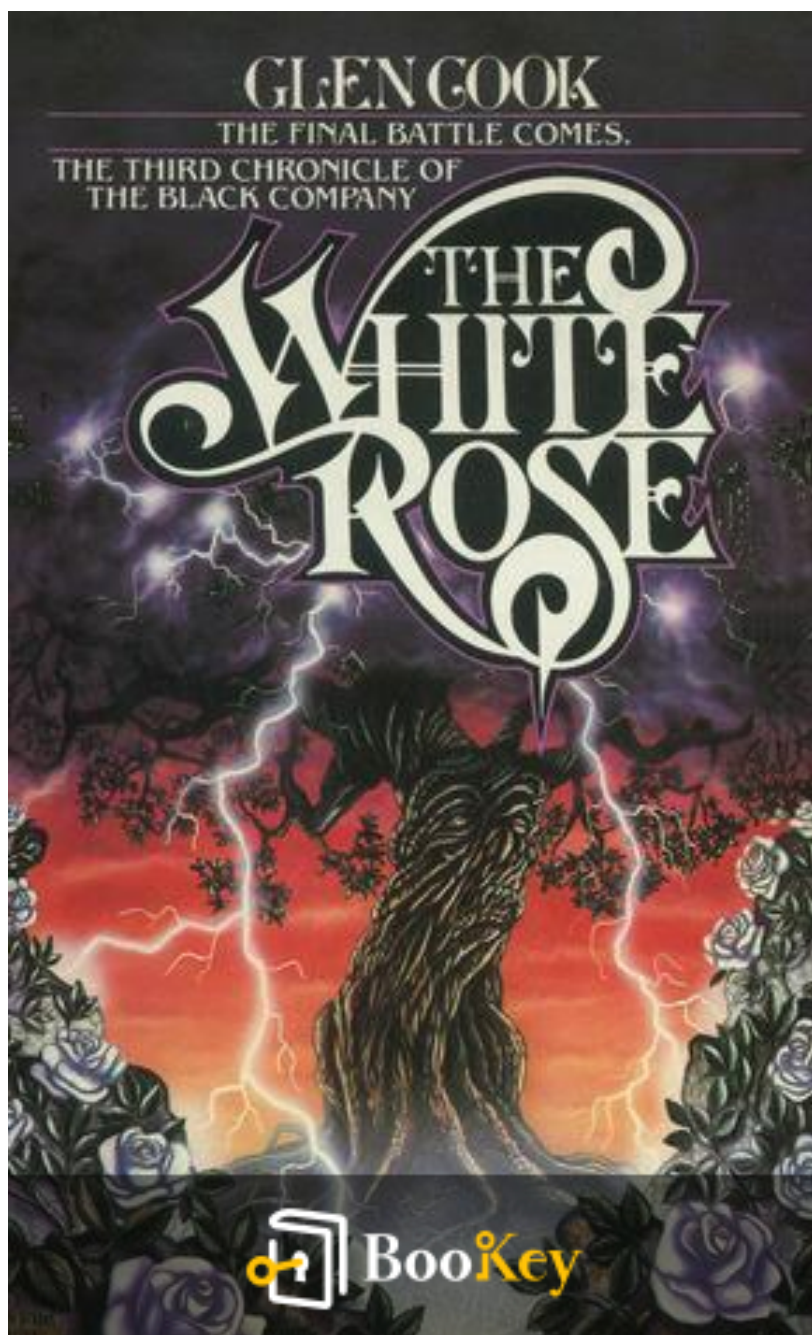


The White Rose PDF (Limited Copy)

Glen Cook



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The White Rose Summary

Sacrifice and honor in a world of shadows.

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About the book

In "The White Rose," Glen Cook weaves a gripping tale of courage and rebellion set against a backdrop of political intrigue and tyranny, where a band of unlikely heroes rises to challenge an oppressive regime. At the heart of this tale lies a mysterious and resilient symbol—the White Rose—representing hope and the unyielding spirit of a people yearning for freedom. Cook's masterful storytelling draws readers into a world where alliances are tested, sacrifices are made, and the line between right and wrong blurs in the face of overwhelming odds. As the protagonists navigate through dangerous landscapes filled with betrayal and uncertainty, readers will find themselves immersed in a thrilling journey that not only questions the nature of power but also celebrates the enduring strength of the human spirit in its quest for justice.

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About the author

Glen Cook is a renowned American author celebrated for his contribution to the fantasy genre, particularly through his innovative blending of military and magical elements in storytelling. Born in 1944, Cook began his writing career with a focus on science fiction but soon transitioned to fantasy, creating the acclaimed series "The Black Company," which has garnered a devoted following due to its gritty realism and morally complex characters. His works often explore themes of honor, camaraderie, and the harsh realities of war, and he is known for his distinctive narrative style that combines dark humor with poignant moments of introspection. In "The White Rose," part of the aforementioned series, Cook continues to unravel the intricate world he has built, further enriching the tapestry of his expansive literary universe.

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Chapter 1 Summary: THE PLAIN OF FEAR

Chapter One: The Plain of Fear

In the stillness of the desert, the air stretched and distorted the scene before him, creating an almost surreal sense of time. The narrator, part of a group of riders, finds himself counting the approaching figures, but each count leaves him with a sense of unease and disorientation. The atmosphere shifts as a gentle breeze rustles the leaves of an ancient tree, Old Father Tree, contrasting the unsettling tension with the harmonious sounds reminiscent of wind chimes.

As the horizon flickers with change lightning—an ominous sign akin to the chaotic clash between deities—he discovers an unusual talking menhir, a stone pillar often associated with magical forces and druidic lore. This menhir warns them of strangers on the Plain, bringing a wave of apprehension as the riders are revealed to be returning from a mission, delayed and exposed to the Lady's increased military presence.

Among the returning patrol are One-Eye and Goblin, both displaying the physical toll of their journey. They seemingly return to the safety of their operational base, Darling, after a challenging month marked by a failed ambush. The narration hints at the tension between the Black Company, a



mercenary group often at odds with the oppressive Lady, and the looming threat of her troops.

The narrator, known as Croaker and serving as the company's physician, confronts One-Eye about his injury and insists on examining it despite reassurances. The camaraderie among the men is underscored by their rough resilience, as old habits take over in return to their hidden base. They descend into their underground fortress, a damp and cramped refuge dubbed the Hole, which serves as the heart of their rebellion—the New White Rose.

The returning members fear for their safety as they adapt to a life of constant ambush in an environment ruled by the Lady's forces, revealing the precarious balance of their existence. Their mission was twofold: to contact sympathizers and to raid a garrison, demonstrating their resilience against an empire that seeks to crush them. As they settle into the murky depths of their lair, Croaker feels the weight of uncertainty; the menhir's repeated warning echoes in his mind, signaling that the challenges are far from over.

This chapter sets the stage for the complex intertwining of friendship, strife, and survival in a world overshadowed by tyranny, hinting at the struggles yet to unfold as they navigate an empire determined to maintain control.



Chapter 2 Summary: THE PLAIN OF FEAR

Chapter Two Summary: The Plain of Fear

Corder serves as the eyes and ears of the remnant Company in Tanner, having long fought against the Lady—a formidable antagonist whose ruthless suppression of dissent has shaped the course of events for decades. Many in the Company once operated as her enforcers, leading to the catastrophic battle at Charm, where a quarter million lives were lost in the brutal conflict against the Rebels. With the Lady's victory leaving no allies, the Company switched sides, compelled by survival.

The protagonist reflects on his weariness and the lost ambitions of his youth, harboring a significant endeavor: eighty pounds of ancient documents believed to hold the key to defeating the Lady and her Taken soldiers. However, six years of fruitless searching has dulled his spirit, and he reluctantly acknowledges the limited excitement in their group as they persist in a period of inactivity.

Suddenly, Goblin, a companion who resembles an old toad, interrupts the protagonist's melancholy with news of a visitor. While they prepare for potential hostilities, the rider on a worn mule, underwhelmingly unarmed, approaches. The sight elicits skepticism from the group, especially given



their precarious situation in Darling's territory, a stronghold against the Lady's powers.

As they approach the old man, he reveals that he is a messenger, identified by the password "Tokens." This term designates a courier from the West, hinting at a network operating under the Lady's radar. He confirms that he has traveled over a thousand miles from Oar, a situation that intrigues Croaker as he realizes how little he knows about the current state of their organization.

The rider presents Croaker with an oilskin packet that carries personal significance, although he lacks details about its origin. The contents remain a mystery, heightening Croaker's anxiety about the potential implications of its delivery.

After dispatching the rider to rest, Croaker retreats to his quarters, where he uncovers the packet's contents. Tension mounts as he prepares to read the message, aware that the stakes of his mission against the Lady remain perilously high. An ominous warning from a nearby talking menhir adds to his unease, suggesting more strangers are on the Plain, hinting at unseen challenges ahead.

As Croaker ponders his next steps, he grapples with the ever-present threat of the Lady and the uncertain future of their resistance. The chapter thus



concludes, laying the groundwork for further developments in their ongoing struggle against tyranny.

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Chapter 3 Summary: STORY FROM YESTERYEAR

Chapter Three: Story from Yesteryear

In the oppressive atmosphere of their modest home, Bomanz, a weary and aging scholar, finds himself at odds with his long-suffering wife, Jasmine. Her incessant complaints echo through the clutter of their shop, drowning out his efforts to focus on a crucial chart—a culmination of decades of research into the elusive Taken, supernatural beings tied to the history of their world.

Bomanz reflects on the burdens of his life choices. While Jasmine rants about the squalor and discontent of their existence, he chastises himself for not being the successful man he could have been—the one who could offer her a life of luxury in Oar, complete with servants and sumptuous meals. Instead, he has dedicated himself to his academic pursuits, which Jasmine perceives as fruitless. Their shared hope lies in the promise of the ancient map, yet each day slips further into dissatisfaction for her.

Feeling the weight of both his domestic turmoil and physical ailments, Bomanz dismisses Jasmine and prepares for the arrival of Tokar, a trader and friend of their son, Stancil. Tokar enters with news of a booming market in antiques and suggestions of partnerships that Bomanz vehemently rejects.



He is too set in his ways and too frail to handle additional partners or distractions, especially when the stakes of his research are so high.

As they converse, Tokar hints at the importance of the Taken, revealing that there might be someone in Oar interested in artifacts related to them. This revelation intrigues Bomanz, but he carefully maintains his feigned ignorance, understanding too well the dangers entangled with excavating such relics in the eyes of the Eternal Guard, the authoritarian force monitoring their actions.

Tokar brings letters from Stancil, revealing the son's upcoming visit home during the summer to help in the shop and to escape the tedium of university life. Bomanz's excitement contrasts sharply with Jasmine's skepticism, as she believes Stancil's involvement will only lead to further complications with the supernatural matters that have haunted their family.

This summer is particularly significant because it heralds the tenth appearance of a comet since the fall of the Dominator, during which the spirits of the Taken are said to be most active. Bomanz hopes this will be the summer he finally unlocks the secrets he has dedicated his life to uncovering, just as he prepares for the anticipated arrival of Stancil.

With a hint of sarcasm, Jasmine expresses her weariness of their grim lifestyle, yet Bomanz is invigorated by the prospect of restocking their



inventory and returning to the Barrowland, a site filled with relics of the past. He gathers tools with a sense of urgency, determined to begin his quest anew, while cursing Jasmine's incessant nagging and half-heartedly entertaining the idea of enlisting help during his explorations.

As he leaves, his banter with Jasmine highlights the deep-seated frustrations in their marriage, rooted in years of sacrifice and yearning for a different life, yet beneath the jests lies a shared hope for a brighter future, particularly as their son prepares to return home. Bomanz, fueled by a mix of apprehension and anticipation, steps into the twilight, ready to embrace the challenges ahead.

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Chapter 4: THE NEAR PAST: CORBIE

Chapter Four Summary: The Near Past: Corbie

In the northern region of Charm, nestled within the legendary Old Forest, lies the Barrowland—a pivotal setting in the ongoing struggle against dark forces. The chapter unfolds in the aftermath of a significant defeat for the Dominator, a once-feared dark entity. His failure to escape the Great Barrow through a character named Juniper has led to a period of seeming calm. The Lady's forces, previously beset by rebel threats, now display high morale, considering that the last remnant of resistance, a child claiming to be the reincarnation of the White Rose, is merely a fugitive fleeing from the remnants of an outlaw group known as the Black Company.

