

BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION TOPICS

CHAPTER 11 – CHAPTER 20

1.

Despite Wes's many faults, Ero seems to hold him in high regard because he overcame major barriers to achieve success. Being a lunos, which is seen as a "lower race" in the Ghost Realm, is one such barrier. Madison, however, scoffs and says, "He claims to be such a brilliant businessman, but he cheated," to which Ero replies, "Perhaps. But the system he cheated was rigged against him."

How do you feel about this statement? Do you think Wes is justified in cheating a rigged system? What parallels do you see between the social hierarchy, discrimination, and racial barriers in Avilésor and our society? Has your opinion of Wes changed at all?

2.

In the same chapter, Ero introduces Madison to Sorrin's Theory—the hypothesis that the ancient founder of the kálos race was an Amínyte. This could potentially explain why Kit was in Project Alpha. However, Ero explains that the theory is widely discredited in Avilésor because kálos don't want to consider the idea that their noble Divinities evolved from such a low-class creature.

Does this kind of bias affect ideas in our world? Can you think of any examples? What similarities does Sorrin's Theory have with Darwin's theory?

3.

Cato's PTSD reaction in the hospital is so severe that he dissociates and believes he's back in the AGC. The experience shatters what little trust he had in Madison, who regrets taking him there. She later explains that the version of the AGC she knew was very different from the horrors of Project Alpha that Cato experienced, so while he'd instantly associated the hospital with the Agency of Ghost Control, Madison hadn't made that connection. She tells him that she can't help him work through situations if he doesn't communicate what's wrong rather than just reacting.

How are these communication issues impacting their already strained relationship? Is one of them at fault, or are they both to blame? What should Madison prioritize—Cato's mental and emotional wellbeing, or his physical health after being tortured for two years, surviving on the streets, fighting a battle with the Shadow Guard, and overexerting his power to the point of a burnout? Is it more important to earn his trust back or diagnose and treat his injuries?

4.

When Madison requests a sample of Cato's ectoplasm in Chapter 13, Cato is surprised to hear her use the word "beautiful" to describe it. The Agents were focused on the power, not the beauty when they studied ectoplasm. What does this tell you about Madison's perspective in comparison to the Agents? Do you think Cato should have given her the sample? Will she want to start running more tests on him?

5.

Cato has chosen not to tell Madison and Vivian about his memory loss. Do you think this was a wise decision? Why do you think he wanted to hide it? In Chapter 14, he struggles to play off several errors when Madison takes Vivian and him to lunch, and his blood-family is getting suspicious.

By Chapter 18, Madison has put the pieces together and figured it out. The news seems to be exhausting and devastating to her. Would it have been better if Cato had confessed upfront? Do you think it would have alleviated the tension between them or made it worse? How do you think Madison feels about Cato keeping secrets from her again, just like he did years ago when he was hiding his newfound powers and superhero alter-ego?

6.

Holly confesses to accepting the \$10,000 from Agent Kovak. She claims that the money was meant for Madison to fund the entoplasm shield around City Hall, but Kovak knew that Madison wouldn't take it. So, he gave it to Holly, who then made a "personal contribution" to fund the Dome. Madison never knew the money came from the AGC.

Do you believe Holly's explanation? Is that the extent of her connection to the "deal" Kovak fabricated so Cato would believe his mother had disowned him?

Later in the conversation, she seems to test Cato by making statements and following with, "You remember that, don't you?" (*Reminder: In Book II, Agent Kovak told Holly that Cato had lost most of his memories.*) The statements don't seem right, but Cato doesn't want to admit the memory loss, so he doesn't challenge her.

How did her manipulation make you feel? Do you think Holly's intentions for having him read the speech are genuinely to help him, or does she have an ulterior motive?

7.

Holly proposes two ideas to Madison after the speech:

1. Madison created a powerful Level 4 hero (Phantom) capable of protecting humankind, but the Agents engineered an even deadlier Level 9 monster (A6) to rival him. Between the two hybrids, Madison's creation is the weaker one.
2. Agent Kovak spoke in code when he first visited Phantom Heights seeking help to capture his fugitives. When he said he'd do *anything* to get the twins back, he was covertly saying that he was willing to trade Cato's freedom.

What are your thoughts on Holly's opinions? Is Axel the inverse of Cato, destined to become a villain someday? Or will the two lab-brothers, being the only true hybrids in existence, remain united on the same team? Do you agree with Holly's translation of Agent Kovak's words? Does Madison have the option of winning Cato's freedom by betraying his lab-family? If so... do you think she'll do it?

8.

Madison doesn't hide her disappointment when Cato chooses the kálos clothing from Avilésor instead of the human clothes she offered as an alternative. And yet, when Mara complains about Cato's wardrobe, Madison tells her, "If he wants to experiment with other customs and dress like a ghost, I'm not going to tell him no."

What do Cato's clothing choices say about how he views himself now? Why does he seem to be attached to components of his Alpha uniform, such as wearing a cloak, wrist gauntlets, boots, et cetera? Wouldn't he want to distance himself from anything that reminded him of the AGC? Do you think Cato's clothes indicate a shift in which race he identifies with, even though he spent most of his life as a pureblood human? How did the Agents "dehumanizing" him at the AGC by treating him like a lab rat make an impact on how he fits into human society now?

9.

How successful do you think dinner with the extended family was? Did Cato's grandparents, aunt, uncle, and cousin seem to accept his lab-family? Was Madison's compromise to have the family over for one dinner instead of an extended multi-day stay a fair one, or should she have denied their request when they insisted that they wanted to see Cato after learning that he wasn't dead? If she had given Cato a choice earlier, do you think he would have agreed or refused to see them? How do you think the evening would have gone if Axel had stayed?

10.

When a ghost attacks at school, Vivian is unprepared to fight, resulting in Trey getting hurt and Kit revealing herself as Casper. Vivian later gets into a fight with Madison at dinner when she's questioned about not being armed. Vivian tells her mom, "I don't *want* to be an exception! I'm not a ghost hunter, and I'm tired of always being labeled as the daughter of one!"

Madison replies, "Sacrificing your safety just to fit in and not draw attention to yourself is a juvenile and foolish thing to do. You aren't just the daughter of a ghost hunter—you're also Phantom's sister. That puts an even bigger target on your back than before."

What are your thoughts on their opposing viewpoints? Is Vivian being irrational, or is her desire to break the stigma of people seeing her only as "the ghost hunter's daughter" valid? In what ways do you think Vivian could try to establish her own identity beyond being stuck with the labels of Madison's daughter and Phantom's sister since her family members are so famous in Phantom Heights?