

## BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION TOPICS

### CHAPTER 31 – CHAPTER 40

1.

When Finn and Reese are baking cookies with Kit and Madison, Cato catches himself feeling jealous. He quickly becomes frustrated that the twins are listening to his negative thoughts, which he can't stop or control. He says:

*I'd always felt that good people were allowed to have bad thoughts, as long as they didn't act on them. But I felt lower than low. My private thoughts might as well have been actions since I couldn't hide them, and really, that wasn't fair. My mind should be a sanctuary where I could harbor whatever nasty thoughts I wanted and they couldn't hurt anybody.*

How do you feel about Cato's position that good people should be allowed to have bad thoughts as long as those thoughts don't turn into actions? How do you think Finn and Reese feel about it since they're privy to so many people's inner thoughts? How would you react to someone if you knew they could hear ALL of your thoughts, even the private ones never meant to be spoken aloud? How does this potentially cause a strain within the lab-family?

Did this scene resonate with you in any other ways? How meaningful was it that the twins had the opportunity to learn how food is made? Do you think Madison is doing a good job when interacting with them? Why do you think Axel was so triggered over something as minor as being offered a cookie?

2.

Holly asks Cato to help her find Greyson. She doesn't expect to find Greyson still alive after all this time, but she wants closure. We know that she's already asked Agent Kovak, who refused. What do you think she would have done if Cato had also refused? How does her lost son factor into her alliances and loyalties? Did Cato make the right decision by agreeing to talk to Axel about Greyson, or did his commitment only ensnare him into another one of Holly's schemes? Do you think Greyson is still alive after all this time?

3.

The leader of the Talon Gang makes another appearance in Phantom Heights. In *A Fallen Hero*, he confronted the Alpha ghosts and faced off against Axel, who shattered his arm. Although his real vengeance is meant for Axel, Cato ends up caught in the crosshairs.

Axel is the one who created these consequences. And yet, he doesn't help Cato. Even worse, he leaves Cato injured, powerless, and helpless. Why do you think Axel reacted the way that he did? The last time he fought the Talon Gang, he didn't have his powers. This time, he does. He's much stronger now than he was when he effortlessly stopped Ryland's blow and defeated the gang. Shouldn't Axel have defended his lab-brother? How did you feel when he walked away from Cato lying in the broken glass, about to lose consciousness? Is there any rationale for his actions?

4.

Rival ghost hunter Jules Pilecki returns in Chapter 33. After hunting down her prey, she questions the ghost before ruthlessly executing her without hesitation or second thought. Her cold action is a stark contrast to Madison's ghost-hunting style, especially considering this is the same ghost that Madison pardoned. Do you think, if Madison had encountered the ghost when Phantom Heights was still in ruins, that she would have responded the same way Jules did? Has she softened because of Cato and the Alpha ghosts, or has Madison always been more merciful?

In the same chapter, Jules uncovers some alarming information—there are kálos communities in the Human Realm, and they've become adept at blending in with humans and living among us. Whose side do you believe: the ghost claiming that these communities are nonviolent refugees who want no part in the war, or Jules fearing that these factions are operating like terrorist sleeper cells waiting to be called to action?

5.

Vivian has been jealous of Ash ever since they first met. It started with jealousy of Ash's physique and beauty, but it's evolved into a deeper resentment that Cato sees Ash as an equal sister and seems to be much closer to her than he is to Vivian.

Do you feel like the two resolved their issues in Chapter 34? Did Ash's confession about the abuse at the AGC change Vivian's opinion of her? What is the significance of the different ways they talk about their relationship with Cato? (Vivian declares what Cato meant to her, while Ash responds with what she meant to Cato.)

6.

Wes nettles Axel by telling him that he should be grateful to humankind for bestowing him with so much power. This triggers Axel's temper, causing him to lose control of his power. Once the situation calms down, Wes defends his actions by saying, "I'm sure I'm not the only one sick and tired of Axel acting like he's better than everyone."

