

## BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION TOPICS

### CHAPTER 21 – CHAPTER 30

1.

When Vivian vocalizes her distaste of Ash's clothes, Cato points out the double standard—why is it acceptable for him to be shirtless but not Ash, even though she's wearing a sports bra and cloak? Why is seeing her bare stomach offensive? Vivian doesn't have a real answer other than admitting that she's jealous. Cato explains that Ash dresses the way she does because as a Pyrokinetic, her body temperature is high, so she likes to wear clothes that are comfortable and keep her cool.

How did this exchange make you feel about the double standards in our society when it comes to gender and clothing? Why is it socially acceptable for males to walk around shirtless, but females are judged for wearing any type of clothing that reveals their shoulders, stomachs, and/or thighs? In this scene, it's not even a man sexualizing Ash—it's Vivian. How has society conditioned women to judge other women? In what ways can women be more supportive of each other?

2.

Agent Byrn complains about the new intern. He can't even remember her name, which is why he tells Dr. Anders that he prefers "numbers over names." Anders reminds Byrn that he's used to having the twins read his mind and instantly obey without needing to be told what to do, not to mention that threatening to fire the intern didn't have nearly the same effect as the threats made to the twins. "Human rights, and all. No cruel and unusual punishment allowed."

Byrn's response: "Slaves are so much better than interns."

What does this interaction tell you about Agent Byrn? Although he views ghosts as nothing more than animals and test subjects, he seems to prefer working with kálos slaves than human employees. Do you think he genuinely misses the twins, or does he just miss the convenience of having them at his beck and call?

How is the doctor's viewpoint different? Dr. Anders is the one who performs most of the experiments, dissections, et cetera, and yet, he appears to have more empathy than Agent Byrn. At the very least, he knows the intern's name. Do you think he makes a clear distinction between kálos and humans, or does he actually feel sympathetic to the test subjects he tortures? Do you think he treats his assistants and interns with respect?

3.

Madison intends to offer Axel a bowl of chicken noodle soup, even though she's fully aware that he has rejected every other meal she's offered him and he'll likely reject this one, too. She hopes that the gesture of taking the time to make him a special meal when he's sick will open the door for a dialogue, and maybe he'll finally tell her what he wants/needs.

Does this seem like a good plan in theory? Do you have any guesses about the mysterious "medicine" that Axel frequently leaves Phantom Heights to get? Why do you think he's so secretive about his bloodline, illness, and trips? Cato notices that this time, Axel's weekly cycle took twice as long, but now he's more unstable than ever. Why do you think the battle with the Shadow Guard affected his health cycle?

4.

When Shannon learns that Holly knew Cato had been alive all this time, she's horrorstricken and furious. Holly tells her, "I realize this is difficult for you to understand, but you have to look at the big picture. I had an obligation to all of Phantom Heights, not one little half-breed mutant in the AGC's custody. We needed Madison, but she was on a hopeless crusade to get her son back, and we were suffering for it. Kovak gave me the opening, and then I guided her onto the correct path to serve Phantom Heights in the face of an imminent crisis."

How do you feel about Holly's willingness to sacrifice one person in order to save thousands? Although what she did was terrible, she may very well have saved Phantom Heights by pressuring Madison to focus on finishing the entoplasm shield and protecting the citizens instead of rescuing Cato. Did Holly make the right decision, even if it was a horrible one?

In the same scene, she tells Shannon, "I'm sorry I hurt you, but God's forgiveness is the only one that matters in the end."

How does Holly's religious view factor into her actions? Does making peace with a higher power exempt her from apologizing and making amends to the people she hurt? Although she claims to have no regrets, do you think Holly has any remorse? What emotions do you think she has about these events?

5.

