its order for granted. This is the "first ring of power." Only sorcerers have access to the "second ring of power," which lets them impart order to the non-ordinary world.



Throughout the book, Carlos' western training is at odds with the phenomena he sees and, gradually, he recalls forgotten bits of his old training as they are filled with new meaning.

The bouts with Doña Soledad and Rosa, during which his double emerges to defend him, show that rationality is only a tiny portion of himself. Carlos needs to verbalize processes and misses Don Juan's explanations, which La Gorda cannot give. She describes phenomena belonging to the second ring but cannot defend them against rational arguments. She notes that while step-by-step instruction works in the tonal world, in the nagual, the sorcerer shows a mystery and waits for the warrior to claim knowledge as power. In the tonal one talks, in the nagual one acts. In a break-through, Carlos understands this perfectly, but still fails to see the lines of the world and the crack between words in the sisters' activities. Suddenly, his senses grow acute and he sees the reddish fibers and wonders about subconscious selective recall as distant events come clear. He finds a "transcendental key." There are no hallucinations, just gathered attention. The other world is no metaphor but a state of being. Their joint task is to focus the second attention. Carlos must figure out what to do without delay.

## Seeing

Don Juan Matus' stand-in as the keeper of the sorcerer's apprentices helps author Carlos Castaneda understand the difference between "looking" at the tonal (ordinary) world and "seeing" the nagual (non-ordinary, other) world. It requires, however, a special revelatory moment for him to quit thinking in terms of hallucinogenic tricks and to "see" the lines of the world that empower sorcerers. "Seeing" is almost always italicized and/or placed in quotation marks to set off this special sense. Carlos' purpose in returning to central Mexico is to learn what happens when he and his fellow apprentices leap into the abyss. He has no recollection. Nestor "sees" Pablito disintegrating before the jump and declares that Carlos has died and is experiencing a "long vision."

Throughout the book, individual characters see the events surrounding Carlos' arrival in significantly different ways. Don Juan and fellow sorcerer Don Genaro "see" various things in gathering followers, such as approaching death, sexual trysts, and unsuspected powers. By contrast, Carlos sees an old crone as a temptress and pretty young Josefina as monstrously ugly, thanks to the "art of stalking" that Don Juan teaches. Sorcerers "see" holes in the stomachs of people who have children and a difference in their "luminosity." La Gorda assures Carlos that Don Juan has explained this to him, but Carlos had not wanted to know. To sorcerers, animals glow yellow, humans white, and sorcerers amber. Average humans are egg-shaped while sorcerers are tombstone-shaped.

When confronted with Don Juan and Don Genaro's four "allies," Carlos sees them as monsters. La Gorda informs him that allies have no form, just a presence and colors, but appear as monsters until one loses one's human form. She talks about "molds," as entities imbued with power that most people see only at the moment of death, but throughout life they allow the assembling of a shape. When La Gorda becomes



complete, she sees a radiant being—God—and becomes a sorcerer. Warriors without form "see" an eye in front of them that allows them to dream without sleeping. La Gorda flies by hooking onto the lines of the world, of which she learns while dreaming.

Gazing is a discipline to help apprentices focus on their "second attention." It takes la Gorda four years to become a gazer and a year to "see" her hands in dreaming, a related discipline. Carlos has seen the guardian of the other world but cannot yet bypass it. He alone among the apprentices has seen the yellow sulfur world where the sorcerers live and await them. He sees that the other world is no metaphor but a state of being. Their joint task is to focus the second attention. Carlos experiences a "consuming ticklishness" and the sudden knowing, which are forms of seeing.



# Style

## Point of View

The Second Ring of Power drops the pretext of being a work of scholarly pretext of Carlos Castaneda's first work, *The Teachings of Don Juan*, in which he is indoctrinated into the drug culture of the Yaqui Indians through a shaman named Don Juan Matus. Carlos is still an academically trained anthropologist, but he is no longer recording verbatims or analyzing his experiences in scholarly terms. The expertise remains, but the continuing story—Carlos has clearly completed more training and "graduated" by leaping into the abyss—of coming to grips with what he has experienced.