Amid this tranquil landscape, we meet Corbie, an enigmatic figure who arrives in Barrowland claiming to be a disabled veteran of the wars led by the Limper. With a pack on his back and a staff in hand, he seeks labor amidst the bustling military presence surrounding the town. The Eternal Guard, a well-paid regiment overseeing the area, has ample work for those willing to perform menial tasks. Corbie becomes a fixture in Barrowland, undertaking various lowly jobs—washing dishes, cleaning stables, and running errands—while remaining largely in the background, making few friends or enemies.



As time passes, Corbie requests and receives permission to occupy a dilapidated house that had once belonged to a sorcerer from Oar. He dedicates his spare time to restoring the structure, channeling his energies into a mission unknown to the townsfolk. While he diligently fulfills his

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Chapter 5 Summary: THE PLAIN OF FEAR

Chapter Five Summary: The Plain of Fear

In this chapter, Croaker learns from One-Eye that Darling is preparing to interview Corder and the messenger, highlighting her increasing stress despite the looming threat of the comet, which will return in twenty years. Croaker reflects on how Darling's urgency to resolve their struggles contrasts with the group's despondency in the isolated Plain of Fear, where they often feel trapped and overwhelmed by their ongoing conflict with the Lady.

As Croaker and One-Eye converse, their banter reveals the tension in the camp. One-Eye has been physically weakening and struggling without his usual equipment, while Goblin's antics add a layer of camaraderie amid the grim atmosphere. Their conversation is abruptly interrupted by an alarm, signaling an enemy presence stirring in the area, which is increasingly rare.

Emerging into the sunlight, they witness a flying object—one of the Lady's Taken—hovering above. The Taken are powerful figures once enslaved by the Lady, now serving as her agents of terror; they are remnants of a time when the Dominator reigned, and their enduring presence serves as a reminder of the past struggles the group has faced. The Taken's encounter



raises alarm as Croaker realizes their situation is escalating.

The chapter delves into the unfolding danger as the group contemplates the scouting nature of the Taken while fearing the potential for an enemy ambush. One-Eye's experience leads him to suggest that while they are preoccupied with the Taken above, another may be lurking nearby, prompting Elmo to prepare a small group to investigate.

Amid this tension, Croaker engages with a menhir, a mystical stone that communicates cryptically, suggesting that the day marks a significant turning point and warning of further threats, indicating that new dangers are becoming a reality. Elmo's plan to form a scouting party emphasizes their need for vigilance. As they prepare for what lies ahead, a sense of foreboding hangs heavy; Croaker notes that the day signifies the "beginning" of renewed conflict on the Plain of Fear, setting the stage for the challenges to come.



Chapter 6 Summary: THE PLAIN OF FEAR

Chapter Six: The Plain of Fear

As the sun began to set, I took my watch atop a barren point on the Plain of Fear, a desolate expanse known for its treacherous terrain and strange creatures. My companion, Silent, an aging man with a haunted demeanor, sat beside me amidst the twisted coral reefs that offered some protective cover. The coral's intricate design creates a deceptive beauty, but its poisons deter many of the Plain's inhabitants.

Amidst the stark landscape—comprised primarily of ochre and blood-red hues—the only signs of life were fleeting glimpses of native reptiles and sparse scrubs. The tranquility was interrupted only by a dark shadow overhead: a windwhale, a massive creature that sails through the skies between us and the sun. Memories of the past returned, propelling a sense of impatience and nostalgia, yet Silent remained stoic, having maintained a vow of silence for many years, making him an enigma among our company.

As night fell, the creatures of the dark began to stir, and luminescent dots flickered above us. The enigmatic Old Father Tree loomed large, a revered and ancient being that the local tribes consider a deity, shrouded in mystery. Amidst this peculiar setting, the familiar sounds of Goblin and One-Eye



echoed from the Hole, and I begrudgingly wished they had not returned, dreading the disruption they always bring.

One-Eye reported that Darling, our superior, had sensed an unusual stir at the edge of the null, which prompted their excursion. Their simultaneous bickering was interrupted by a cumbersome fire that One-Eye had ignited, drawing light that pierced the encompassing darkness, though it also attracted the attention of many menhirs—these living stones serve as our allies in this hostile landscape.

Before long, a figure emerged from the shadows—a tall man known as Tracker, accompanied by a scarred mongrel named Toadkiller Dog. Tracker was weary but strong, indicating he had wandered alone in these perilous lands, a feat only those with desperation undertake. His arrival heralded further questions, especially when he mentioned a mission to deliver a message to someone named Croaker at a place referred to as the Fastness, which is our home base.

Suspicion lingered due to his tough demeanor that reminded me of past encounters, particularly our former comrade Raven. As I engaged Tracker in conversation, trying to gauge his intentions, One-Eye and Goblin emerged stealthily from the darkness, weapons drawn, heightening the tension. However, Tracker managed to retain control, revealing a packet addressed to me and confirming his connection to another messenger, Oar, who had



encountered similar trials.

Understanding the potential significance of the dual messengers, we decided to bring Tracker inside for further observation. A prevailing sense of unease accompanied this decision, as he seemed both an ally and a potential threat. After securing him and his dog in a guarded cell, I retreated to my quarters, wrestling with the temptation to read the packet he had delivered, uncertain of what revelations might await within its confines. The dread of the unknown echoed with the weight of impending revelations, leaving me on edge.

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Chapter 7 Summary: THE SECOND LETTER

Chapter Seven: The Second Letter

In this chapter, we follow Bomanz, a determined researcher and digger, as he explores the Great Barrow, a burial site shrouded in mystery and the remains of ancient beings known as the TelleKurre knights. Bomanz grapples with the challenges of deciphering vague descriptions left by Occules, a figure from the past, and faces the daunting overgrowth that conceals many buried artifacts. As he navigates the dense landscape filled with poison ivy, his focus is on locating the remains of the knights to secure something spectacular for Tokar, his employer.

Bomanz is interrupted by his acquaintance, Besand, an old Guardsman who represents the law and the ongoing struggle against the potential resurrection of dark pasts. Their interaction is filled with tension and banter. Bomanz is wary of Besand's probing questions about his activities and potential illegal digging. Besand hints at troubling news regarding Tokar, suggesting he might be a *Resurrectionist*—someone who seeks to raise the dead. This accusation sends Bomanz into a spiral of concern. He is deeply aware of the dangers tied to Resurrectionists, who aim to revive ancient evils for their own purposes.



Despite their playful exchanges, there lies an underlying animosity in their relationship. Bomanz, desperate to uncover the secrets buried in the Barrowland, yearns for the glory and knowledge that could emerge from his research, particularly about Lady, a captivating figure from the past whose beauty and myth have mesmerized historians. Nevertheless, he must navigate the treacherous waters of the law, represented by Besand, and the moral complexities surrounding his discoveries.

As the chapter progresses, Bomanz recalls the drudgery of years spent piecing together the history of the barrows, including the identities of those buried within. He finds himself on the cusp of a breakthrough, but he is halted by the lingering question of who lies in the mysterious sixth grave. His obsession for knowledge becomes evident, overshadowed by the threats posed by those who may wish to exploit or destroy that knowledge.

The chapter shifts into a more personal tone as Bomanz experiences a haunting dream that echoes his inner turmoil. He dreams of a woman that symbolizes lost desire, and as the dream morphs into unsettling imagery, it reflects his fears and regrets. Thus, the line between past and present begins to blur, reminding him of the stakes involved in his relentless pursuit of arcane knowledge.

The closing segments show Bomanz preparing to stake his claim on the excavation site—a ceremony that grants him rights to the area amidst



mounting pressures from both the law and competing diggers like Men fu, a shady character who epitomizes the cutthroat nature of artifact hunting. The tension remains palpable as Bomanz's thoughts turn once again to Tokar and the implications of his connections, leaving him anxious about the summer ahead when an old friend, Stancil, will return.

Besand's insinuations and reminder of Tokar's dubious connections weigh heavily on Bomanz's mind, culminating in a state of frustration and paranoia as he seeks to protect his work and legacy from those who might exploit or misconstrue it. The chapter concludes with lingering doubts, indicating that Bomanz's journey is fraught with peril, and the choices he makes could lead to dire consequences for himself and those around him.

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Chapter 8: THE BARROWLAND

Chapter Eight: The Barrowland

Corbie, a solitary figure within the Guard compound, drifts through life like a specter, often entranced by the old paintings depicting the Barrowland that decorate the walls of his headquarters. These haunting images serve as reminders of the Dominator's past evils and his failed escape through Juniper, which has reverberated through the Lady's empire, stoking fears and ghostly rumors of his malign presence awaiting resurgence.

Despite the current peaceful facade of the Barrowland, its sinister aura still lingers; time may pass, yet the malevolent force tied to the Dominator cannot be fully vanquished. The Lady, who embodies immortality, will not permit any disturbance to her husband's grave, ensuring that darkness remains at bay—even as Corbie feels its pull.

As winter blankets the region with heavy snowfalls, the townspeople reflect on the harshness of nature, and Corbie becomes a familiar presence, known predominantly for his cryptic stories from the Forsberg campaigns. Within this isolation, he forms an unlikely bond with a young recruit named Case, who is eager to learn from Corbie's tales and possibly his knowledge of chess.



At night, Corbie retreats to the second floor of his home, where he immerses himself in the chaotic, often encrypted records of Barrowland lore, written in TelleKurre and its regional dialect, UchiTelle. These texts are remnants of the Dominator's era and serve as Corbie's only companions in his obsessive quest for knowledge, allowing him to channel his personal ghosts through late-night walks—a struggle with memories that refuse to fade.

As the seasons change, the Great Tragic river floods dramatically, captivating the curious townspeople, including Corbie and Case, who venture to watch the rising waters. For Corbie, the roaring river symbolizes a relentless force, a reminder of their mortality and insignificance. The weight of his past and the threats of the future coalesce as he fears the renewal of the Dominator's hatred against the living.

Despite the Lady's earlier triumph over the Dominator at Juniper, Corbie grapples with doubt regarding whether the evil has truly been eradicated. His fixations on the Great Barrow intensify, stirring unease in Case, who respects Corbie's experience but worries about his fixation on old dangers.

As the seasons pass, Corbie engages in mundane tasks, but fate intervenes when he uncovers an old silk rod that bears significant secrets of the Barrowland—specifically, a chart meticulously crafted by the wizard Bomanz. This document details the locations of the Taken, protective spells,



and burial sites, illuminating the history of the Barrowland and Bomanz's dedicated yet misguided pursuit of truth.

The chart ignites a fierce imagination in Corbie, conjuring images of long-past battles and the sacrifices that have shaped the legends surrounding the Barrowland. However, it also breeds self-doubt; he fears falling prey to the same obsessive drive that consumed Bomanz, a cautionary tale of ambition and hubris.

As dawn breaks, Corbie is left at a crossroads, contemplating whether he will continue his relentless search for knowledge or become ensnared in the tragic cycle of obsession.

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Chapter 9 Summary: THE PLAIN OF FEAR

Chapter Nine: The Plain of Fear - Summary

The chapter opens with the protagonist, Croaker, being summoned by the increasingly sour Lieutenant Elmo, who instructs him to prepare for a meeting. Croaker reflects on his mixed feelings about Elmo and recalls the demise of their previous leader, the Captain, whose wish for Croaker's promotion he reluctantly honored.

Croaker's quarters reveal his identity as both a physician and a scholar, cluttered with ancient tomes that detail the forgotten histories of the defeated – particularly concerning the Domination and the White Rose. He laments the absence of Raven, an ally knowledgeable in the historical language of TelleKurre, who would have aided in interpreting the documents Croaker is struggling to understand.

As he prepares to leave, Goblin, his companion, brings humor to their dire situation, teasing Croaker about his past romantic connection with the enigmatic Lady. Croaker's feelings about their shared history are conflicted; he was once drawn to her but has since lost that romantic illusion.

At the conference room, Croaker reunites with Darling, a formidable woman



who has matured under the weight of leadership. Despite her youth, she bears the scars of hardship, having adapted to the male-dominated military life and proved herself resilient. The atmosphere in the room is tense as they discuss their lack of progress in uncovering the sought-after documents related to the company's history and imminent threats.

