

BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION TOPICS

CHAPTER 41 – EPILOGUE

1.

Hassing's return to the Ghost Realm gives us a more intimate look at Szion outside the Prison. What is your impression of Avilésian society? Are Holly and the Agents correct when they refer to kálos as demons and brutes? Did meeting Katiria, Cassel, Amaya, and the Witch help to humanize ghosts in Avilésor?

How do you think the kálos civilians feel about the growing threat from the AGC? Are they even aware, or is Azar keeping his intel quiet? Considering that humans are low-class slaves in the Ghost Realm, would kálos citizens take the threat seriously? How would that challenge Azar's need for solidarity to his cause?

2.

Cato's wound is severe enough that he has no choice but to seek help from Madison and Doc. How significant is this? Was it a last-resort act of desperation, or could it indicate a small trust shift? Do you think he'll be more willing to compromise in the future now that Doc has helped him?

3.

In Chapter 42, Cato explains to Madison that Ash suffered a different kind of trauma at the AGC—trauma that was unique to her and none of the other Alpha ghosts. Upon learning this, Madison insists on speaking with Ash. She offers emotional support, and Ash chooses to accept it. Cato understands that, while he's willing to adopt any role he can for Ash, he can't substitute as a mother figure, so he's willing to share his own mother with her.

How does this indicate a shift in Ash's relationship with Madison? Did Madison take the right course of action by addressing the issue upfront rather than keeping it private and pretending that she didn't know? How do you think acknowledging the trauma to an Outsider will affect Ash's healing process?

4.

At breakfast, Vivian praises Ash and tells her that she's "sort of become a feminist icon at school" after what she did to Chase. But Ash rejects the praise, saying, "I didn't stand up for myself. I should have been assertive and told him to stop or pushed him away. Instead, I panicked and lost control of my Divinity, then ran away like a coward. I don't deserve praise for that. I'm so tired of saying thank you for empty compliments. Just once, I wish I could get credit for something I actually worked for, like training hard or taking down a strong opponent or being brave. But nobody ever seems to notice those accomplishments. All they care about is how I look or what I'm wearing." She then follows with, "I apologize for being petty. I should just shut up and be grateful for the compliment."

Does Ash raise a valid point? Do people praise her male lab-siblings differently than they do Ash, especially when it comes to accomplishments? How did Ash accidentally become a feminist icon, and why does hearing that make her upset? How has Vivian's position changed from earlier in the book when she was criticizing Ash?

5.

In Chapter 43, Cato and Vivian learn that Madison lied to them about how their father died. This revelation cleans up earlier discrepancies in the previous books (Vivian recollected her father dying in a car crash, but in Book II, Holly mentioned that a ghost had killed Jaxon). To Cato, the exact details of his father's death are irrelevant, but Vivian is understandably upset.

Was Madison wrong to hide the truth? How do you think the nature of Jaxon's death impacted her career as a ghost hunter (and how she feels about Cato being half-kálos)? Would Cato and Vivian have been more likely to become apprentices if they'd known that a ghost murdered their dad? Was Madison's concern about her kids being "afraid of monsters" if they knew the truth valid?

6.

When facing off against Tempest, Axel willingly sacrifices himself to save Jay. Madison demands to know why Axel chose to save Jay and not Cato when he was in trouble with the Talon Gang, and she rejects Cato's excuse that "those were completely different circumstances."

Later, on the rooftop, Cato asks Axel if he saved Jay because of what Cato said to him the day Jay was shot with a crossbow. (*From Book II: "Are you willing to let one of us get hurt or die just because you refuse to help humans? When are you going to start caring about this family? Honestly, sometimes I wonder why you even bothered to find us after we escaped . . . You call yourself a brother. Do you even know what that means?"*) Axel replies, "No. I woulda saved Jay anyways. So you can stop feeling guilty."

Why do you think Axel prioritized one lab-brother's predicament over the other? What was different about the circumstances between Jay's rescue and Cato's abandonment?

Cato says to Axel, "I think I know. I just need to hear you say it." What is Cato thinking? Should he be angry with Axel? Why does he seem so forgiving?

7.

