

## BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION TOPICS

### PROLOGUE – CHAPTER 10

1.

*Phantom's Mask* ended with a surprising revelation—Cato's full name is Cato Jaxon Tarrow. What were your thoughts and emotions when you read that scene? Had you already made the connection before Madison said his name? How did their confrontation change your perception of previous events (kidnapping Vivian Tarrow, Holly's conversations with Agent Kovak, interactions between Madison and the Alpha ghosts, etc.)?

2.

In the prologue, Cato says, "I cracked the ghost hunter's armor wide open to reveal my mother inside. She was a surprisingly weak thing—a trembling, sniveling creature at my feet."

How does separating Madison into different entities help him cope during his interactions with her throughout the books? Depending on the situation, he refers to her as his mom, his mother, Madison, or the ghost hunter. In this case, he views the ghost hunter as an exterior shell harboring his vulnerable mother within.

Does this seem like a healthy coping mechanism? What does it tell you about their relationship and his state of mind?

3.

Chapter 1 introduces us to Azar's second lieutenant, Inalli. What is your initial impression of her? How does she differ from Lieutenant Cisco and Captain Hassing? How does she handle herself as the only woman in a room full of frustrated men who just suffered a devastating and humiliating defeat? How do you think Inalli will be involved as the story progresses?

4.

Azar sends Rayven on a mission without explaining his plan to Captain Hassing. Only as an afterthought does he then give Hassing a separate task at the captain's bequest.

Do you think this secrecy and lack of communication is a warning sign that their relationship is starting to fall apart? Or is it how they would likely interact with each other on a normal day? How do you think Hassing's repeated failures to capture the Alpha ghosts is impacting Azar's trust in him, considering that Azar himself also failed in Book II after he had Jay in custody? Does it seem unusual that Azar would give a top secret mission to his slave Rayven rather than Hassing, the Captain of the Guard? What does this indicate about Rayven's relationship with Azar?

5.

Cato and Madison ended Book II with an intense fight. However, once Cato's identity was revealed, Madison refused to continue the battle. Cato, on the other hand, was still prepared to kill her. If Vivian hadn't stood in his way, do you think he would have? Why or why not?

6.

Throughout *A Fallen Hero* and *Phantom's Mask*, Madison and Cato provided differing accounts of events. Madison claimed that her son had died, while Cato had a clear memory of his mother's signature on a custody transfer selling him to the AGC for \$10,000. Vivian backed up Madison's account in Chapter 21 of *Phantom's Mask* when she recalled a memory of Madison sobbing over the lifeless body of a teenager partially covered by a white sheet.

The conflicting accounts also explain the misunderstanding between Vivian and Cato in Chapter 30 of *A Fallen Hero* when Vivian says, "How did you know I had a brother?" Cato was devastated by her word choice, thinking the past tense "had" meant that Vivian had also cut ties with him, just like Madison.

Thanks to Ero displaying Madison's memory, it turns out both parties gave truthful accounts based on the knowledge they had. Why do you think Agent Kovak went to such extreme lengths to create these false narratives? Do you believe that Finn and Reese were more involved than they claimed when Cato confronted them in Chapter 8? How do you think Holly Jennings ties into the equation? What could she have done with the money she received on the same day as the alleged custody transfer?

7.

In Chapter 7, Madison and Axel have an uncomfortable encounter. Madison is understandably mortified by Axel's nudity. But Axel, who came from a place where the Alpha ghosts were regularly stripped down, dehumanized, and treated like lab animals, doesn't feel any shame or embarrassment in this natural state. He doesn't seem to understand her discomfort, especially since she's a scientist who studies ghosts.

How does this interaction between Axel and Madison illustrate a culture clash? Consider how differently Western society views the human body in a highly sexualized manner compared to other cultures such as the ancient Greeks, who celebrated the nude form as a symbol of virtue and strength. Why are cultural norms difficult to explain to an outsider who didn't grow up learning "that's just the way things are"? Did Madison handle the situation in an acceptable way? Why or why not? What could she have done differently?

8.

In Chapter 7, Wes and Madison engage in a conversation:

*“I’ll admit, you know more about kálos than I do. I’m not . . . um . . . I’m a little out of my comfort zone.”*

*“Why? Because you have to take care of a kálos instead of kill one?”*

*He’d clearly meant it to be a joke, but she admitted, “Yeah.”*

*“You’re knowledgeable about kálos, though, and that’s a much bigger head start than anyone else would have in your position. Just, you know, don’t use that knowledge to kill them. That’s not really any different from regular parenting, right?”*

*Madison couldn’t help it; she chuckled. “I suppose you’re right.”*

There’s some irony to the situation Madison now finds herself in—a ghost hunter becoming a caregiver and guardian to eight ghosts. What challenges will she have to face? How will her background as a professional ghost hunter help her? How will it hurt her? Do you think Wes will be a responsible ally to support her efforts? How would parenting a kálos be different than raising a human, and do you think Madison is up to the task? Why or why not?

9.

When Cato goes to Madison’s room in Chapter 9, he has an intense physical, mental, and emotional reaction to the smell of peppermint. Have you ever experienced a response like this to a seemingly small, inconsequential trigger that brought back bad memories? What other ways have you noticed Cato’s PTSD manifesting throughout the books?

10.

The first supper with both of Cato’s families together doesn’t exactly go smoothly. It starts with Cato threatening to stab his mother and ends with Axel breaking the dining room table in a fit of rage. Finn and Reese won’t speak in the presence of humans unless given a direct order. Madison fails miserably when she tries to convince the others to introduce themselves and talk about their pasts.

Do you foresee any hope of these two families coming together? What barriers do they need to overcome before they can reconcile?