Goblin reports on recent intelligence, indicating that their enemies are fortifying their positions and preparing for an impending attack. Corder, another member of their group, mentions alarming rumors of new Taken—supernatural beings once under the Lady's command—amassing enemies against the Black Company. This raises concerns about the revival of the notorious Limper, an old foe killed by Croaker himself, suggesting the return of a past threat.

Corder details the emergence of new Taken each assigned to different regions: Benefice, Blister, Creeper, Learned, and Scorn. The new Taken, unlike the previous, appear to embody a more bureaucratic form of terror rather than raw chaos. The realization that the Limper's resurgence could put them at a severe disadvantage looms heavy, creating a palpable sense of dread among the assembled members.

As discussions shift toward strategies for survival, the group's focus narrows on pressing dangers, demonstrating their precarious situation underscored by thwarted hopes and anxieties. Darling and Croaker plan to meet later to



revisit the documents that Raven once guarded, pondering what they might reveal, particularly about the Limper's true name, which could hold the key to their defense.

Suddenly, a rider arrives, bloodied and bearing urgent news. His warning is cut short by the mounting chaos as Taken approach. Though fear permeates the air, the arrival of the mantas – large, powerful creatures – provides a glimmer of hope as they retaliate against the Taken, displaying the unpredictable nature of the battle.

Amidst the turmoil, Croaker finds himself torn between aiding the wounded messenger and witnessing the unfolding chaos of battle. He chooses life, rushing to assist the boy, illustrating the blend of duty and conscience that drives him—a reminder of the ever-present stakes and the balance between their previous triumphs and looming fears.

In the midst of the conflict, Croaker's collection of documents remains an open question, hinting at unresolved histories and potential paths to power or defeat, illustrating the chapter's themes of memory, legacy, and the heavy weight of past actions that continue to influence their present struggles.

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Chapter 10 Summary: BOMANZ’S STORY

Chapter Ten: Bomanz’s Story

In this chapter, we find Bomanz grappling with the sudden arrival of his son, Stancil, who returns home earlier than expected, much to his mother Jasmine's delight. Bomanz's initial irritation at Jasmine's call for him transforms to joy as he sees Stancil, now a tall and healthy young man engaged to Glory, the sister of Bomanz’s acquaintance, Tokar. This revelation unsettles Bomanz, as Tokar is rumored to be involved in Resurrectionist activities—a group tied to dark and historical magic that could threaten their family’s safety.

The conversation shifts as Bomanz worries about the implications of Stancil's engagement. While Stancil insists he knows enough about Glory's family to want to marry her, Bomanz cautions about their potential ties to dangerous beliefs and the suspicions of Besand, the local Monitor, who is keeping a close watch on the family due to escalating tensions surrounding Tokar.

As the chapter unfolds, Bomanz reflects on nostalgia, his past, and the changes in relationships over time. He admits to feeling trapped in an aging body, reminiscing about his younger days filled with dreams of adventure



and the inevitable disappointment that follows maturity.

Stancil, eager to talk about his studies and life, remains unaware of the weight of his father's concerns. Their interactions reveal a mix of familial love and tension, hinting at the complexities of growing up and the strain of external pressures, particularly those represented by Besand, who symbolizes authority and a looming threat.

Amidst their discussions, Bomanz and Stancil fall into lighthearted banter over a small mishap involving a thief named Men fu, who tries to steal artifacts from their excavation site. Their laughter and camaraderie provide a brief respite from the heaviness of their previous conversations, displaying a deeper bond forming between father and son.

Eventually, Bomanz and Stancil discover a piece of valuable armor in their excavation—an artifact that centers on the Shapeshifter, a legendary figure from their lore which adds tension to the narrative, as its unearthing might attract unwanted attention, particularly from men like Besand. This tension deepens when the reality of their work sets in, particularly the fear that their dig could become embroiled in the chaos surrounding the Resurrectionists.

In a revealing moment, Bomanz opens up about his feelings regarding aging and dreams that have yet to be achieved. He expresses vulnerability to Stancil, addressing fears about what lies ahead for him and his family. This



candid exchange helps Stancil understand his father's struggles, illustrating a generational gap filled with unspoken fears and expectations.

As the chapter concludes, a sense of foreboding hangs over Bomanz as he contemplates the comet's arrival—an omen foreshadowing unrest and the potential realization of long-held fears. Conversations with Besand further solidify the idea that change is on the horizon, challenging the lives they have constructed. Jasmine joins Bomanz, and they share a tender moment under the comet, a nostalgic reminder of their youthful beginnings, yet also a harbinger of the uncertainties to come.

Through the layers of familial complexity and monumental outside forces, this chapter captures the nuanced transition between hope and anxiety, highlighting the bonds of kinship against an ever-encroaching darkness.

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Chapter 11 Summary: THE BARROWLAND

Chapter Eleven Summary: The Barrowland

In this chapter, Corbie grapples with the haunting memories of the past, particularly those tied to legendary figures like Soulcatcher, Stormbringer, and the Lady. These names resonate more powerfully in the ancient language, contrasting sharply with the mundane reality of his present life. Corbie often finds himself drawn to the Barrowland, a mysterious and ominous place that symbolizes the remnants of a bygone era and the lingering power of ancient champions, now seemingly overshadowed by the current struggles of life.

As Corbie continues to ruminate over these thoughts, he is visited by Case, a young member of the Guard. Case brings news that Colonel Sweet is concerned about Corbie's nighttime wanderings, prompting Corbie to reflect on how his actions may appear to others. Despite his distractions, he still acknowledges his responsibilities and engages in conversation with Case over a modest breakfast of oats and bacon, contrasting their meager provisions with their military pay.

When Corbie meets with Colonel Sweet, humor is exchanged, but the tone shifts as Sweet reveals a more serious issue. A visitor from Charm, acting



under the Lady's authority, has reported on Corbie’s behavior, suggesting it raises concerns. Colonel Sweet emphasizes that perceptions matter greatly in their world, and Corbie’s nighttime escapades have caught unwanted attention. In a candid moment, Corbie confesses the psychological scars left from the war, admitting to nightmares filled with the cries of innocent children. This vulnerability deepens their connection as Sweet shares his own emotional weight from past horrors, highlighting the shared trauma they endure.

As their conversation delves into the topic of the Rebel faction and the elusive White Rose, Corbie realizes that threats still loom, even if it seems victory is within reach. Their discussion culminates in a chess game, symbolizing the strategic maneuvers and dangers they both face. The chapter concludes with an understanding between the two men, underscoring the need for vigilance in a world rife with uncertainty and the chilling possibility of being watched by powerful enemies, including the enigmatic Taken, who represent a deeper and darker threat in their ongoing struggle. Corbie resolves to be more cautious, aware that his past may still have the power to compromise his future.

Element	Summary
Chapter Title	Chapter Eleven: The Barrowland
Main	Corbie

Element	Summary
Character	
Themes	Haunting memories, ancient power, perceptions, shared trauma, vigilance
Key Figures	Soulcatcher, Stormbringer, the Lady, Case, Colonel Sweet
Setting	Barrowland, a symbolic place representing a bygone era
Plot Summary	Corbie reflects on his past amidst current struggles, engages with Case about his behavior, and faces Colonel Sweet's concerns about perceptions and the Rebel faction. Their conversation about shared trauma culminates in a chess game, symbolizing strategies and dangers ahead.
Conclusion	Corbie resolves to be cautious as he acknowledges that both his past and present are intertwined with threats that could compromise his future.



Chapter 12: THE PLAIN OF FEAR

Chapter Twelve: The Plain of Fear

In the desolate landscape of the Plain of Fear, the protagonist grapples with a sense of foreboding, captured in a moment where he surveys the vast sky. Having the watch, he feels an unsettling weight in his gut, compounded by the ominous presence of the Taken—unstable beings that roam the Plain, believed to be hostile to any outsiders. As he observes the sky, a pair of manta pairs deftly glides through the air. These creatures, known for their agility, engage in a dance meant to taunt the Taken, resisting the presence of intruders with an inherent animosity. The protagonist is acutely aware that he, too, is an outsider, along with Darling, another entity among many on the Plain.

As he wanders past a creeper-lined creek, he notes a shift among the peculiar menhirs—standing stones that have an arcane aura, hinting at greater happenings on the Plain. Their laughter-like whispers resonate in the air, indicating their sentience and consciousness beyond the mundane. The protagonist's unease grows as he senses a call to arms among the numerous species that inhabit this inexplicable world.

One particularly wise menhir, towering above, ominously forewarns him:



five armies are approaching. Its cryptic message reminds him that their alliance is precariously built on a shared adversary rather than mutual trust. He reflects on the variety of intelligent species cohabiting the Plain, a unique council of beings that include the menhirs, walking trees, windwhales, and many more. This richness in diversity carries with it both alliances and dangers.

The protagonist's thoughts are abruptly interrupted by the menhir, which has now morphed from helpless stone into an emissary, bearing a warning of strangers encroaching upon their territory. The creatures of the Plain apparently fear their status and seek to reassess the presence of the protagonist and his companions. Here, the tension of being an outsider intertwines with the urgency of impending conflict.

As the narrative unfolds, the scene shifts to Tracker and his oddly named dog, Toadkiller Dog, who are stationed at the entrance of the Hole, observing the Taken. Tracker has built a rapport with Darling—though the protagonist feels uneasy about Tracker's resemblance to Raven, a figure from his past whom he associates with danger. Reflecting on Raven's history and the threat posed by the Limper, who has seemingly returned from death, the protagonist's anxiety deepens. He questions whether other adversaries might similarly have survived and are lurking, waiting to strike.

Tracker attempts to assuage the protagonist's fears, speaking with



unwavering confidence about their impending victory over the Taken. Yet, despite Tracker's assurances, there remains an unsettling aura about him, one that amplifies the protagonist's distaste for having relied on potentially dangerous allies. The tension culminates in the uncomfortable silence as Tracker's theories about the nature of their foes are met with skepticism.

Ultimately, the chapter illustrates themes of uncertainty and the burdens of leadership that weigh heavily on the protagonist. As they stand on the precipice of conflict, both the natural and supernatural elements of the Plain—embodied through the menhirs, the windwhales, and the unknown armies—serve as constant reminders of the ever-looming stakes of their situation.

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Chapter 13 Summary: THE PLAIN OF FEAR

Chapter Thirteen: The Plain of Fear

In this chapter, Croaker finds himself in a tense situation as the group prepares for an urgent mission inspired by the unpredictable actions of Darling, a military leader with a reputation for her daring strategies. The story opens with Croaker's exchange with the Lieutenant, who instructs him to let Tracker act as a lookout. As they descend into a dank pit known as the Hole, Croaker is reminded of the discomfort that comes with such confinement, particularly regarding the unpleasant odors that linger from a cramped living space shared by a large group.

Darling, filled with her characteristic intensity, expresses her determination to go after two formidable adversaries known as the Taken, specifically targeting the Limper, a notorious enemy who has proven to be a near-immortal threat in the past. Croaker is skeptical about the plan, warning her of the high risks involved and the power of their enemies. He reflects on his previous encounters with the Limper, acknowledging that while he has inflicted damage, dispatching such a powerful opponent is a monumental task.

The discussion escalates, revealing prominent tension as Darling insists on

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the potential benefits of breaking their enemies' momentum. Although confident in her strategy, she refuses to divulge all the details to Croaker, opting to withhold information to ensure security during the operation. Frustrated but resolute, Croaker grapples with the implications of disobedience and the pressure of either accepting orders or facing the consequences.

As tempers flare, Silent and the Lieutenant intervene, attempting to calm the situation and urging Croaker to submit to Darling's command. Finally, faced with an ultimatum, Croaker storms out, frustrated but still concerned about the looming threat posed by the Taken.

He later receives an unexpected oilskin packet from Elmo, which sparks his curiosity and anxiety. He wonders about the implications of the message within, suspecting it may involve a ploy by the Lady, another powerful figure in their ongoing conflict. After wrestling with his apprehensions, he eventually decides to open the packet, setting the stage for possible new revelations that could impact their precarious circumstances.

In this chapter, themes of loyalty, leadership, and the burden of command intertwine, illustrating the complexities of wartime relationships and the ever-menacing presence of their supernatural foes.



Chapter 14 Summary: THE STORY OF BOMANZ

Chapter Fourteen Summary: The Story of Bomanz

In this chapter, we meet Bomanz, an artisan specializing in restoring antiquities, who is showcasing a remarkable piece from his latest TelleKurre collection: a skeleton in magnificent armor believed to belong to King Broke, a key figure from the Domination era. His business partner, Tokar, expresses admiration for the creation, hinting at a significant financial return from its sale. However, Bomanz is constrained by the dictates of his employer, Besand, and hints at tensions arising from his association with the Resurrectionists—a group regarded with suspicion and disdain.