In Chapter 24, Vivian attempts to bond with Kit and Axel. Kit initially acts defensive and says, "Cato is *my* brother. I know you had him first, but he's mine now, and you can't take him back. I'm a good sister. He said so." Eventually, Vivian convinces her that she wants to share Cato, not take him away. Axel, on the other hand, takes the opposite approach, telling Vivian that she can have Cato because he doesn't care. He even goes so far as to tell Vivian that he wouldn't have sacrificed himself to save her as Jay did; he would have let her die if he'd been in Jay's shoes.

Do you think Axel's statements are true? Does he really not care about Cato, or is it a front? Would he actually have let Vivian die? Why do you think he intentionally causes friction with Madison and Vivian?

6.

Trey's parents finally make an appearance. In Chapter 24, we learn that:

*The Selmans had never been overly thrilled about their son's apprenticeship, but they held the unwavering belief that children should have the right to choose their own path, make their own mistakes, and find their own success without parental dictatorship interfering. They generally preferred to stay out of the ghost-hunting part of Trey's life even though it was such an important piece.*

What is your impression of Tom and Kaitlyn Selman? Are they supportive parents? Do you think Trey's dedication to becoming a ghost hunter puts on a strain on his relationship with his parents since they don't approve, even if they do step back and let him pursue his goals without interference? How do you feel about their opinion that parents shouldn't stop children from choosing their own path and making their own mistakes along the way?

7.

Officer Jana reveals that she didn't look for Vera (her sister) or Axel (Vera's son) when they fled the Ghost Realm because she didn't want to know where they were. She then adds, "But if I'd been given the order, I would have found them and brought them to justice."

Lieutenant Cisco replies, "I know. That's why I didn't give you the order." He felt that promoting her to the rank of officer was more important than prosecuting her sister of a minor crime.

Jana's decision to choose the Shadow Guard over her sister likely altered the trajectory of Axel's life years ago. What do you think might happen if Jana and Axel cross paths again now that she's aware of who he is? Will she remain loyal to the Shadow Guard, or will she want to make amends to her family? Do you think Axel is likely to forgive her? How do you think that meeting would go?

8.

What are your thoughts about RC's blood-family? How did his past relationship with Emmett impact how he interacts with his lab-family? Was Jay correct when he ordered the Alpha ghosts to stay out of the fight and let RC face his blood-family alone? How did you feel when you learned how RC got the scar on his eye?

9.

When Madison doesn't give Agent Kovak any updates, he then calls Holly and gives her a chance to come clean. But first, Holly asks Kovak to help her find her son, Greyson. Kovak refuses and says that Madison is right—the kid is probably dead, and searching for him is a waste of time. Holly presses him a second time, and again, he refuses. Only then does she deny having any news of the Alpha ghosts.

If Kovak had agreed to search for Greyson, do you think Holly would have given him a different answer? Would she have betrayed the Alpha ghosts in exchange for the possibility of finding her son? Or do you think she would have remained loyal to Phantom Heights even if Kovak did honor her request?

Agent Kovak seems to be fairly certain that the Alpha ghosts are in Phantom Heights, but he's hesitant to move in because the Rip is so close and his team would be going in blind. How did he figure it out? What do you think his next move is going to be? How does Holly's newfound disloyalty affect any plans he might have had?

10.

Ero's departure comes as a surprise to Cato, who tells him that Finn and Reese think of him as a father figure. Ero says, "I never intended to replace their father." He goes on to say, "Cato, they admire me. But you and the others are their family, and they love you more than anything in this world. You understand that, right? Our relationship is nothing like the one they have with you." When Cato insists that the twins don't know how to love, Ero says, "Between their lab-family and me, I am the one they could live without."

Do you agree with Ero's assessment? If Finn and Reese had been given a choice, would they have opted to go with Ero or stay in Phantom Heights with their lab-siblings? How has Ero's mentorship impacted the twins since they first met? Do you think Cato is right and they now see their teacher as a father figure?

Was Ero a positive influence on them even though Axel claims that their powers haven't changed since they started their lessons? Do you think they'll ever develop telepathic abilities, or will they remain basic Mind-Readers? How do you think Ero's absence will affect the twins?