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Annotation Guide

1. Summarize the chapter.

2. What are 3 questions you have about this chapter?

3. What is one connection you can make to this chapter?

4. What is one sentence that struck you or that stands out to you? ***Explain why it stands out to you***.

Contrasts and Contradictions:

1. Give an example of a contrast and/or contradiction. This is when a character does something that contrasts with what you'd expect him to say or do. *What does this contradiction mean? What does it reveal about the character/plot/theme?*

Aha Moment

2. Give an example of an aha moment. This is when a character realizes or understands something. *What does this aha moment reveal about the character/plot/theme? What is the significance of this aha moment?*

Again and Again

3. Give an example of a word, phrase or object that is repeated again and again. This is when you notice a word, phrase, or situation mentioned over and over. What does this repetition signify? What does it mean? Why is this repeated again and again?

Memory Moment

4. Give an example of a memory moment. This is when the author interrupts the action to tell you about a memory. What does this Memory Moment mean in the context of this story? Why is this memory important? What does this memory momenty signify for the character/text/theme?

RUFUS

10:39 a.m.

I gotta take a photo of Mateo sleeping.

That sounds creepy, no shit. But I gotta immortalize this dreamy look on his face. That doesn't sound any less creepy. Shit. It's the moment, too, I want. How often do you find yourself on a train that's having a blackout with an eighteen-year-old kid and his Lego house as he's on his way to the cemetery to visit his mother's headstone? Exactly. That's Instagram-worthy.

I stand to get a wider shot. I aim in the darkness and take his picture, the flash blinding me. A moment later, no joke, the train's lights and fans come back and we continue moving.

"I'm a wizard," I mutter. No shit, I discover I have superpowers on my End Day. I wish someone got that on camera. I could've gone viral.

The picture is dope. I'll upload it when I have service. It's good I got the photo of Mateo sleeping when I did—yeah, yeah, creepy, we established that—because his face is shifting, his left eye twitching. He looks uneasy and he's breathing harder.

Shaking. Holy shit, maybe he's epileptic. I don't know, he never told me anything like that. I should've asked. I'm about to call out for someone on the train who might know what to do if he's having a seizure when Mateo mutters "No," and repeats it over and over. Mateo is having a nightmare.

I sit beside him and grab his arm to save him.

MATEO

10:42 a.m.

Rufus shakes me awake.

I'm no longer on the mountain; I'm back on the train. The lights are on and we're moving.

I take a deep breath as I turn to the window, as if I'm actually expecting to find boulders and headless birds flying my way. "Bad dream, dude?"

"I dreamt I was skiing."

"That's my bad. What happened in the dream?"

"It started with me going down one of those kiddy slopes." "The bunny slope?"

I nod. "Then it got really steep and the hills got icier and I dropped my ski poles. I turned around to look for them and I saw a boulder coming for me. All of a sudden it got louder and louder and I wanted to throw myself off to the side into this mound of snow, but I panicked. I was supposed to turn down another hill where I saw my Lego sanctuary, except it was as big as a cabin, but my skis disappeared and I flew straight off the mountain while headless birds circled overhead and I kept falling and falling."

Rufus grins.

"It's not funny," I say.

He shifts closer to me, his knee knocking into mine. "You're okay. I promise you don't have to worry about boulders chasing you or flying off a snowy mountain today."

"And everything else?"

Rufus shrugs. "You're probably good on the headless birds, too." It sucks that that was the last time I'll ever dream.

It wasn't even a good one.

DELILAH GREY

11:08 a.m.

Infinite Weekly has secured Howie Maldonado's final interview. Delilah herself hasn't.

"I know everything about Howie Maldonado," Delilah says, but her boss, Senior Editor Sandy Guerrero, isn't having it. "You're too new for a profile this important," Sandy says, walking toward a black car sent over by Howie's people.

"I know I work in the absolutely worst cubicle with the most ancient computer, but that doesn't mean I'm not qualified to at least assist you with this interview," Delilah says. She comes off as ungrateful and arrogant, but she won't take it back. She'll move far in this industry by knowing her worth—and by landing a byline in this piece. It may have been Sandy's industry status that persuaded the publicist to choose *Infinite Weekly* over *People* magazine, but Delilah grew up with not only the Scorpius Hawthorne books, but also the films, all eight of them, which nurtured her love for this

medium. From fangirl to paid fangirl.