The relationship dynamics deepen as Bomanz discusses plans for a wedding present for Tokar's future sister-in-law and contemplates his future in Oar. With an impending transfer of power to a new and unpopular Monitor nicknamed "the Jackal," pressure mounts within the community, as this change stirs fears among patrons like Bomanz and Tokar.

As the chapter unfolds, Bomanz experiences unsettling dreams foreshadowing peril. The arrival of the comet, which is believed to be a sign of impending change or doom, adds a layer of tension. We witness Bomanz's restless preparation and uneasy navigation through a town rife with secretive



whispers. His encounters culminate in a violent turn when he learns that Besand was attacked by plotters who aimed to eliminate him, a fact that deepens Bomanz's anxiety over the growing unrest.

Through his waking hours and troubled thoughts, Bomanz grapples with his role in a world defined by conflict, resurrection, and buried histories. As he prepares to confront possible threats, both from outside forces and within his family, the broader implications of loyalty, legacy, and choice weigh heavily on him.

The chapter balances themes of craftsmanship, family loyalty, and the specter of violent change, setting the stage for further developments as Bomanz's world unravels around him. Ultimately, it highlights his struggle against the shadows of the past while hinting at choices that will shape his future and that of his loved ones. As the comet's glow flickers ominously overhead, questions of identity and allegiance become increasingly pressing, paving the way for impending conflict as Bomanz contemplates the resurgence of dangers once thought contained.



Critical Thinking

Key Point: The Importance of Choice in Shaping Our Destiny

Critical Interpretation: Bomanz's plight illustrates how our choices define not only our individual paths but also impact those around us. As you navigate through life's uncertainties, remember that every decision carries weight, especially in times of change. Like Bomanz, who must weigh his loyalties against his aspirations amidst rising tensions, embrace the idea that your actions today can lay the foundation for a brighter tomorrow. Seize the opportunity to craft your own future, understanding that the power of choice lies within you, even amid chaos.

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Chapter 15 Summary: THE BARROWLAND

Chapter Fifteen: The Barrowland

In this chapter, Case learns that Corbie has returned after an eight-month absence. Delighted to see each other, they embrace, and Corbie shares the difficulties he faced on his journey back, highlighting the challenges of deteriorating roads in their region. The conversation quickly turns serious as Case asks Corbie about his daughter. Corbie admits that his quest to find her—a search that involved giving his savings to a man in hopes of locating his children—has proven disappointing, as many records have gone missing.

The two men discuss the harsh winter conditions they have faced, both in their area and in Oar, where Corbie had been. The winter had been particularly bad, not just due to the incessant snow but also because of threats from tribes who had stolen their supplies. Corbie is relieved to learn that Case and his companions watched over his home while he was away.

As they talk, Case mentions the alarming weather patterns following the appearance of the Great Comet, which has led to uncharacteristically harsh winters. Corbie remembers how the Barrowland, once familiar, is now almost unrecognizable due to the snow and flood changes. Confident that his home remains undisturbed, Corbie contemplates his next moves and



retrieves a silken map, which he examines with old, weather-worn documents he had stolen from the university in Oar.

Feeling the weight of his circumstances, Corbie reflects on his miscalculations and the precarious path ahead. While he desires to avoid high-risk decisions, he acknowledges that confronting his challenges may be unavoidable. With the sky darkening, he prepares to return home, pondering the necessity behind his struggles and weighing whether the risks he faces are truly worth it.

Chapter Title	Summary
Chapter Fifteen: The Barrowland	Case reunites with Corbie after his eight-month absence. Corbie discusses the challenges he faced during his return, including poor road conditions and searching for his daughter, which has been disappointing due to missing records. They reflect on the harsh winter conditions affecting their region and Corbie's previous location in Oar. The conversation shifts to the alarming weather patterns following the Great Comet's appearance. Corbie realizes the Barrowland is now almost unrecognizable and feels the pressure of his situation. He examines maps and documents, contemplating his next steps, the necessity of his struggles, and the risks he must face.

Chapter 16: THE PLAIN OF FEAR

Chapter Sixteen Summary: The Plain of Fear

In this chapter, the protagonist, Croaker, finds himself on the brink of an unknown adventure alongside his comrades, including familiar faces like One-Eye, Elmo, and the enigmatic Darling. Despite his frustrations with their apparent secrets, Croaker prepares by packing his gear, oblivious to the true nature of their mission.

As Croaker steps into the cavern's stable, he senses something is amiss when he discovers only Darling's mount is ready to ride. His companions call him out for overpreparing, revealing the light nature of their equipment for what promises to be a raid rather than a full-scale operation. Although irritable, Croaker shares a moment of warmth with Darling, recalling their long history together since her rescue from danger in the past. This relationship hints at Croaker's underlying emotional struggles, marked by a romantic streak that colors his observations.

When they finally emerge into the night, the atmosphere buzzes with an underlying tension. A massive windwhale—a colossal creature known for its immense size—looms above them, swallowing the stars in its shadow. As the menhirs, ancient sentinels imbued with wisdom, begin to glow and shift,



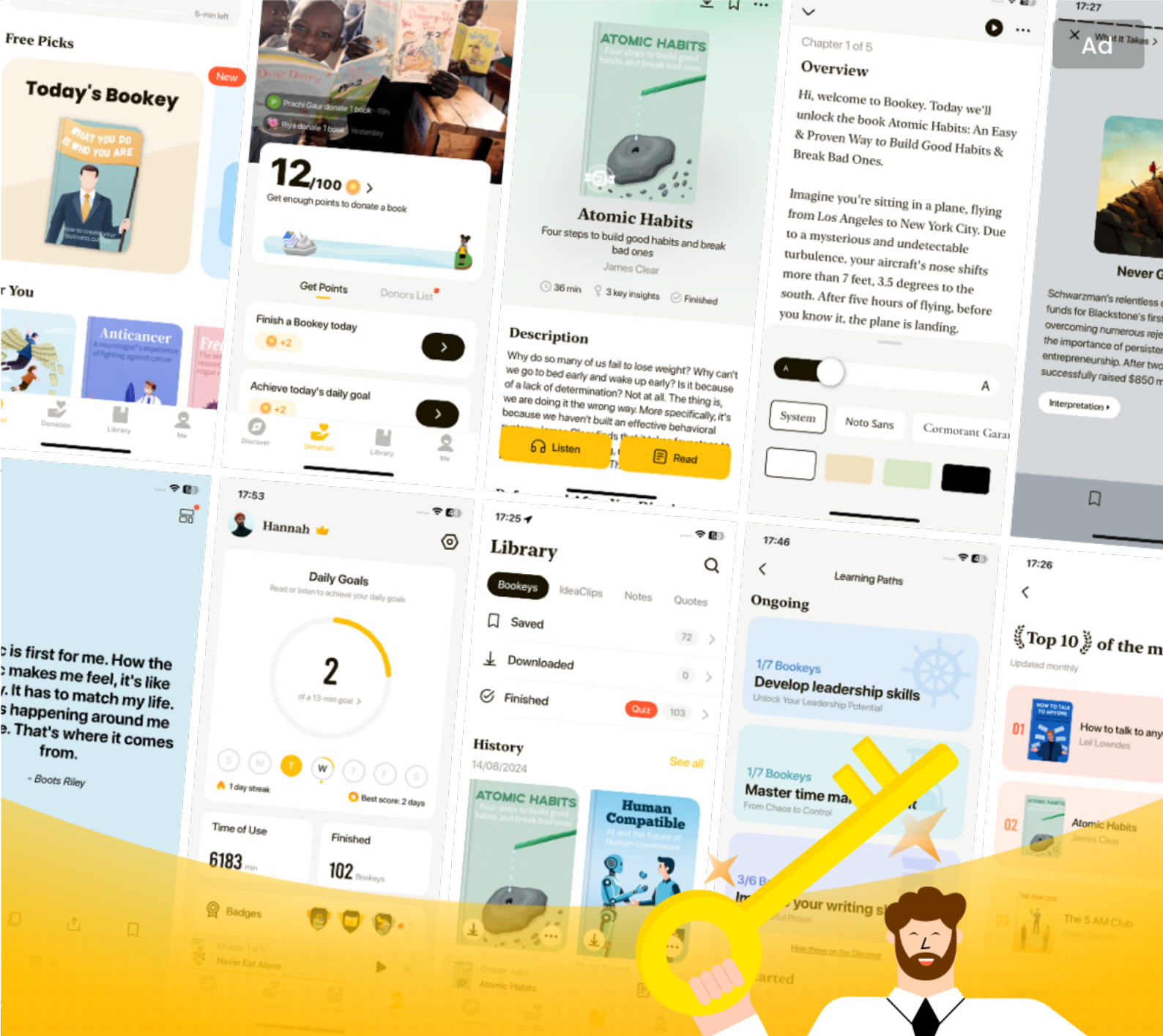
the urgency of their mission becomes clear: they are boarding the windwhale in hopes of confronting the Taken, dark entities that threaten their world.

Croaker experiences a mix of awe and discomfort as they scale the whale's slick flanks, a bizarre yet powerful sensation enveloping him. Guided by the

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Chapter 17 Summary: RUST

In Chapter Seventeen, titled "Rust," the narrative unfolds with a sense of tension and urgency as the characters, led by Croaker, navigate a perilous situation following their encounter with the Taken. The chapter begins with Croaker reflecting on previous misjudgments regarding their adversaries, particularly the Limper, who, due to a disconnect between their intended actions and the capabilities of their enemies, remains elusive when they arrive to confront him.

As they approach the edge of the Plain, Goblin detects the presence of the Taken, prompting the group to take cover. The atmosphere is thick with paranoia and the burden of past experiences, notably Croaker's memories of a similar mission that ended in tragedy. These recollections highlight the moral complexities of their actions, as they are forced to fight against youthful conscripts who had little choice in their allegiance.

The windwhale—a massive flying creature aiding their escape—drops them off not as they expected, but higher up, creating further anxiety among Croaker and his comrades. The ever-optimistic Tracker prepares himself with his weaponry, while Croaker contemplates the dire situation unfolding below them as their operations to dismantle the Taken's stronghold become chaotic. Their mission quickly morphs into a desperate scramble when an unexpected enemy regiment arrives, throwing their plans into disarray.



The ensuing battle escalates as scores of imperials converge on their position, forcing the Company to make a hasty retreat while the windwhale ascends without many of their number. This loss deepens the sense of hopelessness among Croaker and his crew, as their options rapidly diminish. The chapter is infused with a foreboding atmosphere, illustrated through their thwarted escape plans and the increasing threat of the Limper and Benefice, two of the most formidable Taken.

As the enemy surrounds them, the Lieutenant maintains a commanding presence, attempting to rally the troops for defense instead of flight. He pushes for a fight against overwhelming odds, strategizing for assistance from Rust, which holds its own long-standing enmity towards the Lady and her minions. Meanwhile, Croaker and others scavenge for valuable information among the Limper's documents amidst the chaos of skirmishes.

Goblin and Silent, demonstrating their magical prowess, unleash a cloud of moths that successfully disrupt the enemy, though the specter of future attacks looms as artillery pieces are assembled against them. The growing threat of bombardment adds to the mounting tension as the company prepares for what appears inevitable—an all-out assault fueled by their adversaries' numbers and resources.

As the chapter progresses, Tracker's skill with a bow stands out, showcasing



a glimmer of hope and resilience even as Croaker grapples with the grim realities of their situation. The balance between impending doom and the camaraderie among the Company suggests that struggle—both physical and moral—will continue to define their journey, as the Lieutenant’s insistence on survival against the odds drives the group’s determination to face whatever the day brings.

Overall, this chapter serves as a pivotal moment in the story, emphasizing themes of brotherhood, sacrifice, and the weight of decisions made in the name of survival, all while shrouded in a pervasive sense of dread that propels the narrative forward.



Chapter 18 Summary: SIEGE

Chapter Eighteen: Siege

As twilight faded into night, the air around the besieged city of Rust was tense with uncertainty. The residents, worn from a day of dread, had unexpectedly survived the day without the attack of the Taken—a malevolent force typically represented by powerful beings who serve darker ambitions, including a notable figure known as the Limper. The unexpected quiet had ignited a flicker of hope among the defenders.

