

## BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION TOPICS

### CHAPTER 21 – CHAPTER 30

1.

When Cato sees his mother and blood-sister in the park, he panics and runs away. Later, when he's with Ash, he's petrified of letting his two families meet. Is this a reasonable fear? What do you think the result might be if his families were to cross paths? Do you think Cato would be capable of harming his human family in order to protect his lab-family?

2.

Holly and Shannon have a rather dark discussion during their picnic, and Shannon refers to their interaction as a chess match. What kind of relationship do they seem to have now that they're outside of "survival mode" in City Hall? Do you think Holly keeps her daughter at arm's length as a way of protecting her, or is she just an apathetic character incapable of showing love in a traditional way? Does Holly have any admirable qualities? How has growing up in a life of politics, secrets, and emotional masks affected Shannon?

3.

Vivian and Trey make a compelling argument to forge a stronger deal with the Alpha ghosts in Chapter 22. How do Madison and Wes react? Do you think it's a good idea for them to reach out to the fugitives, considering we know from Cato's point of view that the Alpha ghosts are quite content avoiding humankind and living free and unrestricted in the abandoned outskirts? Why or why not? What are the risks?

4.

In Chapter 23, we see a civilized showdown between Wes, a clever negotiator, and Jay, a cunning strategist. In subtle ways, they struggle back and forth for power during the discussion. Was there a clear winner, or were they evenly matched? Wes can tell that Jay is young, but he still underestimates just *how* young the leader actually is. Do you think Jay would have been at a disadvantage if Wes knew how old he truly was? Would Wes have treated him differently as a kid than as an adult? How would the negotiation have gone differently?

5.

In Chapter 24, Jay finds a way to adhere to Wes's conditions while still managing to hide Cato's and Axel's identities. He takes advantage of the humans' earlier miscommunication with Agent Kovak in the first book when they wrote *A4 is blind* on the whiteboard. What do you think of Jay's plan? Is it a good long-term solution, or is there a good chance it will go wrong? What kind of repercussions do you think there may be if it does?

6.

How do the people of Phantom Heights react when they finally get to meet their mercenaries? How is their reception of the Alpha ghosts different than their reception of Cato when his identity as Phantom was revealed? How does this affect Cato? Do you believe this "new era" of the deal is likely to work out just as well, if not better than the old arrangement? Or do you predict bad news on the horizon by having the humans and Alpha ghosts interacting more closely with each other now?

7.

How do you feel about Madison receiving the mysterious test results from the AGC? What motives do you think she might have for wanting them? And how do you think Cato would react if he were to find out?

8.

Cato seems to intentionally distance himself from his human family by often referring to them as "my mother" and "my blood-sister." Since his incarceration, we've never seen Cato address his mother as "Mom" until Chapter 28 when he's standing in his old house, watching her sleep.

What does this say about his previous disassociation to her and his current mindset? Was calling her "Mom" a slip of the tongue, or did he mean it? Does this indicate that he's on a path toward forgiveness?

9.

Rival ghost hunter Jules Pilecki makes an appearance in Chapter 30. What differences do you notice between her ghost-hunting methods and Madison's? How do you think Jules and Madison differ in their priorities and morals? If Jules had been the ghost hunter leading the survivors of Phantom Heights instead of Madison, how would events have likely played out differently? Thinking back to the first book when Agent Kovak told Trey that Jules would be a better mentor than Madison, do you agree with that assertion now that you've met Jules?

Holly's troubled past isn't crystal clear since she isn't the most reliable narrator. She told Shannon that although she was beaten, raped, and dragged into the Ghost Realm to be sold as a slave, she managed to escape her captor and flee, only to be sent away for psychiatric treatment. However, when watching the Rip, Holly's contemplations imply that the timeline she told Shannon wasn't accurate; she actually spent at least a year as a slave before her escape: "Sometimes, her nightmares sucked her back into the Ghost Realm, reminded her how it felt to wear rags and chains and answer to a sharp whistle like a dog. A year, a lifetime, it was all the same. It was hell."

Wes further confirms Holly's past enslavement when she accidentally uses the term "scarback" instead of "slave" and seems to have unusually thorough knowledge of Avilésor's Black Market. Wes tells her, "I bet even Maddie doesn't know about these types of Charms and brews. I've always wondered what caused you to hate kálos so much. You wouldn't happen to be a scarback yourself, would you?"

What does this revelation tell you about Holly's character? Do you think her hatred toward kálos and her actions against them (including Cato) are better justified, knowing that she is a survivor who suffered incredible abuse?