"Howie Maldonado won't be the last person to die, I'm pleased to report," Sandy says, opening the car door and removing her sunglasses. "You have your whole life ahead of you to eulogize celebrities."

Delilah still can't believe how low Victor sank last night with that prank Death-Cast alert.

Sandy gives Delilah's colorful hair a once-over, and Delilah wishes she'd respected her editor's hints to dye it brown again, if only to gain her favor right now.

"Do you know how many MTV Movie Awards Howie has won?" Delilah asks. "Or which sport he played competitively as a child? How many siblings he has? How many languages he speaks?" Sandy doesn't answer a single question.

Delilah answers them all: "Two awards for Best Villain. Competitive fencing. Only child. He speaks English and French. . . .
Sandy, please. I promise I won't let my passion get in your way. I will never have another chance to meet Howie."

His death can be life-changing for her career.

Sandy shakes her head and releases a deep breath. "Fine. He's agreed to interview, but there are no guarantees. Obviously. We've reserved a private dining area in Midtown and we're still awaiting confirmation from his publicist that Howie has agreed to this setup. The earliest Howie may see us is at two."

Delilah is ready to sit in the car with her when Sandy shakes her finger.

"There's still time before we meet," Sandy says. "Please find me a copy of Howie's book, the one he *wrote*." The sarcasm in Sandy's voice is so sharp she doesn't need air quotes. "I'll be a hero if I get a copy signed for my son." Sandy closes the door and lowers her window. "I'd stop wasting time if I were you."

The car takes off and Delilah pulls out her phone, walking toward the street corner while looking up phone numbers for nearby bookstores. She trips off the curb and lands flat in the street, a car honking as it approaches her. The car brakes, a couple feet away from her face. Her heart runs wild and her eyes tear up.

But she lived because Delilah isn't dying today. People fall all the time.

Delilah is no exception, she reminds herself, even if she's not a Decker.

MATEO

11:32 a.m.

The clouds are gathering as we walk into Evergreens Cemetery. I haven't been here since I was twelve, the weekend of Mother's Day, and I cannot for the life of me tell you which of the entrances will help us reach her headstone fastest, so we're sure to be wandering for a bit. A breeze carries the smell of trimmed grass.

"Weird question: Do you believe in the afterlife?" I ask. "That's not weird, we're dying," Rufus says.

"Right."

"Weird answer: I believe in two afterlives."

"Two?"

"Two."

“What are they?” I ask.

As we walk around tombstones—many so deeply worn that the names are no longer visible, others with crosses planted in them so high they look like swords in rocks—and under large pin oak trees, Rufus tells me his theory on the afterlives.

“I think we’re already dead, dude. Not everyone, just Deckers. The whole Death-Cast thing seems too fantasy to be true. Knowing when our last day is going down so we can live it right? Straight-up fantasy. The first afterlife kicks off when Death-Cast tells us to live out our day knowing it’s our last; that way we’ll take full advantage of it, thinking we’re still alive. Then we enter the next and final afterlife without any regrets. You get me?”

I nod. “That’s interesting.” His afterlife is definitely more impressive and thoughtful than Dad’s—Dad believes in the usual golden-gated island in the sky. Still, the popular afterlife is better than no afterlife, like Lidia believes. “But wouldn’t it be better if we already knew we were dead so we’re not living in the fear of how it happens?”

“Nope.” Rufus wheels his bike around a stone cherub. “That defeats the purpose. It’s supposed to feel real and the risks should
scare you and the goodbyes should suck. Otherwise it feels cheap, like Make-A-Moment. If you live it right, one day should be good. If we stay longer than that we turn into ghosts who haunt and kill, and no one wants that.”

We laugh on strangers’ graves, and even though we’re talking about our afterlives, I forget for a second that this is where we’ll end up. “What’s the next level? Do you get on an elevator and rise up?”

“Nah. Your time expires and, I don’t know, you fade or something and reappear in what people call ‘heaven.’ I’m not religious. I believe there’s some alien creator and somewhere for dead people to hang out, but I don’t credit all that as God and heaven.”

“Me too! Ditto on the God thing.” And maybe the rest of Rufus’s theory is right too. Maybe I’m already dead and have been paired with a life-changer to spend my last day with as a reward for daring to do something new, like trying the Last Friend app. Maybe. “What does your after-afterlife look like?”