The peace was abruptly shattered by a thunderous knock at the gate. It was One-Eye, a seasoned sorcerer known for his gruff demeanor but invaluable magical expertise, demanding entrance with urgency. Relaunching into a more cautious rapport, he relayed that their imperial enemies were running low on patience, prompting Goblin and Silent, both adept in their own magical arts, to strategize amidst the chaos.

Suddenly, a fiery spectacle erupted as an unfortunate soul hurtled toward them, engulfed in flames, igniting a morale-boosting cheer from Goblin and One-Eye. Imperial artillery began to burn as chaos mounted on the enemy's side, and the rebel wizards seized the moment to unleash their spells, further disrupting their foes.



As night descended, the imperials prepared to storm the walls. With dim moonlight shining through the darkness, Croaker, a seasoned soldier and the narrator, stood shoulder to shoulder with Tracker, a fellow archer. Tracker, ever composed even in the face of impending battle, inquired about the enigmatic Lady, a powerful figure from Croaker's past. He struggled to articulate her essence—beautiful yet formidable, a figure who inspired both awe and fear.

The battle commenced. Arrows flew into the obscurity as walls trembled under the pressure of ladders and grappling hooks. While the wizards tried to create illusions to stall the enemy, their efforts were not enough to hold back the imperial tide. As fighting reached its peak, the ominous shape of the long-anticipated windwhale—a massive, magical vessel they had hoped would aid their escape—loomed in the sky, signaling hope amidst despair.

A group of younger men broke ranks, sprinting toward the parade ground to board the windwhale, heedless of the Lieutenant's commands to hold fast. Croaker, in a moment of hesitation involving important documents, felt the panic in the air escalate as the imperials surged closer.

In the frantic melee, Tracker displayed exceptional prowess, dispatching enemies with grace and speed, embodying a legendary swordsman from tales of old. Just as the men began to rise and retreat toward the windwhale,



Croaker saw Tracker surrounded by opponents. Desperation led to Toadkiller Dog, Tracker's loyal canine companion, lunging to save Croaker from imminent peril, reinforcing the spirit of camaraderie that defined their loosely knit brotherhood.

As the chaos unfolded, the windwhale began ascending. The battle faded into the distance, but tension lingered, especially when Croaker realized the absence of the Taken, raising questions about their sudden evasion. The vast expanse of the Plain, replete with wonders and dangers, unfolded below them.

Upon safely landing, however, a stark truth awaited them: Tracker had succumbed to a catatonic state, a consequence of the horrors witnessed during the siege. Questions arose about losses incurred—both men and their loyal companions like Toadkiller Dog were left behind amid the chaos—a painful reality for the mercenary band who prided themselves on loyalty.

As they gathered and grieved, assessing the day's toll revealed mixed feelings. Though they had dealt a significant blow to the enemy through captured documents and disrupted plans, a sense of failure pervaded. Their efforts had uncovered capabilities of the windwhales that the Taken had previously underestimated, which could shift the dynamics of their ongoing battle against dark forces.



After the raucous arguments subsided, Croaker retreated to his quarters, drawn to the captured papers. Among his work, he stumbled upon another troubling packet from the west, hinting at broader designs from their enemies and a tangled path still ahead, foretelling future confrontations that would demand even greater resolve and sacrifice.

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Chapter 19 Summary: BOMANZ’S TALE

Chapter Nineteen: Bomanz’s Tale

Bomanz finds himself plagued by vivid dreams, particularly of a mysterious woman whose words elude him. His reflections on the dreams reveal a mix of foreboding symbols, hinting at danger tied to his past and the powerful forces ancient to the Barrowland, a place of danger and death. As night falls, Jasmine brings him tea, disrupting his thoughts and prompting conversation about recent events: Stance, his son, has encountered a growing tension due to the new Monitor's ineffectiveness, and another man, Besand, has met a grim fate.

As Bomanz grapples with his own plans to engage the Barrowland, Stance stumbles in, shaken after witnessing the aftermath of Men fu’s desperate attempt to use Besand’s amulet amidst supernatural peril, leading to the latter's gruesome death. The gravity of the situation weighs on them—as they face not just the loss of friends but the dangers lingering in Barrowland, which might beckon even more souls to tragedy.

Despite Stance’s fears about further risk, Bomanz remains resolute, determined to venture into the Barrowland to confront the ghosts and the ancient power awaiting him. His energy shifts as he sheds his everyday



persona and embraces the wizard within, ready to confront what lies ahead. Stance, having witnessed horrors beyond his years, struggles against his father's proclamation yet ultimately realizes his role as aid rather than opponent.

As the town descends into chaos following the assassination attempt on the Monitor, Bomanz prepares himself. He handles the heavy pall of solemn affairs with unexpected poise, ignoring the distractions of chaos stemming from the Guards' breakdown of order. He desires to fulfill the rituals needed to communicate with the spirits, feeling the weight of the comet's imminent approach and its influence on his impending actions.

His plans are interrupted by the arrival of family and unexpected guests during an important night of work. He feels the intrusion keenly but makes the best of the situation, engaging in games while keeping an eye on his true purpose. The game of Throws, played under the watch of his family, serves as a metaphor for the looming uncertainties he faces. Through it all, he beckons for focus and fortitude from Stance, preparing for the risky communion with ancient powers.

As night deepens, Bomanz invokes his spells, driven by a mix of confidence and underlying doubt about his preparations as he sets out to breach the ancient Barrowland grounds. Varied ghosts haunt his passage, their cries reverberating in his decision. The attention turns to the looming dragon, a



harbinger of his past fears, before he catches a glimpse of the Lady of the ancients who holds immense significance.

In a revealing moment within the crypt, he encounters both the Lady and the slumbering form of the Dominator, a figure from age-old legend. Their presence hints at greater stakes involving power, dominance, and the bond between teacher and pupil. The Lady appears both inviting and challenging; her disdain for Bomanz's desire to bind her to his will becomes apparent.

As they engage, Bomanz realizes he's reached a tipping point—he possesses her true name, a profound key to manipulating her power. Yet, emotions entwined with ambition and desire complicate his approach, leading to a contemplative struggle between control and understanding as he seeks the knowledge he needs. The chapter captures Bomanz's battle against his fears while navigating ancient, dangerous forces tied to his destiny and unforeseen consequences that lie ahead.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: Embrace Your Inner Strengths to Navigate Challenges

Critical Interpretation: In this chapter, Bomanz embodies the spirit of persistence and courage as he prepares to engage with the ancient and treacherous Barrowland, despite the overwhelming forces arrayed against him. This serves as a powerful reminder that in our own lives, we may often face daunting challenges that evoke fear and uncertainty. Embracing our inner strengths and stepping into roles that allow us to confront these adversities can be transformative. Just as Bomanz sheds his everyday persona and embraces the wizard within, we too can harness our potential to face what lies ahead, reminding ourselves that growth often requires us to confront what frightens us most.



Chapter 20: THE BARROWLAND

Chapter Twenty: The Barrowland

As the relentless rain drizzled over the landscape, Corbie ventured out despite the persistent ache in his leg. He engaged in a conversation with Case, a young soldier questioning Corbie's decision to remain in the dismal weather when he could search for his children in Opal, a place known for its better climate and brighter prospects. Corbie's reluctance to leave stemmed from more than just physical discomfort; he grappled with his deep-seated fears of human interaction and emotional connections, particularly tied to his past and relationships.

Corbie, a seasoned warrior from a life fraught with battles against formidable foes, found that his true fears lay not in the threats of swords or sorcery but in the complexities of love and social ties. The conversation drifted toward their shared experiences in the military, revealing that both had ties to the infamous Black Company—a group known for its ruthlessness and cunning in battle. Case shared fragments of stories from his father, Nightcrawler, a figure from the same dark history that haunted Corbie.

This led Corbie to request Case's silence regarding a serious matter he



wished to disclose—contingent upon his potential death. He asked for Case's commitment to secrecy about an important task: if anything were to happen to him, Case would need to retrieve a packet for a blacksmith named Sand in Oar and subsequently inform Colonel Sweet about the stirring of the undead, a sign of impending danger. Corbie's weighty request loomed over them as he clarified its significance, underscoring the gravity of the situation they found themselves in.

In a contemplative state, Corbie prepared to attempt a divination spell he had not practiced in years. Memories of his younger self and the accumulation of his wisdom intertwined as he recalled the teachings of his mentor, the wizard Bomanz. Hesitant but resolute, he gathered his tools in Bomanz's dwelling. It was here that he intended to channel his spirit into the Barrowland, a place steeped in dark magic and forgotten horrors.

Transcending the physical realm, Corbie felt the pulsating power of ancient spells enveloping the site of the Great Barrow, where dark remnants and spirits bound to the Dominator resided. His journey revealed more than anticipated: legions of slain soldiers from the White Rose, eternally guarding against the looming threat of evil, and the terrifying presence of the dragon depicted in Bomanz's map.

As Corbie ventured deeper, he found not only the crypt of the Dominator—a fearsome entity that had previously threatened the world—but he also



encountered a chilling twist: the Dominator was not dormant but instead ominously aware. The moment their eyes met, panic surged through Corbie, leading to a frantic escape. The air crackled with ferocity as a storm erupted outside, echoing the chaos within as thunder roared and lightning struck the Barrowland.

Invisible shapes emerged from the devastation, racing away toward the forest, unseen by the guards who searched for clues in the aftermath of the tempest. Meanwhile, Corbie's body lay still, tethered to life by a thin thread as he fought against the repercussions of his dangerous venture. The chapter encapsulates the intertwining of past memories, the weight of responsibility, and the lurking horrors within the Barrowland—escalating a sense of urgency as dark forces begin to stir.

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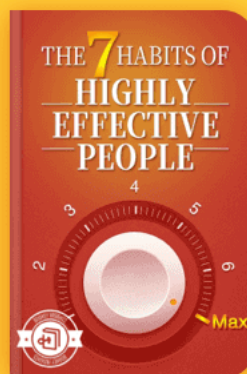
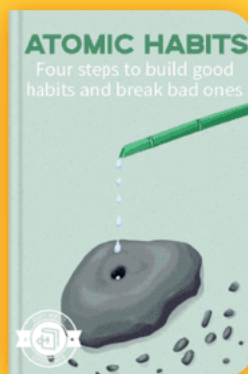
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Chapter 21 Summary: THE PLAIN OF FEAR

Chapter Twenty-One: The Plain of Fear - Summary

In this pivotal chapter, the protagonist seeks an audience with Darling, who is prepared for a confrontation regarding military strategies and losses. However, instead of raising alarms about the operational oversight, he presents her with a set of mysterious letters from a figure named Oar, which he has kept to himself until now. These letters are a vital piece of the larger puzzle he has been trying to solve, one that Soulcatcher indicated might hide a critical weapon.

Darling reads the letters with growing interest, but initially finds them incomplete and unhelpful. The letters have been received in swift succession, raising suspicions about their true timing and origin. Upon closer inspection, they uncover a hidden message that alludes to both urgency and danger, suggesting that the final installment of a crucial narrative regarding Bomanz's last days is yet to come. The writer hints at hiding copies of this narrative in specific locations for the protagonist to retrieve.

As they decipher the message, a key revelation occurs: the content reflects the "finger speech," or a form of sign language, indicating the need for caution. Darling and the protagonist realize that the message serves as a



desperate call for assistance amid escalating threats, particularly from an impending Rust raid aimed at revenge, which could unleash the Taken, powerful entities antagonistic to their cause.

The protagonist feels a rising fear about the precarious situation they are in, yet Darling encourages him to bide his time and await further communications. He wrestles with the notion of embarking on a dangerous journey alone to seek out the hidden letters, but Darling insists it's too great a risk for her to accompany him, reinforcing her status as the "White Rose." This title carries immense weight, identified by allies and adversaries alike, symbolizing hope and salvation for their diminished movement.

Finally, Darling urges the protagonist to study and reflect on the implications of the letters, compelling him to pursue the thread of this mystery with resolve. Their exchange highlights the tension between their personal connection and the larger destinies they must confront, solidifying Darling's role as a symbol of hope in a tumultuous world. The chapter closes with a sense of impending action, as the protagonist prepares to follow the trail of clues that may lead to salvation or demise.



