

BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION TOPICS

CHAPTER 41 – EPILOGUE

1.

Chapter 41 reveals Azar's true power over darkness. Considering that most children have a natural fear of the dark, what does Azar symbolize? Does this connection to a common childhood fear have an impact on how you perceive him as a villain?

Azar tells Cato, "You took shelter in my darkness when your enemies hunted you. You covered yourself in my shadows to hide from the searchlights. You've always felt safest in the dark, haven't you? And now the dark offers you sanctuary, and you reject it?" What do you think about this observation?

Flipping back to Chapter 10, Azar says, "Ironic, isn't it, Hassing, that people fear the darkness because they can't see the monsters that lurk in it. People always choose the light with the misconception that it will illuminate the danger. Instead, they allow themselves to be blinded. Soon enough, they'll see it's in the darkness where their salvation lies." What are Azar's views about good versus evil personified as dark versus light? In the context of the book, if Azar is "the dark," does that make the Agents "the light"?

2.

At the end of Chapter 41, Cato accidentally allows his second Divinity to break free. Seeing the damage he causes with one little slip-up, do you feel differently about Agent Kovak's testimony that Cato is dangerous and needs to be kept neutralized and under constant supervision?

This same scene shows Axel taking a life (the first that we know of). Both half-breeds have now crossed the lines they drew for themselves. How do you think this is going to affect them moving forward?

3.

In Chapter 43, we learn that Jay's name is not actually Jay. He is one of the Unnamed. When he christened Finn and Reese, he also gave himself a new name, and then went on to ensure that every new member of Project Alpha always remembered to say his or her name aloud before falling asleep to prevent anyone else from forgetting their name. Does this knowledge alter your perspective about Jay's relationship with the twins and why he was so determined to bring them along after the accident even though they were a burden? Why do you think Jay chose to keep this information a secret from his lab-family?

4.

How are the people of Phantom Heights responding to the knowledge that their mighty protectors are so young? What debates are arising? We've seen a change in the way both Madison and Wes speak to the Alpha ghosts, using their youth as a justification to exert authority over them. How does that make you feel? How do the Alpha ghosts react? What does this shift in respect represent about our current society and the way kids are often brushed aside as having inconsequential opinions about serious topics?

5.

Shannon gives a powerful speech to her peers in Chapter 45:

"Cato was one of us. And I don't just mean human. I mean he was a friend, a student, a kid—just like us. He walked beside us through these halls. He made a real difference in the world, something many of us have dreamed about but never accomplished. When the Agents took him away, we let them. Because they were in a position of authority, and we were just kids, and when they said there was nothing we could do, we believed them. When city council told us they were negotiating on Cato's behalf, we listened to them. We let the adults handle the problem because we were just kids. What could we do? When our parents told us to have faith in the system and our elected leaders, we trusted them. Because they were our parents, and we were just kids, so they must know best. We wrote letters to the AGC, to city council, to Congress, even to the White House, but we were too quiet. Our voices were only the whispers of invisible children. We let them silence us! We swallowed their bullshit that kids had no right to try and make a difference! But guess what? We 'kids' grew up real fast in those two years inside City Hall. We carried dead friends. We were brave. We were raiders. We were survivors. I know the Alpha ghosts are not like Cato. They're not human. But regardless of how this deal started, they've carried his mantle in a way that makes me proud, a way that should make all of us proud. They may be 'just kids,' but they changed our lives. And now, here we are, right back where we started—adults making all the decisions and trying to brush us aside again. Our opinions matter! Do you support the Alpha ghosts? Then let's make sure our voices are heard this time! We are not 'just kids.' We are a force to be reckoned with! Our lives are at stake, too! I, for one, am not going to just stand in silence and watch history repeat itself. Are you with me? Let's be loud! Let's shake Phantom Heights! Let's remember Cato's sacrifice! Let's defend the ghosts that now wear Phantom's mask!"

Does Shannon's speech resonate with you? And if so, how? What are some parallels between the points she raises and current issues that have sparked protests in our current society?