Not recalling the leap, Carlos returns to hear his his colleagues' witness and explanation. Carlos still needs to understand things rationally. He questions minutely, takes notes, but it all makes him appears as an idiot to the others with whom he deals. The result is a much more accessible book, which reads like a work of fiction (which some critics claim the whole series is). Carlos is trying to learn what the others have without "power plants" and hears for the first time many things about which Don Juan has spoken at length and shown in ways that Carlos has understood metaphorically rather than ontologically. It is a delightful study in human relations among some fairly odd characters and in group dynamics.

## Setting

The Second Ring of Power is set somewhere in the bleak mountainous highlands of Mexico at some point following author Carlos Castaneda's resumption of training as a sorcerer's apprentice under Yaqui Indian shaman Don Juan Matus. The book must be considered a sequel to *The Teachings of Don Juan*, in which Carlos, a graduate fieldwork in anthropology at the University of California, Los Angeles, undergoes an apprenticeship in the summers of 1961-64 with the renowned shaman. Fearful of the powerful drugs he is receiving, Carlos breaks off the relationship.

The present book shows further training after the conclusion of the first book. Mention is made of trip(s) to Mexico City and to the deserts bordering the United States. Indications are that Carlos is a "commuter" rather than a full-time member of the brother- and sisterhood of apprentices working under Don Juan and his colleague Don Genaros. They live in comfortable but primitive rural houses with outhouses and do-it-yourself build-ons, and frequently trek into the near-by valleys on spiritual quests. The low, mounded hills have a "mesmeric" quality. Leaves, trees, water, and wind are used for "gazing," a discipline like meditation. The area is accessible by car but it appears that motor vehicles are rarely seen. There is an unnamed town nearby with a modern hotel and elaborate church.



Much of the book is "set" in experiences of the "second attention" — the other world that only sorcerers divine and to which Don Juan and Don Genaros have gone permanently. Carlos learns to "see" with other-worldly sight how things that he has previously assumed are drug-related hallucinations are realities.

## Language and Meaning

Like *The Teachings of Don Juan*, *The Second Ring of Power* is written in the first person past tense, but this volume drops the pretext of being author Carlos Castaneda's field notes as a graduate student of anthropology at the University of California, Los Angeles, and turgid analysis of his experiences during an extended introduction to the drug culture of ancient Mexico. With the density gone, this work reads much more like a novel, engaging readers with fleshed-out, memorable characters and movement along a plot line.

Carlos wants and needs to understand what he has undergone, particularly the leap into the abyss that culminates the apprenticeship. He returns to central Mexico to find Pablito and Nestor, his colleagues and friends, and hear what they have to say about. Before he can, he is twice attacked by female apprentices whom he knows only casually, and begins to hear systematically about the drug-free training the others have received from his mentor, Don Juan Matus. He appears stupid to them, not knowing the commonplace, and constantly writing everything down rather than listening and retaining. He comes to realize that he has selectively understood, and throughout the book is able to recall lost memories and interpret them more fully. This gives *The Second Ring of Power* a general appeal, for even those not involved in sorcery must deal with problems of perception and dealing with those around them.

## Structure

*The Second Ring of Power* by Carlos Castaneda opens with the briefest of prefaces, setting up this book as Castaneda's search to understand his apparently recent leap into the abyss, which he does not recall. It is followed by six numbered and titled chapters.

Chapter 1, "The Transformation of Dona Soledad," sets the slightly surrealistic mood as the woman that Carlos remembers as an old crone tries to seduce him, sets her dog on him, and would have choked him to death had a terrible entity not emerged from his head and thrown her off. In Chapter 2, "The Little Sisters," Carlos meets an odd trio of sorcerer's apprentices, who also end up assaulting him. Again he is saved by the mysterious entity. All of the characters are developed gradually throughout the book, creating some consternation early on as only hints of who they are is given.