“It’s whatever you want. No limitations. If you’re into angels and halos and ghost dogs, then cool. If you wanna fly, you do you. If you wanna go back in time, knock yourself out.”

“You’ve thought about this a lot,” I say.

“Late-night chats with the Plutos,” Rufus says.

“I hope reincarnation is real,” I say. I’m already finding that this one day to get everything right isn’t enough. This one life wasn’t enough. I tap headstones, wondering if anyone here has been reincarnated already. Maybe I was one of them. I failed Past Me if so.

“Me too. I want another shot, but not counting on it. What’s your afterlife look like?”

Coming up, there’s a large tomb that resembles a pale blue teapot, and I know my mother’s headstone is a few rows behind it. When I was younger I pretended this teapot tomb was a genie’s lamp. Wishing for my mother to come back and complete my family never worked.

“My afterlife is like a home theater where you can re-watch your entire life from start to finish. And let’s say my mother invited me into her theater—I could watch her life. I just hope someone knows what parts should fade to black so I’m not scarred my entire afterlife.” I
couldn’t sell Lidia on this idea, but she did admit it sounded a little cool. “Oh! And there’s also this transcript of everything you’ve ever said since birth and—”

I shut up because we’ve reached the corner, and in the space beside my mother’s plot there’s a man digging another grave while a caretaker installs a headstone with my name and dates of birth and death.

I’m not even dead yet.

My hands shake and I almost drop my sanctuary.

“And . . . ?” Rufus asks, quickly following with “Oh.”

I walk toward my grave.

I know graves can be dug on an accelerated schedule, but it’s only been eleven hours since I even got the alert. I know my final headstone won’t be ready for days, but the temporary one isn’t what’s throwing me off. No one should ever witness someone digging their grave.

I’m hopeless too soon after believing Rufus is my life-changer. Rufus drops his bike. He walks up to the gravedigger and puts a hand on his shoulder. “Yo. Can we have a few minutes?”

The bearded gravedigger, dressed in a filthy plaid shirt, turns to me and then back to my mother’s plot. “Is this the kid’s mom?” He gets back to work.

“Yeah. And you’re in the middle of digging his grave,” Rufus says as trees rustle and a shovel scoops up earth.

“Yikes. My condolences all around, but me stopping ain’t going to do anything, except slow me down. I’m knocking this out early so I can leave town and—”

“I don’t care!” Rufus takes a step back, balling up his fists, and I’m scared he’s about to try to take this guy on. “So help me . . . Give us ten minutes! Go dig the grave of someone who isn’t standing right here!”

The other guy, the one who planted my headstone, drags the gravedigger away. They both curse about “Decker kids these days” but keep their distance.

I want to thank the men and Rufus, but I feel myself sinking, dizzy. I manage to stay upright and reach my mother’s headstone.

ESTRELLA ROSA-TORREZ
JULY 7, 1969
JULY 17, 1999
BELOVED WIFE AND MOTHER
FOREVER IN OUR HEARTS

“Can I have a minute with my mom?” I don’t even turn around because I’m stuck staring at her End Day and my birth date. “I won’t be far,” Rufus says. It’s possible he doesn’t go very far, maybe only a couple of feet, or maybe he doesn’t move at all, but I trust him. He’ll be there when I turn around.

Everything has come full circle between my mother and me. She died the day I was born and now I'll be buried next to her. Reunion. When I was eight, I found it weird how she was credited as a "beloved" mother when the only mothering she did was carry me for nine months; ten years later, I know much better. But I couldn't wrap my head around her even feeling like my mom because she never had the chance to play with me, to open her arms as I took my first steps so I could crash into her, to teach me to tie my shoes, none of that or anything else. But then Dad reminded me, in a gentle way, that she couldn't do any of those things for me because the birth was complicated, "very hard," he said, and that she made sure I was okay instead of taking care of herself. That's definitely worthy of the "beloved" cred.

I kneel before my mother's headstone. "Hey, Mom. You excited to meet me? I know you created me, but we're still strangers when you think about it. I'm sure you've thought about this already. You've had a lot of time in your home theater where the credits start rolling because you died while I cried in some nurse's arms. Maybe that nurse could've helped with the severe bleeding if she hadn't been holding me. I don't know. I'm really sorry you had to die so I could live, I really am. I hope you don't send some border patrol to keep me out when I finally die.

