

BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION TOPICS

CHAPTER 31 – EPILOGUE

1.

In Chapter 32, Vivian is forced to make an embarrassing request that sends Cato and Axel on a tampon run. Aside from this being a rather comical scene to break up the tension, the author utilized it to provide both world-building and character-building, as well as to address issues that are often glazed over in books. Have you ever noticed that in literature and film, female characters are often somehow able to live in post-apocalyptic or wilderness settings without any luxuries such as razors or tampons, and yet they can wear tank tops that show off perfectly smooth underarms, and they somehow never have to worry about a period?

How do you feel about authors writing scenes that address female biology? Does it make you uncomfortable? Do you feel it's necessary to keep the book real and believable by presenting solutions to real-world problems most women would experience in survival settings such as this, or is it a superfluous detail that is usually better off left ignored for the sake of convenience?

How did comparing Ash to Vivian provide us with world-building information about kálos? We also see some insecurities in Vivian that hadn't surfaced before. How does her lowered self-confidence and jealousy toward Ash make you feel about her as a character?

2.

In Chapter 34, Wes proposes making a deal with the Alpha ghosts. The humans of Phantom Heights will provide medicine for the twins and direct the Agents' attention away from the town so the Alpha ghosts will feel safe making a home there. They'll also find a way to remove the neutralizers so the fugitives can have their powers restored. In return, the Alpha ghosts will put their powers and fighting skills to use, serving as mercenaries and helping the humans fight the invaders. Does this seem like a good plan that will be beneficial to both sides? Do you see any potential flaws, or do you think the agreement is sound?

3.

Trey takes a rather chilling trip to the AGC, which is deep underground in a maze of tunnels. He sees where the Alpha ghosts lived, what they ate, and where they were tortured. He also visits the Arena where they battled each other and dangerous animals from Project Theta. Agent Kovak tells Trey that Project Alpha's primary research is studying kálos powers, and that he forces the subjects to fight as a way to coax them into using their abilities without the usual method of electrical stimulation, which would damage the equipment.

After seeing Project Alpha, has your opinion about the Agents and the Alpha ghosts changed at all? Do Kovak's accounts seem to match up with the personalities and interactions we've seen among the fugitives? How reliable do you think Kovak's testimony is? What do you think the function of his top-secret weapon might be?

4.

Throughout the story, we see Trey struggle to prove himself. Despite his training and determination, he seems to second-guess himself frequently; he even acknowledges that he's an inadequate ghost hunter in comparison to Madison's son and worries that she's disappointed in him as her apprentice. Despite Trey's apparent lack in leadership qualities, he bristles when Agent Kovak asks if he was Phantom's sidekick. Trey claims that ghosts belong in a lab and he wasn't as close with Cato as Agent Kovak seemed to think. Kovak tells him, "I took Phantom out of the spotlight. It's all yours now whenever you're ready to step up and take it. Your turn to be the hero . . . Admit it—you were secretly happy I removed Phantom from the picture."

Was Trey lying to Kovak to earn the Agent's trust? Or was Agent Kovak right—was Trey actually happy to see his friend fall so Trey could have the opportunity to escape from Phantom's shadow? If Trey were to learn about Cato's escape, how do you think he would react?

5.

On the way back from the AGC, Wes and Trey are stopped in the middle of the open road by Axel, who orders them to get out of the car. Although Axel had the perfect opportunity to steal the neutralizer deactivator, he instead removed the bug and left.

Why do you think he chose not to steal the only thing capable of removing his neutralizer and saving RC? Do you think Axel was acting on his own, or was he following Jay's orders?

6.

After several failed attempts to interrogate the twins about Cato, Holly desperately tries one more time to get an answer from A1 in the final moments before they part ways. She says, "I command you to tell me the truth. Was Cato in Project Alpha? Is he here?"

A1 finally gives her an answer: "All information regarding Project Alpha is classified."