When Axel is dying on the sidewalk, Madison grows increasingly frustrated with Jay's refusal to let Doc try and save him. She finally draws a weapon on Jay and orders to him stand down, but still, he refuses. When Cato steps in, she points the ectogun at Cato and seems to be prepared to fire. It's nonlethal, but still a clear escalation.

How did this scene make you feel as you imagined a mother pointing a gun at her son? If Axel hadn't awakened, do you think Madison would have been willing to cross the line and pull the trigger, even though she'd refused to fight Cato in town square at the beginning of the book?

Given the presumed short time window to make a decision and administer medical treatment, was Madison acting within reason? How will this impact her relationship with Cato? (Consider: Cato already has nightmares about her shooting him. Madison is willing to take extreme measures to save his rude, dangerous, spiteful lab-brother despite all the fights, even if it means giving Cato a few bruises.)

8.

In Chapter 45, we see that Azar keeps his Prisoners trapped inside mirrors rather than cells. Earlier in the book, Ero had explained that Rodeledor, aka the Mirror Realm, is a positive reflection of the living Realms (Cröendor, Avilésor, etc). What do you think it would feel like to be trapped inside a mirror? How useful (or dangerous) is Lieutenant Inalli's power? Why do you think Azar would want to keep people in mirrors rather than cells?

In this chapter, we also meet Sandt, a ruffian who specializes in capturing and killing wild unicorns to collect their horns for the Black Market. Why do you think Azar specifically chose Sandt for this mission? Why was he successful when so many others failed before him?

Later, in Chapter 48, Azar mentions that Sandt is an Oneiro. Azar tells Cato, "His Divinity seems harmless enough, doesn't it? But he can decide when and if a creature sleeps, not to mention total control over dreams. Sleep deprivation is an underestimated weapon. So are nightmares."

Do you think Sandt is going to play a bigger role in the future, or has his purpose (capturing the Alpha ghosts for Azar) been fulfilled? Is he a serious threat? Why do you think Azar said, "I think it would be beneficial to remind you why the Agents are our mutual enemies," before sending Sandt back in to Cato's cell at the end?

9.

In Chapter 47, Vivian learns that Madison is testing samples of blood from Cato and Axel without their knowledge. How do you feel about this? Is Madison justified since she's a scientist and this is usually how she collects samples from kálos, or did she cross a line? How do you think Cato and Axel will react if they find out?

When Madison finally realizes that something is wrong and the Alpha ghosts are missing, not just avoiding her, do you feel that she took the right course of action? Was there any chance that she might have been able to save them if she'd acted sooner? Do you think Jules will be a factor in the future now that Ero has erased her memory of the Alpha ghosts? Do you have any theories about how Cato could get out of the predicament he finds himself in at the end of the book?

10.

Azar and Cato finally have an in-depth conversation with each other in Chapter 48. What are your thoughts on Azar's perspectives about the brewing war, the AGC's weapon, and the crimes of humanity? Is Cato right to refuse Azar's offer of friendship? Do you think Azar will be able to persuade or manipulate him over time?

Azar says, "For the sake of the argument, let's go along with the ridiculous human fallacy of good and evil. You want me to be the bad guy. Fine. Who represents my inverse? The truth is that my adversary, whether you agree or disagree, isn't you—it's the Agents who locked you away and tortured you. Are they the 'good guys,' Cato?"

Many stories have one protagonist versus one antagonist. How does this series differ by having the protagonist face two antagonists (Azar and Kovak) with different agendas? Is there a "good" team or a "bad" team to root for? If a war does break out between the Realms, would you rather see Azar or Agent Kovak win? Who is the lesser of the two evils?

Azar continues to cast doubt in Cato's mind by telling him that his powers are growing and he's losing his humanity as they do. He says, "And once your mask was finally torn away, how did the humans treat you? They sealed you away in a laboratory. Locked you in a cage. Tortured you. Would they have done that if they considered you to be one of them? Why do you torment yourself trying to decide what you are when they already decided for you?"

What do you think about Azar's observation? Is Cato becoming less human as he grows more powerful? What exactly defines his "humanity"? Is it his power, or what he chooses to do with it? Knowing that he's been stripped of all his human rights in Cröendor but Azar has offered him full kálos right in Avilésor, does it make more sense for him to ally with Azar? Do you think he'd turn his back on his human friends and family?