And yet, Axel's words contradict Wes's assertion: "You think humans gave me a gift? If you had even the slightest idea of what I lost to get this curse . . ." Multiple times, he claims that humans "ruined" him. During the peak of his rage, he says, "I lost *everything*! You think it's so great having all this power? Then why don't you take it! Because I don't want it! !! NEVER! WANTED! IT!"

Knowing what Axel is capable of, what is your impression of him? Does he bully people and act out because he's the fastest, strongest, most powerful kálos in existence and thinks he's above everyone? Or does his spite come from a place of self-loathing and suffering? Could it be a combination of both perspectives? Was Wes out of line for pushing Axel to the brink just to test his power?

7.

When Trey cuts his hand, Axel finally loses the battle with his inner demon and enters a bloodlust. The other Alpha ghosts are barely able to hold him off and protect Trey. If Finn and Reese hadn't reacted so quickly, Trey would have been slaughtered.

What is the significance of the twins—who have zero combat experience, passive Divinities, and no will to fight (or even defend themselves)—being the ones to save Trey when their warrior lab-siblings were too slow to react? How does Axel's bloodlust tie in with the "curse" he'd mentioned in Chapter 35? Do you think Axel was fully aware when he begged Jay to kill him?

What did you think of Cato's observation that he has the power to level the town with a single scream or skewer everyone with a storm of ice shards, and yet, the patrol seemed to be more afraid of him when he was holding a gun? Is there a psychological difference between seeing a visual, physical weapon versus knowing that there's a greater yet invisible power?

8.

Although Madison has made some compromises, she still seems to be pushing for a return to some sense of normalcy. She pressures Cato to wear human clothes, arranges for the extended family to visit, and convinces Cato to spend the night in his old room at his old house. She also asks Cato not to fight ghosts anymore so he can relax and readjust to normal life again.

What do you think is driving this push? Is Madison trying to establish a comfortable environment for Cato after everything he's been through? Is she completely oblivious and selfishly wanting life to be normal again just because she wants it that way? Or is this a method of coping with her own trauma?

After all, Cato isn't the only one who went through a difficult time. Within the last two and a half years, Madison mourned the death of her son; received his ashes from the AGC even though she specifically told Kovak that she wanted to bury him, not cremate him; lost her will to fight ghosts; watched Phantom Heights fall apart as people died, went missing, or fled; pulled herself together enough to finish her entoplasm shield and protect the survivors; reluctantly took on a leadership role that involved dangerous missions resulting in the deaths of raiders on her team; and feared for her daughter's life when the Alpha ghosts kidnapped her. Now, she's struggling to be a caregiver for eight severely abused kids and teens that have dangerous superpowers.

Are Madison's motives for trying to cling to normalcy selfish or selfless (or perhaps a combination)?

9.

When Cato wakes up from a nightmare and doesn't know where he is, he panics when Vivian and Madison approach him. Once he hears Axel's voice, he instantly calms down. Madison reflects:

*The bitterness festered inside her. She resented Axel for many reasons, but now a new one had surfaced. He, not she, had the power to soothe her son from a nightmare. Why? Why? How could the unblinking watch of a carnivore lull Cato to such peace when Madison's very presence made him cower in a corner?*

What are your thoughts on her observation? Axel abandoned Cato to face the Talon Gang alone. He went into a bloodlust and tried to kill not only Trey, but also Cato. Why does Cato still find Axel's presence soothing? Why does he trust Axel to protect him while he's sleeping? Do you think his trust is misplaced (or unearned)?

10.

During an intense series of battles, Captain Hassing shows off his abilities in ways we haven't seen yet. He creates ectoplasm tentacles, nets, and explosions, and he comes dangerously close to subduing Cato and Jay. Do you feel that Hassing has earned his position as Captain of the Guard despite his repeated failures? Did Cato make a mistake by allowing the captain to escape and seek medical treatment rather than killing him there on the spot?

How do you feel about Ash's role in the schoolyard and battle? Why do you think she struggles to control her Divinity? Although it was an accident, was she justified in setting Chase's jacket on fire and then running away? Based on how the fight was going, do you think the Alpha ghosts would have prevailed against Hassing if her neutralizer hadn't failed? How did her lapse in control turn the tide of the battle? How did Cato manage to calm her down, and what did his actions say about their relationship?