Did he actually answer her question? How do you think Holly interpreted his reply? How do *you* interpret it? Was his response a preprogrammed statement from Agent Kovak, or do you think he answered independently with his own thoughts and words?

7.

Do the humans treat Wes, a werewolf, differently than they treated Cato, a half-ghost? If so, why? How is Wes's role as a protector different than Cato's was?

8.

The Tarrowes have suffered tragedies in the past, but we see only hints at their losses and haven't uncovered the whole story yet. When Agent Kovak first visits Phantom Heights in Chapter 17, he tells Madison that her son's death was a "tragic accident." She claims it was his fault, and he replies, "I tried to save him, you know. But I know that makes you miserable—the last face he ever saw was mine, not yours, and you can't stand that."

Vivian reveals in Chapter 25 that her dad died in a car accident, although it's unknown if the two deaths are related or even happened at the same time.

In Chapter 37, Trey slips up when talking to Agent Kovak, who responds with, "Jaxon Tarrow. That's a name I haven't heard in a while. It still saddens me to think of how things might have unfolded differently if not for his untimely demise."

In Chapter 38, we get a little more insight about Madison's son and learn that the Agents aren't as innocent as they'd originally claimed. Kovak praises himself on his "well-crafted tale": "If only I'd intervened just a little sooner, maybe I could have saved him. But there was nothing I could do except take the poor boy in my arms and hold him for his last few breaths so he didn't die alone. Such a tragedy."

Agent Byrn seems more concerned than Kovak, worrying, "If [Madison learns the truth], there's going to be a lot of trouble . . . Nobody cares when kálos blood is spilt, but human blood, now that's messy. Lawsuits, investigations, questions from the Board . . ."

And yet, Kovak insists, "He had to die. Holly was right; it was the only way to break Maddie's spirit. And it worked. Better than I could have hoped. I didn't expect Phantom Heights to suffer so much when she fell apart but, well, sacrifices have to be made . . . An unfortunate but necessary cost. I don't regret my decision." He even goes so far as to say, "Someday, when the dust has settled and we've won our war, Maddie will appreciate what I did."

Do you have any hypotheses as to what actually happened to Madison's family? How do you think losing part of her family affected the way she leads Phantom Heights, reacted to Vivian's kidnapping, and interacted with Finn and Reese when they were in her care? Do you think Kovak is capable of intentionally spilling human blood in the name of winning his war, or do you believe him when he claimed he did everything he could but was too late to save the young ghost hunter's life? Why do you think Agent Kovak needed to break Madison's spirit, and how do you think Holly might have been involved?

9.

Azar and Rayven encounter a Seer who speaks in rhymes. She says, “The Warden’s left his Prison to wander where he should not. Tell me, Shadow Lord, have you found yet what you sought?”

What do you think she means by this greeting?

She also provides an unusual prophecy: “Purest of demons, child of beast, harbinger of light, blinded who sees, blood of the enemy, son without wings, slaves who will rise to one day be kings. Seven to bring the Seventh, but Eight are the key. They must decide what the fate of the Realms shall be.”

How are the Alpha ghosts referenced in the prophecy? What do you think “Seven to bring the Seventh” means? Do you believe this prophecy will be helpful to Azar’s quest, or will it potentially distract him from letting events unfold in their natural course?

10.

The Alpha ghosts are faced with two choices—they can either stay in Phantom Heights and become mercenaries at the risk of humankind betraying them again, or they can venture into the Ghost Realm and try to survive in Azar’s domain. Cato and Axel vote to leave. Ash and Kit vote to stay. Finn and Reese, whose votes count as one, will presumably opt to stay since the Alpha ghosts pledged their service to humans. That leaves the current vote at 2-3. But since RC surrendered his vote to Jay, the leader’s decision will count as two and ultimately determine the final majority.

How do you think Jay is going to vote? What pros and cons will he need to consider? If you were in Jay’s position, what would your vote be?