"But I know you're not like that, because of Dad's stories. One of my favorites is the one where you were visiting your mother in the hospital, a few days before she died, and her roommate with Alzheimer's kept asking you if you wanted to hear her secret. You said yes and yes over and over even though you knew full well that she used to hide chocolate from her kids when they were younger because she had a sweet tooth." I place my palm on the headstone's face, and it's the closest I'll come to holding her hand. "Mom, am I going to be able to find love up there since I never got the chance to find it down here?"

She doesn't answer. There's no mysterious warmth taking over me, no voice in the wind. But it's okay. I'll know soon enough. "Please look after me today, Mom, one last time, because I know I'm not already dead like Rufus thinks we are, and I would like to have my life-changing day. See you later."

I get up and turn to my open grave, which is maybe only three feet deep and uneven. I step in, sit down, and rest my back against the side the gravedigger hasn't finished with yet. I keep my toy sanctuary on my lap, and I must look like a kid playing with blocks in a park.

"Can I join you?" Rufus asks.

"There's only really room for one. Get your own grave." Rufus steps inside anyway, kicks my feet, and squeezes in, resting one leg on one of mine so he'll fit. "No grave for me. I'm gonna be cremated like my family."

"Do you still have their ashes? We could scatter them somewhere. The 'Parting with Ashes' forum on *CountDowners* is really popular and—"

"The Plutos and I took care of that a month back," Rufus interrupts; I should try and rein in my stories about online strangers. "Scattered them outside my old building. I still felt mad empty afterward, but they're home now. I want the Plutos to scatter my ashes elsewhere."

“Where are you thinking? Pluto?”

“Althea Park,” Rufus says.

“I love that park,” I say.

“How do you know it?”

“I went there a lot when I was younger, always with my dad. He would teach me about different clouds, and I would shout out which clouds were in the sky while I was swinging toward them. Why do you like it there so much?”

“I don’t know. I end up there a lot. It’s where I kissed this girl, Cathy, for the first time. I went there after my family died, and after my first cycling marathon.”

Here we are, two boys sitting in a cemetery as it begins drizzling, trading stories in my half-dug grave, as if we’re not dying today. These moments of forgetting and relief are enough to push me through the rest of my day.

“Weird question: Do you believe in fate?” I ask.

“Weird answer: I believe in two fates,” Rufus says.

“Really?”

“No.” Rufus smiles. “I don’t even believe in one. You?” “How else

do you explain us meeting?” I ask.

“We both downloaded an app and agreed to hang out,” Rufus says.

“But look at us. My mom and your parents are dead. My father is out of commission. If our parents were around, we wouldn’t have found ourselves on Last Friend.” The app is designed mainly for adults, not teens. “If you can believe in two afterlives, you can believe in the universe playing puppet master. Can’t you?”

Rufus nods as the rain comes down harder on us. He stands first and offers me a hand. I take it. The poetry you could write about Rufus helping me out of my grave isn’t lost on me. I step out and walk over to my mother’s headstone, kissing her inscribed name. I leave my toy sanctuary against the stone. I turn in time to catch Rufus snapping a photo of me; capturing moments really is his thing. I turn to my headstone one last time.

HERE LIES
MATEO TORREZ, JR.
JULY 17, 1999

They’ll add my End Day in no time: September 5, 2017. My inscription, too. It’s okay that there’s a blank right now. I know what it will say and I know I’ll make sure I’ve lived as I’m claiming: *He Lived for Everyone*. The words will wear away over time, but they’ll have been true.

Rufus wheels his bike along the wet and muddy path, leaving tire tracks. I follow him, my insides feeling heavier with every footstep away from my mother and my open grave, knowing I’ll be back soon enough.

“You sold me on fate,” Rufus says. “Finish telling me about your afterlife.”

I do.

DELILAH GREY

12:52 p.m.

Delilah rushes to the only bookstore in the city that miraculously carries Howie Maldonado's science fiction novel, *The Lost Twin of Bone Bay*.

Delilah speeds toward the store, staying far away from the curb, ignoring the catcall from a balding man with a large gym bag, and rushing past two boys with one bike.

She's praying Howie Maldonado doesn't move up the interview before she can get there when she remembers there are greater stakes at play in Howie's dying life.