Chapter 22 Summary: THE PLAIN OF FEAR

Chapter Twenty-Two: The Plain of Fear

In this chapter, the narrative resumes with the arrival of men from Rust, who fled from the battlefield after an encounter with the Taken—the elite soldiers serving the Lady. The Taken had lost equipment crucial for their operations, specifically magical carpets vital for their mobility and attacks. The Limper, a formidable figure and one of the Taken, likely faced considerable scrutiny from the Lady regarding this setback.

Amidst this turmoil, Croaker, the narrator and physician of the Black Company, enlists the help of his quirky comrades, One-Eye and Goblin, to address the ongoing danger they face on the Plain of Fear—a desolate and treacherous landscape known for its brutal challenges and magical disturbances. Their current endeavor involves translating names and assembling documents, but the cramped quarters become unbearable with Goblin and One-Eye's bickering and antics.

To find a distraction from the growing tension, Croaker proposes a challenge to his companions: he needs to leave the Plain unnoticed. Although they express eagerness to join him on a journey west, Croaker firmly declines, fearing the treacherous landscape would lead to their demise. Their banter



offers humor amidst the growing tension as One-Eye and Goblin each display their typical personalities—One-Eye's arrogance in his magical prowess and Goblin's cheerful mischief.

After deciding on a plan involving Croaker's magical amulets—one that alerts him to the presence of the Taken and another that provides a protective effect—the trio steps outside the safety of their null space to test the amulets. They venture towards the coral reefs, a vibrant and dangerous area of the Plain, where Goblin and One-Eye play games while Croaker tries to find solace in the landscape.

Despite Croaker's attempts to relax, he is haunted by memories from past conflicts and the horrific sights they experienced during earlier battles in this same Plain. Eventually, Croaker turns in for the night, only for an intense nightmare to disrupt him. In this dream, he encounters a hauntingly beautiful woman embodying an essence of fear and calm simultaneously. She is connected to the Lady, who had a significant role in his past, making her presence both alluring and terrifying.

She speaks to him, urging him to join her at Charm and become her historian, a request that stirs internal conflict within Croaker. Their conversation reveals the escalating threat of the Lady's forces as five armies prepare to invade the Plain. The Lady acknowledges the pain Croaker has endured at the hands of the Taken and the burdens he carries, particularly the



loss of their precious Annals—a record of the Black Company's history, which he abandoned during a harrowing escape.

The Lady hints at a glitch in her plans regarding the Limper, surprising Croaker with her awareness of past exchanges between them. She proposes that by joining her, he could witness significant events unfold, appealing to parts of Croaker that consider her offer despite its dangers. Tension builds as the Lady warns Croaker about the presence of a significant threat looming nearby, compelling him to fight against his desire to trust her.

As the dream fades, Croaker finds himself face-to-face with Toadkiller Dog, his loyal companion. This encounter brings him comfort and a sense of security amidst the uncertainty surrounding their situation. The chapter concludes with Croaker and the dog making their way back to the Hole, where they unexpectedly find Goblin and One-Eye snoring away, blissfully unaware of the perils Croaker faced alone.

In an unexpected turn, Tracker, a new character introduced as a capable warrior, reveals his ability to read old languages, an unexpected skill that could aid their efforts in deciphering crucial documents left behind. Croaker acknowledges Tracker as a valuable addition to their team, recognizing his strength and unique abilities amidst the bizarre realities of the Plain of Fear. This chapter encapsulates the ongoing struggles of the Black Company, blending moments of dark humor, supernatural encounters, and the



intricacies of loyalty and conflict in their tense and uncertain world.

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Chapter 23 Summary: THE PLAIN OF FEAR

Chapter Twenty-Three: The Plain of Fear

In the midst of the Monthly Meeting, a significant yet unproductive gathering, Darling, the leader, directs the proceedings with an urgent focus. During these lengthy discussions, agents share intelligence reports on the Taken, powerful adversaries threatening the rebellion. The charts reveal unsettling patterns: areas of the Plain remain unexplored, signifying territory yet to be compromised. Anti-imperial sentiments are on the rise, thanks to recent uprisings, but the menacing presence of the Taken, especially Whisper—a cunning and hostile strategist—grows stronger as she strengthens her foothold deeper within the Plain.

Whisper's strategy is to establish fortified garrisons, slowly encircling the rebels and reinforcing her forces—a classic tactic that has successfully subdued many insurgencies. With time on her side, Darling recognizes the urgency of their situation, stating that they need decades to secure a sturdy defense against the imperial forces. She announces a risky mission: Croaker, a hesitant but resourceful member of their team, is to venture out and find the completion of his correspondent's story—a crucial piece of information before the Taken can tighten their grip.



Though Croaker protests, insisting that he doesn't stand out amongst his companions and feels like a "nothing guy," Darling insists that his presence is necessary. The addition of Goblin and One-Eye, known for their distinct skills and abilities, only amplifies Croaker's anxieties—after all, if they're recognized, it could jeopardize their mission. Amidst the tension, Tracker, a seasoned scout, volunteers to join them, showcasing his knowledge of the northern territories.

The group hastily prepares for departure, outfitting themselves with essential gear and supplies. They board a windwhale, a massive beast used for transport across treacherous terrain, and soon they find themselves soaring into the night sky, leaving behind conventional comforts and familiarity.

As they journey onward, a change storm—a fierce and chaotic phenomenon of the Plain—unexpectedly emerges, disrupting their flight. The storm expands rapidly, its strange energies promising unpredictable transformations. Faced with shifting realities where their very forms could rearrange, panic ensues. One-Eye and Goblin attempt to harness magic to counter the storm, but their efforts prove futile against nature's chaotic force.

In the thick of the storm's power, Croaker observes as his companions undergo alarming transformations. Goblin swells grotesquely, Tracker mutates into a monstrous form resembling a wild beast, and Toadkiller Dog shifts into something much more terrifying. Miraculously, amidst the horror,



Croaker experiences no apparent change, though he feels the substantial weight of anxiety. The windwhales, guided by instinct, manage to land safely, but the experience leaves an indelible mark on the group.

After hours of tumult, the storm dissipates. The team emerges shaken but intact. One-Eye reflects on their lucky survival—suggesting the windwhales' awareness of the storm's danger. As they gather themselves, Croaker, now acutely aware of the Plain's dangers, shares a moment of camaraderie with his companions, realizing they have a story to tell and new challenges ahead—even as a new dawn breaks over the altered landscape around them.

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Chapter 24: THE WIDE WORLD

Chapter Twenty-Four Summary: The Wide World

In this chapter, the protagonist reflects on the overarching secrecy within their group, which prioritizes survival and keeps them from fully understanding the dangers surrounding them. Their recent escape from the Plain of Fear is shrouded in uncertainty, amplified by the arrival of their escort—windwhales—who harbor their own mission: an impending assault on their headquarters, dubbed Whisper.

As they soar above, the narrative describes a chaotic scene in Whisper's town where mantas, airborne creatures used in the attack, unleash destruction from the skies. They bombard buildings with bolts, inciting havoc as the monstrous windwhales descend to wreak havoc upon both civilians and structures alike. The fighting is fierce, illustrating the brutal reality of warfare, with Whisper herself caught in the fray.

After surviving the aerial combat and witnessing the devastation below, the protagonist travels with companions Goblin and One-Eye through the Windy Country, a desert region that contrasts starkly with their earlier experiences. As they navigate toward the free city of Roses—a historically independent settlement and friend to their cause—they reflect on past



escapades, including the duo's propensity for trouble within the city's red walls. Notably, they recall Raker, a once-fierce Rebel general, highlighting Goblin and One-Eye's past misdeeds during the skirmish against him.

Despite their initial plans to lay low and gather supplies, Goblin's and One-Eye's reckless nature leads them astray, and the protagonist is left to deal with the consequences. They decide to proceed regardless of their companions, who have vanished in search of distractions, thus emphasizing the importance of sticking to the mission as a soldier's first rule.

The tension escalates when rumors of a disturbance in Roses bubble up; fires and sorcery hint at the mayhem caused by Goblin and One-Eye's antics. Choosing not to risk their own safety by searching for the errant duo, the protagonist prepares to leave with Tracker, showcasing his pragmatic approach to survival in harsh circumstances.

The chapter culminates with reflections on the nature of their conflicts, analyzing past strategies against enemies like Raker and delving into insights on the Lady, their complex leader with seemingly unshakeable authority. Tracker, who embodies a more straightforward view of their situation, engages in discussions about strategy and vulnerabilities, particularly regarding their adversaries, ultimately pondering the essence of combat and cunning in the perilous landscape they inhabit.



Through this chapter, themes of loyalty, survival, and the intricate dynamics of their world are woven together, laying a foundation for the turbulent journey that lies ahead.

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Chapter 25 Summary: THE BARROWLAND

Chapter Twenty-Five: The Barrowland

In this chapter, tension escalates as Corbie fails to report for work, drawing concern from his colleagues. After attempts to reach him go unanswered, a group of workers decides to force entry into his home, worried for his well-being. Inside, they discover Corbie in a precarious state—unresponsive at a neatly arranged table, with an oilskin packet and a book by his side. Their concern deepens as they realize Corbie's shallow breathing and weak pulse indicate a serious medical emergency.

As word of Corbie's condition spreads, Case, who is on duty, finds himself torn. He had previously promised to deliver a letter for Corbie should anything happen to him. When Colonel Sweet arrives and assesses the situation, he questions Case about his intentions regarding the oilskin packet. Sweet's presence is imposing, and Case feels intimidated as he reluctantly hands over the packet, explaining Corbie's fears of not having much time left.

Sweet examines Corbie but is perplexed by his condition, noting it does not resemble a stroke as initially suspected. Instead, he expresses the need for Corbie to be moved to a location where medical attention could be



administered. A veterinarian, referred to as the horse doctor, arrives but is unable to provide clarity on Corbie’s medical state, leaving Sweet to manage the situation.

Case holds a deep concern for Corbie as their conversation reveals that Corbie may have had a more complex past, possibly having come from one of the prosperous Jewel Cities before his fortunes changed. This adds a layer of intrigue to Corbie’s character, raising questions about his life before joining the army. The chapter closes with the urgency of moving Corbie to safety while Case reflects on whether or not to disclose the message he holds for Corbie, leaving readers anxious about what lies ahead for both characters.

Chapter Title	Summary
Chapter Twenty-Five: The Barrowland	Corbie fails to show up for work, prompting concerns among his colleagues. They find him unresponsive in his home with an oilskin packet and a book. His health is critical, with shallow breathing and a weak pulse. Case is torn between his duty to deliver a letter for Corbie and the pressing medical situation. Colonel Sweet examines Corbie and decides he needs to be moved for medical help. The arrival of the veterinarian yields no answers, leaving Sweet in charge. Case learns more about Corbie's mysterious past, adding depth to his character. The chapter ends with urgency to move Corbie and Case's dilemma about revealing the contents of the oilskin packet.

Chapter 26 Summary: ON THE ROAD

Chapter Twenty-Six: On the Road

After a three-day halt to gather supplies and ready the wagon, I began to worry about our companions, Goblin and One-Eye, who had yet to reappear as we traveled north along the Salient Road. Our destination was a fortress called Meystrikt, previously held by the Company on behalf of the Lady.

In the midst of preparing supper in the woods away from the road, I heard a commotion nearby. To my relief, it was Goblin's unmistakable voice, embroiled in a heated argument with One-Eye. Their squabbling revolved around blame for a predicament they found themselves in, especially considering the unpleasant memories associated with Meystrikt. Having recognized that they had been riding horses, I speculated whether they had successfully swindled them from their previous owners—a feat neither was particularly skilled at.

As I edged closer to the road, I called out to announce our presence. However, my approach was met with a hasty magical response from them, which conjured clouds of insects around Tracker and me. Gripped by irritation but determined to maintain control, I managed to identify myself and demanded they dismount from their stolen horses. Their previous antics



had stirred the trouble once again, eliciting concerns about the vigilance of the Lady's agents.

After some banter and feigned innocence from Goblin and One-Eye, I insisted they join us for supper, despite my frustration over their irresponsible actions. Reflections of the Captain, our former leader who had also faced insurmountable challenges, lingered in my thoughts, reminding me of our shared failings.

That night, filled with restless thinking about potential repercussions, I ultimately decided against turning back despite the looming danger. We packed our chaotic ensemble into the wagon—still groaning with mismatched provisions—and continued our journey past the fort. The guards barely paid us any mind, signaling the mundane nature of life in these parts since my last visit.