Chapter 3, "La Gorda," introduces the no-longer-fat apprentice whom Don Juan Matus has left in charge pending Carlos' arrival and unlikely survival of the attacks that Don Juan has planned and ordered. Carlos will either learn or perish. He begins to put



together the pieces of his earlier training and experience, but still struggles with rationalism.

Chapter 4, "The Genaros," formally introduces Benigno, Pablito, and Nestor, who have been away in the mountains. Their training under a different sorcerer is characterized and the intergroup tensions that exist, keeping them from becoming whole and losing form.

Chapter 5, "The Art of Dreaming," and Chapter 6, "The Second Attention," show la Gorda as a skilled pedagogue, patiently putting up with Carlos' foibles, keeping peace in the groups, and introducing teachings at the precise time and place that they will do the most good. La Gorda helps Carlos substantially suppress his rational mind and accept the reality of an other world.

The book moves naturally and compellingly and the characters meld together as they achieve mutual respect. There is nothing mawkish about it and the supernatural does not diminish the story. There are ample portions of humor, fear, and coming to clarity.



## Quotes

"I asked her to explain her meaning and not to assume for one instant that I knew anything. Those statements angered her even more. She stood up abruptly and dropped her skirt to the ground.

" 'This is what I mean!' she yelled, caressing her pubic area.

"My mouth opened involuntarily. I became aware that I was staring at her like an idiot.

" 'You and I are one here!' she said.

"I was dumbfounded. Doña Soledad, the old Indian woman, mother of my friend Pablito, was actually half-naked a few feet away from me, showing me her genitals. I stared at her, incapable of formulating any thoughts. The only thing I knew was that her body was not the body of an old woman. She had beautifully muscular thighs, dark and hairless. The bone structure of her hips was broad, but there was no fat on them.

"She must have noticed my scrutiny and flung herself on the bed.

" 'You know what to do,' she said, pointing to her pubis. 'We are one here.'

"She uncovered her robust breasts.

" 'Doña Soledad, I implore you!' I exclaimed. 'What's come over you? You're Pablito's mother.'

" 'No, I'm not!' she snapped. 'I'm no one's mother.'

"She sat up and looked at me with fierce eyes." Chapter 1, The Transformation of Doña Soledad, pp. 15-16.

"I heard then, or perhaps I felt, a snapping sound at the base of my neck, right behind my windpipe. I knew that she had cracked my neck. My ears buzzed and then they tingled. I experienced an exceptional clarity of hearing. I thought that I must be dying. I loathed my incapacity to do anything to defend myself. I could not even move a muscle to kick her. I was unable to breathe anymore. My body shivered, and suddenly I stood up and was free, out of her deadly grip. I looked down on the bed. I seemed to be looking down from the ceiling. I saw my body, motionless and limp on top of hers. I saw horror in her eyes. I wanted her to let go of the noose. I had a fit of wrath for having been so stupid and hit her smack on the forehead with my fist. She shrieked and held her head and then passed out, but before she did I caught a fleeting glimpse of a phantasmagoric scene. I saw doña Soledad being hurled out of the bed by the force of my blow. I saw her running toward the wall and huddling up against it like a frightened child." Chapter 1, The Transformation of Doña Soledad, p. 58.

"The peculiar sound at the base of my neck was something I had become keenly aware of. Don Juan had described it as the sound one makes at the moment of changing speed. I had the faint recollection of having experienced it in his company. Although I had become aware of it the previous night, I had not fully acknowledged it until it happened with Rosa. I realized then that the sound had created a special sensation of heat on the roof of my mouth and inside my ears. The force and dryness of the sound made me think of the peal of a large, cracked bell." Chapter 2, The Little Sisters, p. 83.





" 'We were just playing a little joke on him,' Josefina said clearing her throat. 'I was pretending to be mute.'

"The three girls huddled up close together and began to laugh. La Gorda remained impassive, looking at me.