Shannon's decision to spearhead the protest causes Holly to stop speaking to her. What does this tell you about their dysfunctional relationship? Does Holly see this rebellion as a personal attack, given her role as a city councilwoman, or is she more angry about Shannon defending ghosts, the sworn enemies of humankind? How do you feel about Shannon's statement: "You know when you're a little kid and you believe your parents are omniscient and always right? I understand that Mom sometimes makes the wrong decisions with the right intentions."?

6.

In Chapter 45, we learn that Axel is related to Officer Jana and that Axel's mother, Vera, had been accused of committing a crime. If Vera had been convicted, Jana would not have been promoted to officer, so Vera fled Avilésor to protect her sister's career and reputation. Jana initially seems troubled and uncertain by the news of Vera's demise and Axel's survival before she composes herself and vows that she wants to redeem her family's honor by turning him over to the Shadow Guard so he can pay for Vera's crime instead of her.

What do you think Jana is going to do the next time she crosses paths with Axel? Will she choose the Shadow Guard over her kin, as she did once before? Considering that she hasn't seen Axel since he was a child and pure of blood, do you think Jana will be able to accept his evolution at the hands of the Agents?

7.

Would the battle against the Shadow Guard in Chapter 47 have resulted in a different outcome if not for Ero's assistance and Axel's *nydæa* half making a brief but devastating appearance? How do you think events might have played out differently without those two factors that Azar hadn't anticipated in his battle strategy? Based on the gravity of the defeat, how do you think Azar is likely to react? How will he re-strategize?

8.

Cato says in Chapter 48, "I'd learned not to hold back in the Arena, even when sparring against friends and allies—I certainly wasn't going to hold back against Madison." And yet, do you think he actually did hold back during their duel? He could have killed her in an instant; without the power of intangibility, she'd have no way to avoid his lethal ice projectiles. Why did Cato choose to draw out the fight instead of ending it quickly? Is Madison an equal opponent? How does Cato react when she finally recognizes him and then refuses to continue fighting? Why is this so important to him?

Denying him this satisfaction causes Cato to lose control, and his wrath nearly destroys Phantom Heights. In the aftermath, he says, "*No. No, no, what have I done? All I'd wanted was the truth. Instead, I'd become the monster I swore I would never be. I'd proved that They were right and I belonged in a cage. And . . . I understood. I knew why my mother sold me. Why I'd been locked in a cage and sealed away from the Outside world . . . People were afraid of me. They'd known, even when I hadn't, that this thing was inside of me. If I couldn't be kept under control, I had to be contained, and He had offered that very solution. So this wouldn't happen.*"

Do you agree with his analysis? Is this the truth he'd been searching for? As far as we know, this is the first time he's lost control of his powers on this scale. What do you think about the concept of locking a dangerous person up *before* they commit a crime? Did this reason (in addition to others) justify Cato's incarceration at the AGC?

9.

We've seen Trey struggle again and again to stand his own ground. And yet, every solo confrontation with a hostile ghost has resulted in Trey needing to be rescued. When he fought the Siphon, Cato stepped in to save him after he was knocked unconscious. When he fought the Fusion, Jay pushed him out of the way to save him from the crossbow bolt, and RC finished the kill. Despite Trey's best efforts to step up as a ghost hunter in his own right, he seems to have gone from being Phantom's sidekick to Madison's, unable to claim a single victory on his own.

Do you think Trey is happy to see Cato again? Is he glad that his friend is alive, or is he secretly disappointed that Phantom has returned more powerful than ever, casting Trey even deeper into a shadow he's unlikely to step out of? Does Trey have any hope of competing against Cato and escaping the "sidekick" label?

10.

Cato, after much contemplation, had admitted to Jay earlier in the book (Chapter 27) that his greatest desire was to force his mother to acknowledge his existence—to look him in the eye and *see* him, her own flesh and blood that she had disowned.

Do you think Cato accomplished that goal by the end of the book? Based on Cato's version of events contrasting with his mother's and blood-sister's accounts, what do you think actually happened? What was Kovak's "well-crafted tale" he was so proud of in Book I? How did the ending make you feel? How do you think these open issues are going to be resolved in Book III?