Feeling somewhat reassured, I directed us toward Elm and Oar, and beyond that, the expanse of the Great Forest, preparing for whatever lay ahead.



Critical Thinking

Key Point: The importance of camaraderie and facing challenges together in times of uncertainty

Critical Interpretation: In the midst of chaos and danger, the bond among companions shines the brightest. Just like the narrator's concerns for Goblin and One-Eye, life's challenges often bring us closer to those we care about. This chapter teaches us that, despite frustrations and disagreements, the strength of relationships can provide comfort and support. Embracing the strength found in collaboration can inspire you to persevere through difficult times, knowing that you are not alone in your journey, and that sometimes, it's the shared experiences—both good and bad—that truly fortify our resilience.



Chapter 27 Summary: OAR

Chapter Twenty-Seven Summary: OAR

The chapter opens with a scene of dreary weather, as the characters struggle through relentless rain while heading northward. One-Eye, one of the characters, complains about the incessant showers that have plagued their journey for a week. The weather has not only made travel difficult but has also left local crops vulnerable to disease, notably the "firedance," a malady linked to infected rye. The environment reflects a changing cycle, with milder winters leading to increased pest infestations, while game species diminish due to poor foraging conditions.

The group approaches the fortress at Deal, a stronghold previously seized from rebels. However, due to the Lady's confidence in Forsberg, the fortress stands abandoned, looted by nearby peasants. The group is aware that their objective is Oar, and they resolve to ensure their mission proceeds smoothly, as past mistakes have put them on edge.

Once they reach Oar, they opt for an inconspicuous inn favored by small traders, deliberately avoiding the areas they previously frequented to not attract unwanted attention. The narrator, accompanied by Tracker, sets out to find a local smith named Sand, well-known for his craftsmanship. They



discuss the city's rebuilding efforts since their last visit while remaining vigilant for trouble.

Tracker's animal, Toadkiller Dog, alerts them to potential danger, though outwardly, they see nothing suspicious. When they finally locate Sand's smithy, they discover it eerily quiet and devoid of activity. A tackmaker explains that Sand's absence is due to the "Grey boys"—the local imperial troops—who have been taking into custody anyone they suspect of political dissent, indicative of the shifting power dynamics in the region.

Their mission takes a serious turn as Tracker suggests that they find out what happened to Sand, and they begin plotting their next steps. The surrounding distractions and temptations of Oar test their resolve, especially for Goblin and One-Eye, who entertain divided opinions on how to handle the imperials stationed in the city. Ultimately, the decision is made to leave Oar rather than risk confrontation, underscoring the themes of dodging danger and the burden of memories from past escapades. The chapter concludes with a sense of urgency to vacate the city, as they sense that remaining might draw unwanted attention to their group.



Chapter 28: TO THE BARROWLAND

Chapter Twenty-Eight: To the Barrowland

The journey to the Barrowland proves less than thrilling, as the weather grows increasingly dreary. The imperial engineers have attempted to improve the forest road with corduroy paths and canvas coverings to combat the notorious northern snow, yet a sense of unease permeates the air. One-Eye remarks on the effort put into the road's maintenance, especially given that the Dominator—a legendary figure feared by the impoverished lower classes of Forsberg—was believed to be defeated. Nonetheless, the lingering dread surrounding his legacy persists, particularly as the crew, including the anxious Tracker, approaches the Barrowland, a land steeped in superstition.

After a lengthy week, they finally reach the Barrowland, finding it transformed into a desolate swamp. The once-bustling area now appears abandoned, with dilapidated buildings showing signs of neglect. Upon entering, they encounter a guard, who identifies himself as Candle, a trader from Roses. Despite being informed that the northern road had reopened, locals suggest that opportunities have dwindled due to the tribes overhunting fur-bearing animals.



After obtaining lodging at the Blue Willy tavern—where the somber atmosphere mirrors the relentless drizzle—the crew attempts to sell their goods but finds little interest. Reassured by fellow traders that the tribes will come to them, they await their arrival. Candle, eager to manage his business, visits the guard headquarters, where he encounters a familiar face among the soldiers. The guards' unfriendly demeanor reflects the grim state of their surroundings, revealing that conditions have worsened since his last visit during military service.

When Candle returns to Blue Willy, he and his comrades, Goblin and One-Eye, begin to discuss the intriguing yet unsettling history of the Bomanz house nearby. Undergoing restoration for years by a man named Corbie—who has since suffered a debilitating stroke—the house raises suspicions. Goblin speculates that something nefarious may have occurred, suggesting that Corbie's condition might be linked to supernatural forces.

As night falls, a powerful storm engulfs the area, further heightening the mood of desolation. Midnight brings an opportunity for the crew to investigate the Bomanz house under the cover of darkness. They quietly navigate the rainy streets, cautioning each other, especially regarding potential haunting or traps in the foreboding structure.

This chapter is characterized by a palpable sense of history, trepidation, and the companions' determination to uncover the mysteries shrouding the



Barrowland. It hints at deeper complexities surrounding the Dominator's legacy and the intertwined fates of those who dwell within this ominous land.

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Chapter 29 Summary: THE BARROWLAND, BACK WHEN

In Chapter Twenty-Nine, entitled "The Barrowland, Back When," Case finds himself in a precarious position after being summoned by Colonel Sweet. The tension builds as the Colonel interrogates Case about his interactions with an enigmatic figure named Corbie. The Colonel, a stern authority figure, presses Case for details, particularly focusing on a mysterious oilskin packet that Corbie had entrusted to him. Despite Case's nervousness, he provides the Colonel with information, deliberately omitting mention of the message contained in the oilskin, highlighting his loyalty to Corbie.

As the conversation unfolds, Sweet reveals that the contents of the oilskin—a long letter in an unreadable language—have drawn his suspicious interest. He speaks of potential connections to the Jewel Cities, reinforcing the stakes of the situation. Sweet's mounting curiosity leads to a pressing question: Why did Case try to conceal the packet? In this moment of crisis, Case realizes that he may not be able to uphold his loyalty as strongly as he wished.

After some reluctance, Case reveals that Corbie had expressed concern for his own safety and had asked him to deliver a letter to a smith named Sand, in the town of Oar. He also recalls Corbie's ominous warning about something in the Great Barrow that "isn't asleep anymore," a mysterious



reference that stirs both anxiety and unease in Sweet.

The chapter reaches a climax when Sweet, now visibly affected, orders Major Krief to apprehend Sand Smith, further entrenching Case in his feelings of guilt. Despite his internal conflict, Case remains devoted to caring for the injured Corbie, trying to reconcile his actions with his emerging suspicions about Corbie’s true identity and motives.

The chapter expertly sets up a tense narrative arc, where loyalty, betrayal, and the weight of secrets intertwine, leaving readers anticipating the repercussions of Case's decisions in a world where trust is scarce and danger lurks at every turn.

Key Points	Details
Chapter Title	The Barrowland, Back When
Main Characters	Case, Colonel Sweet, Corbie, Major Krief, Sand Smith
Situation	Case is interrogated by Colonel Sweet regarding Corbie and an oilskin packet.
Colonel's Inquiry	Sweet questions Case about the oilskin and its contents—a long letter in unreadable language.
Case's Dilemma	Case omits key details about the letter in order to protect Corbie.
Threats Revealed	Case recalls Corbie's warning about a disturbance in the Great Barrow.

Key Points	Details
Climax	Sweet orders Major Klief to apprehend Sand Smith, causing Case feelings of guilt.
Themes	Loyalty, betrayal, weight of secrets, danger, and mistrust.
Reader's Anticipation	The repercussions of Case's decisions and Corbie's true motives.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: The Importance of Loyalty in Adversity

Critical Interpretation: In Chapter Twenty-Nine, Case's struggle to balance loyalty with the demands of a powerful authority figure illuminates a profound lesson about the value of being steadfast, especially in challenging times. As you navigate your own path through life's uncertainties, remember that loyalty can be both a strength and a burden; it shapes relationships and influences choices. Just like Case, who grapples with his loyalties to Corbie against the harsh scrutiny of Colonel Sweet, you too may face moments where your commitment to others is tested. Embrace the importance of loyalty, but also be mindful of the potential consequences it may carry. This chapter inspires you to uphold trust and integrity while recognizing that sometimes, your allegiance may lead you toward difficult decisions, ultimately shaping who you are and the legacy you wish to leave behind.



Chapter 30 Summary: A BARROWLAND NIGHT

Chapter Thirty: A Barrowland Night

In this chapter, we follow the characters Goblin, One-Eye, and the narrator as they investigate a mysterious house, likely linked to the historical figure Bomanz whose letters have piqued the narrator's interest. One-Eye quickly assesses the location, confirming there are neither traps nor ghosts, but rather residual sorcery tinged with a more recent history. The trio heads upstairs to delve deeper.

The narrator, armed with notes from the Bomanz letters, enters the small room first, ensuring the window is secure before lighting a lamp. With Goblin and One-Eye by the door, he begins examining the eclectic collection of books. However, no papers are found, raising suspicions about the possibility of a prior search. One-Eye provides assurance that it doesn't appear ransacked but queries about the narrator's efforts to uncover hidden items, hinting at a methodical search.

The plot thickens when a spear in the corner reveals a hidden compartment. Inside, the narrator finds an ancient map—an artifact that conveys the weight of history and the power it possesses, sending chills down his spine. Though Goblin and One-Eye remain excited by their discovery, the narrator



recognizes the significance of the document, noting it represents Bomanz's years-long quest.

As they study the chart, One-Eye deduces that Bomanz likely tried to enter a perilous location and became trapped. This revelation is unsettling for the narrator, who recalls Bomanz's warnings about the risks involved. The realization strikes the group that they must find a way to retrieve Bomanz's soul, which is believed to be intertwined with the message he left behind.

Time is of the essence; Goblin and One-Eye dutifully search the room for additional clues. However, anxiety builds for the narrator as the minutes tick by without further discoveries. Eventually, they unearth an old scrap of paper that contains a cipher key—information that could be crucial for decoding more of Bomanz's writings.

The night concludes with the trio safely returning to their lodgings, the weight of their findings lingering in the air. Goblin's question about their next steps reveals the tension of uncertainty that hangs over the group. Although the narrator suggests they rest and contemplate their next moves, the complexity of the situation leaves him restless. The chapter emphasizes the intertwining of history, risk, and the pursuit of knowledge, setting the stage for the challenges to come as they navigate the perilous terrain of their discoveries.

Element	Summary
Chapter Title	A Barrowland Night
Main Characters	Goblin, One-Eye, Narrator
Setting	Mysterious house linked to Bomanz
Initial Action	The trio investigates the house, confirming it's not ransacked but filled with residual sorcery.
Discovery	A hidden compartment is found in a spear that contains an ancient map linked to Bomanz's quest.
Significance of the Map	Represents Bomanz's historical quest and hints that he may have become trapped in a perilous location.
Key Revelation	They determine they need to retrieve Bomanz's soul, connected to the message left behind.
Additional Clue Found	An old scrap of paper containing a cipher key crucial for decoding Bomanz's writings.
Conclusion	The characters return to their lodgings amid uncertainty about their next steps, with the narrator feeling restless.
Themes	Interweaving of history, risk, and the pursuit of knowledge.



Chapter 31 Summary: NIGHT IN THE BARROWLAND

Chapter Thirty-One Summary: Night in the Barrowland

As a storm rages outside, Croaker lies awake, troubled by restless thoughts and the repercussions of their recent dealings. He feels the weight of unease exacerbated by a ghostly whisper calling out to him, hinting at a foe's determination to find him and suggesting a looming danger to the White Rose, a mysterious figure in their lives.

While trying to dismiss the encounter, Croaker observes Toadkiller Dog, the loyal companion who, for the first time, bears witness to Croaker's haunting visions. Accepting the strange situation, Croaker finally succumbs to sleep.

The next day begins with breakfast, where Goblin and One-Eye join Croaker in expressing their concerns about their safety. To illustrate the tense atmosphere, soldiers arrive to question the innkeeper about any suspicious activity. Croaker's inquiry into a recent break-in reveals he has drawn unwanted attention, making him anxious about their vulnerability.

Goblin and One-Eye propose strategies for capturing a man named Corbie, who seems to be crucial to their plans, but they all acknowledge the risks involved. Tracker suggests the forest as an escape route, where they could



hide, but Croaker worries about the journey ahead as tensions heighten.