"They had tricked me! I found my stupidity and gullibility so outrageous that I had a fit of hysterical laughter, which was almost out of control. My body shivered.

"I knew that Josefina had not just been playing, as she had claimed. The three of them had meant business. I had actually felt Josefina's body as a force that, in fact, was getting inside my own body. Rosa's nibbling on my side, which undoubtedly was a ruse to distract my attention, coincided with the sensation I had had that Josefina's heart was pounding inside my chest." Chapter 2, The Little Sisters, p. 110.

" 'What does a complete person look like to a sorcerer?' I asked.

" 'Like a luminous egg made out of fibers,' she said. 'All the fibers are complete; they look like strings, taut strings. It looks as if the strings have been tightened like a drum is tightened.

" 'On an empty person, on the other hand, the fibers are crumpled up like at the edges of the hole. When they have had many children, the fibers don't look like fibers anymore. Those people look like two chunks of luminosity, separated by blackness. It is an awesome sight. The Nagual made me see them one day when we were in a park in the city.'

" 'Why do you think the Nagual never told me about all this?'

" 'He told you everything, but you never understood him correctly. As soon as he realized that you were not understanding what he was saying, he was compelled to change the subject. Your emptiness prevented you from understanding.'" Chapter 3, La Gorda, pp. 120-121.

"I had the clear impression that as soon as she opened that door a wind rushed through. That wind pulled us and we actually went through the wall. Or rather, the walls of the house went through us, or perhaps all three, la Gorda, the house and myself, went through the door she had opened. All of a sudden I was out in an open field. I could see the dark shapes of the surrounding mountains and trees. I was no longer holding onto la Gorda's waist. A noise above me made me look up, and I saw her hovering perhaps ten feet above me like the black shape of a giant kite. I felt a terrible itch in my belly button and then la Gorda plummeted down to the ground at top speed, but instead of crashing she came to a soft, total halt.

"At the moment that la Gorda landed, the itch in my umbilical region turned into a horribly exhausting nervous pain. It was as if her landing were pulling my insides out. I screamed in pain at the top of my voice.

"Then la Gorda was standing next to me, desperately out of breath. I was sitting down. We were again in the room of don Gernaro's house where we had been.

"La Gorda seemed unable to catch her breath. She was drenched in perspiration.

" 'We've got to get out of her,' she muttered." Chapter 3, La Gorda, pp. 166-167.



" 'The Nagual and Genaro split you once in the eucalyptus grove. They took you there because eucalyptuses are your trees. I was there myself and I witnessed when they split you and pulled your nagual out. They pulled you apart by the ears until they had split your luminosity and you were not an egg anymore, but two long chunks of luminosity. Then they put you together again, but any sorcerer that sees can tell that there is a huge gap in the middle.'

" 'What's the advantage of being split?'

" 'You have one ear that hears everything and one eye that sees everything and you will always be able to go an extra mile in a moment of need. That splitting is also the reason why they told us that you are the Maestro.'

" 'They tried to split Pablito but it looks like it failed. He's too pampered and has always indulged like a bastard. That's why he's so screwed up now.'

" 'What's a double then?'

" 'A double is the other, the body that one gets in dreaming. It looks exactly like oneself.'" Chapter 4, The Genaros, p. 199.

" 'Everybody gets angry with you because it hasn't dawned on them yet that you're no different than they are,' she went on. 'They see you as the Nagual and they don't understand that you indulge in your ways just like they do in theirs.'

"She said that Pablito whined and complained and played at being a weakling. Benigno played the shy one, the one who could not even open his eyes. Nestor played to be the wise one, the one who knows everything. Lidia played the tough woman who could crush anyone with a look. Josefina was the crazy one who could not be trusted. Rosa was the bad-tempered girl who ate the mosquitoes that bit her. And I was the fool that came from Los Angeles with a pad of paper and lots of wrong questions. And all of us loved to be the way we were.

" 'I was once a fat, smelly woman,' she went on after a pause. 'I didn't mind being kicked around like a dog as long as I was not alone. That was my form.'" Chapter 5, The Art of Dreaming, p. 237.

"The little sisters looked at one another and then turned to la Gorda. She made a gesture with her head. Josefina stood up and went to the front room. She returned a moment later with the bundle that Lidia had shown me.

"I had a pang of anticipation in the pit of my stomach. Josefina carefully placed the bundle on the table in front of me. All of them gathered around. She began to untie it as ceremoniously as Lidia had done the first time. When the package was completely unwrapped, she spilled the contents on the table. They were menstruation rags.

"I got flustered for an instant. But the sound of la Gorda's laughter, which was louder than the others', was so pleasing that I had to laugh myself.

" 'That's Josefina's personal bundle,' la Gorda said. 'It was her brilliant idea to play on your greed for a gift from the Nagual, in order to make you stay.'" Chapter 5, The Art of Dreaming, pp. 266-267.



"The Nagual has entrusted me to take care of everyone; in your case, I have to help you to tighten your layers. The Nagual said that death pushes the layers apart. He explained to me that the center of our luminosity, which is the attention of the nagual, is always pushing out, and that's what loosens the layers. So it's easy for death to come in between them and push them completely apart. Sorcerers have to do their best to keep their own layers closed. that's why the Nagual taught us dreaming. Dreaming tightens the layers. When sorcerers learn dreaming they tie together their two attentions and there is no more need for that center to push out.'

" 'Do you mean that sorcerers do not die?'

" 'That is right. Sorcerers do not die.'

" 'Do you mean that none of us is going to die?'

" 'I didn't mean us. We are nothing. We are freaks, neither here nor there. I meant sorcerers. The Nagual and Genaro are sorcerers. Their two attentions are so tightly together that perhaps they'll never die.'

" 'Did the Nagual say that, Gorda?'

" 'Yes. He and Genaro both told me that. Not too long before they left, the Nagual explained to us the power of attention. I never knew about the tonal and the nagual until them.'" Chapter 6, The Second Attention, pp. 290-291.

"She explained that the particular formation which we were in was a Toltec power arrangement. I was at that moment the center and binding force of the four corners of the world. Lidia was the east, the weapon that the Toltec warrior holds in his right hand; Rosa was the north, the shield harnessed on the front of the warrior; Josefina was the west, the spirit catcher that the warrior holds in his left hand; and la Gorda was the back and where he keeps his power objects. She said that the natural position of every warrior was to face the north, since he had to hold the weapon, the east, in his right hand. But the direction that we ourselves had to face was the south, slightly toward the east; therefore, the act of power that the Nagual had left for us to perform was to change directions." Chapter 6, The Second Attention, pp. 313-314.

"La Gorda gave me a last command. She told me that on my return I should go directly to the Genaros' house.

" 'We don't want to see you until you know what to do,' she said with a radiant smile.

'But don't delay too long.'

"The little sisters nodded.

" 'Those mountains are not going to let us stay here much longer,' she said, and with a subtle movement of her chin she pointed to the ominous, eroded hills across the valley.

"I asked her one more question. I wanted to know if she had any idea where the Nagual and Genaro would go after we had completed our rendezvous. She looked up at the sky, raised her arms and made an indescribable gesture with them to point out that there was no limit to that vastness." Chapter 6, The Second Attention, p. 328.

## Topics for Discussion

What does the parable of the snail teach? Does it seem as applicable to non-sorcerers?

How do Doña Soledad's transformation differ from Josefina's? How, if at all, are they alike?

How do children make their parents incomplete? Is the restoration process fair?

How does gazing work? Can you see any applicability? What kind of gazer would you be—and why?

Why must impeccable warriors be indifferent? How would you describe impeccability in your own words?

How do doubles and naguars differ and how are they alike?

How do the incidents with the allies contribute to Carlos' growth?

Can you see Carlos Castaneda as a full-fledged Nagual? What would his leadership and teach style be like?