Croaker takes matters into his own hands and heads to the imperial compound to gather information. Instead, he inadvertently attracts suspicion from a guard named Case. Unbeknownst to him, this encounter sets off a chain of events that will lead to their arrest.

Shortly after returning to their inn, armed soldiers burst in and apprehend the group. Despite their protests of innocence, it becomes clear that their earlier actions have resulted in serious consequences. Colonel Sweet, the new commander of the Eternal Guard, visits them, revealing that their inquiries have raised alarms about their intentions, heightening the paranoia surrounding a buried threat connected to the Great Barrow.

Facing uncertainty and the scrutiny of the Guard, Croaker realizes the gravity of their situation. As they navigate the challenges ahead, it becomes evident that their predicament may require more than just clever tactics to escape unscathed. The chapter concludes with a sense of foreboding as they prepare to face the consequences of their actions while under the watchful gaze of their captors.

Key Points	Details
Stormy Night	Croaker is troubled by his thoughts and ominous feelings during a storm, hearing ghostly whispers warning him of danger.

Key Points	Details
Toadkiller Dog's Witness	For the first time, Toadkiller Dog observes Croaker's haunting visions, marking a significant moment in their relationship.
Breakfast Discussions	Goblin and One-Eye express concerns over their safety as soldiers question the innkeeper about suspicious activity.
Attention from Authorities	After Croaker inquires about a recent break-in, he realizes they have attracted unwanted attention, increasing their vulnerability.
Plans Against Corbie	Goblin and One-Eye discuss strategies to capture a crucial figure named Corbie but recognize the inherent risks involved.
Escape Route Suggestion	Tracker suggests the forest as an escape route, but Croaker feels apprehensive about the journey ahead.
Gathering Information	Croaker heads to the imperial compound for intel but raises suspicion from a guard named Case.
Arrest	Upon returning to the inn, armed soldiers arrest Croaker and his group, revealing the consequences of their actions.
Colonel Sweet's Visit	The new commander informs them that their inquiries have alarmed the authorities regarding a buried threat linked to the Great Barrow.
Foreboding Conclusion	The chapter ends with an air of dread as Croaker and his companions prepare to face the repercussions of their choices under the watchful gaze of the Eternal Guard.



Chapter 32: IMPRISONED IN THE BARROWLAND

Chapter Thirty-Two: Imprisoned in the Barrowland

The situation is dire for the four companions: Croaker, Goblin, One-Eye, and Tracker. Outnumbered and facing a half platoon of Guard soldiers, they are far from the anonymity they hoped to maintain. When the soldiers confront them, paranoia drives their aggressive tactics, and Tracker's mental state begins to deteriorate under pressure. After a tense standoff, Tracker goes berserk, incapacitating several soldiers with a mix of raw power and confusion, a reaction rooted in his emotional turmoil regarding his missing dog, Toadkiller Dog.

As the soldiers rally, Croaker intervenes to keep Tracker calm, realizing the dangerous impression they are making. Their efforts lead them further into the belly of the Guard's headquarters, descending into a dank cellar designed, perhaps, to intimidate. Here, the group is met with Colonel Sweet, a sharp and shrewd officer who doubts their cover story as simple traders. He's particularly interested in their inquiries about a man named Corbie, who is suspected to have ties to the Rebels or Resurrectionists.

Despite the threatening atmosphere and the torturous equipment surrounding them, Croaker and his companions maintain a façade of fearlessness. Sweet

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attempts to intimidate them further by strapping One-Eye to a rack.

However, the situation takes a bizarre turn when One-Eye begins conjuring spiders from his body, taking the soldiers by shock. This display unnerves Colonel Sweet and his men, who struggle to maintain their composure as the fantastical spiders—illusions created by One-Eye—swarm.

The tension escalates until Sweet recognizes he's losing control; the impending threat of One-Eye's illusions begins causing chaos among his men. Croaker seizes the moment and negotiates their release from the improvised torture chamber, demanding silence and sealing the door to prevent any noise from escaping. One-Eye revels in his newfound confidence while Goblin's incessant enthusiasm further escalates their challenges.

After resolving to leave, One-Eye unexpectedly collapses the very building they were detained in, obliterating the evidence that might reveal their identities. Although Croaker admires the boldness, he is exasperated by One-Eye's impulsiveness, knowing that they now have to prioritize finding Corbie, the key to their predicament. As they make their exit into a new building, they encounter Case, a figure from their past who seems oblivious to the enormity of the chaos that has just transpired, setting the stage for what lies ahead in their tumultuous journey.

The chapter encapsulates the interplay of power, fear, and the supernatural,



illustrating the precarious balance Croaker and his comrades must maintain as they navigate a world filled with danger and intrigue.

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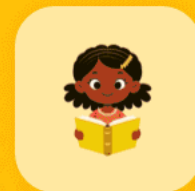
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Chapter 33 Summary: MISSING MAN

Chapter Thirty-Three: Missing Man

In the ruins of the compound, chaos reigns after the headquarters has been engulfed by flames. The protagonist, alongside his companions One-Eye and Tracker, confronts a soldier named Case, urging him to show them Corbie, the elusive figure previously thought dead. Their interaction reveals a sense of urgency and tension, as they navigate the debris of the once-formidable building, with Toadkiller Dog sniffing around.

When Case leads them to a dimly lit room, they are stunned to find Corbie alive, despite being presumed dead for six years—a significant player in their past and the one who set the character Darling on her troubling path. The existence of Corbie raises numerous questions regarding his hidden motives and the implications of his supposed death, especially since Darling seemed unaware of his survival.

Case reports that Corbie has been incapacitated for months, raising concerns about the Colonel's actions regarding Corbie's communications, which might hold vital information. As the conversation unfolds, it's clear that both Raven and the Colonel were enmeshed in a web of secrecy. One-Eye suggests finding the Raven is now paramount, while Croaker, the



protagonist, grapples with the logistics of retrieving essential documents that are now precariously at risk in the burning building.

Determined to get the information they desperately need, Croaker devises a plan to enlist Case's help through magic, compelling him to assist without question. The dynamic hints at their fearsome reputation and the escalation of conflict as the stakes grow higher. Case ultimately complies, showing both reluctance and a flickering sense of loyalty.

With the spell in place, Croaker and his team prepare to move quickly before their location becomes compromised. They execute a cleverly orchestrated distraction, using the chaos of the rescue operation in the compound to their advantage.

After successfully procuring the needed documents, the group sets off into the wilderness, burdened by the tension of carrying both their past and a potentially crucial ally in Raven. The urgency grows as they recognize that Raven's fate intertwines with Darling's emotional world, and Croaker realizes that they need him alive, not just for their immediate aims, but for the sake of their friend.

As the chapter concludes, their journey takes them deeper into the woods, where they make camp, out of sight from the lingering threats. In the midst of rain and uncertainty, Croaker begins to sift through the recovered



documents, knowing that within lies crucial information that could change the course of their struggle. The burden of their shared history hangs heavy as they prepare for whatever revelations await.

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Chapter 34 Summary: BOMANZ'S STORY

In Chapter Thirty-Four, titled "Bomanz's Story," we delve into a tense confrontation between Bomanz and the enigmatic Lady who reveals herself as Ardath—Bomanz's twin sister whom he believes he murdered. The interaction between them is fraught with tension, as Ardath's acknowledgment of her past invokes fear and resignation. Bomanz, however, attempts to subdue the situation, expressing his desire to learn from her and hinting at the significance of her knowledge for the impending chaos.

Outside, in a chaotic scene filled with the sounds of fighting and conflict, Bomanz is alerted through a series of voices, including one from Tokar, who is planning an assault as the town's defenses crumble. A sense of urgency compels Bomanz to leave Ardath, even as he grapples with the haunting memories of his actions and the ghost of regret left by his sister's fate. His past decisions swirl chaotically in his mind, symbolized by the ghostly pursuer, Besand, who represents his deepest fears and failures.

Bomanz races through the turmoil, aware of his surroundings in a transformed state that allows him to move with remarkable speed. He makes his way back home to confront his son Stancil and the injured Glory, yet their reunion is marred by confrontation. Stancil, betraying both dread and loyalty, takes a dark turn by attempting to free a powerful entity, threatening the safety of all.



In a swift and brutal moment, in a desperate attempt to maintain control, Bomanz enacts a violent power, incapacitating Glory and coldly confronting Stancil, whose grief and anger only exacerbate the chaos surrounding them. As the atmosphere thickens with tension and conflict, Bomanz is driven by a singular focus: to stop Tokar from unleashing the horrors awaiting within the Barrowland.

The disturbances escalate, drawing the attention of fierce combatants outside while Bomanz struggles with the responsibility of preserving his loved ones amidst a deadly supernatural clash. He witnesses the desperation unfold, his home invaded by intruders and the street outside flooded with violence. In a moment of frantic urgency, he casts spells to thwart attacks, yet ultimately feels the crushing weight of failure as he realizes Tokar has reached the edge of the Barrowland.

As the earth quakes beneath him, signaling impending doom, the barriers break, and the figures of ancient horrors—the Ten Who Were Taken—emerge from the Barrowland. Bomanz, recognizing the gravity of the situation, steps forward into the chaos, determined to confront all that encroaches upon his world. The chapter closes as he enters a catastrophic scenario, wielding his greatest magical prowess in a desperate bid to save what remains, echoing a profound and tragic confrontation with the past he cannot escape.



Chapter 35 Summary: THE BARROWLAND, FROM BAD TO WORSE

In Chapter Thirty-Five, titled "The Barrowland, From Bad to Worse," the protagonist reflects on a letter from Raven that recounts a legend involving a character named Bomanz. The letter's dramatic portrayal sparks the narrator's curiosity, leading him to ponder the fate of Bomanz's wife and son—figures often overlooked in popular legends. This contemplation triggers memories of past battles, particularly the climactic conflict between the Lady and the Dominator during the turmoil in Juniper.

As the narrator draws connections between historical events, he considers the mysterious lineage of the Lady, noting the existence of at least three sisters, one of whom is identified as Soulcatcher—former mentor and strategist against the Lady. This realization hints at potential revelations locked within genealogical records they once studied, indicating a deeper conflict still hidden in the narratives they've come to know.

Amidst this introspection, the narrator tends to Case, a frightened accomplice who is anxious about his fate. After reassuring him that they won't harm him, the conversation reveals that Case is aware of Raven's legendary status as the father of the White Rose, affirming Raven's importance in a larger context of their ongoing struggles against the Lady.



As night envelops them, Goblin arrives with troubling news: they are unable to rescue Raven, who is trapped in a precarious situation and requires assistance beyond their abilities. Goblin expresses that even One-Eye is affected by what he encountered while attempting to reach Raven, highlighting the gravity of their predicament. The weight of the task ahead looms large, as the narrator realizes that without Raven's expertise, they face insurmountable challenges.

With little choice but to regroup and strategize, the narrator grapples with anxiety over their dwindling options, vexed by recurring nightmares of the Barrowland's ominous transformation. The chapter closes on a note of uncertainty, underscoring the urgency of their plight as they await One-Eye's recovery and the next steps in their dire mission.

Element	Description
Chapter Title	The Barrowland, From Bad to Worse
Protagonist's Reflection	Contemplates a letter from Raven about Bomanz, triggering thoughts about Bomanz’s wife and son.
Key Memory	Remembers past battles, notably the Lady vs. the Dominator during Juniper turmoil.
Mysterious Lineage	Considers the Lady’s lineage, specifically her three sisters, including Soulcatcher.
Genealogical Records	Hints at undiscovered conflicts within historical narratives.

Element	Description
Case's Situation	Tends to Case, who fears for his fate, acknowledges Raven's legendary status.
Troubling News	Goblin informs of Raven's precarious situation, requiring help beyond their abilities.
Impact on One-Eye	One-Eye affected by the challenges faced while trying to assist Raven.
Sense of Urgency	Narrator feels anxiety over few options and nightmares of Barrowland's transformation.
Chapter Closing	Ends with uncertainty about their mission while they await One-Eye's recovery.



Chapter 36: HARD TIMES

Chapter Thirty-Six: Hard Times - Summary

In a tense and foreboding atmosphere, One-Eye reveals to Croaker that a character named Raven is trapped in a realm of dangerous magic, following a botched mission into the center of Bomanz's territory. Raven, an amateur in sorcery, miscalculated the dangers surrounding him and fell prey to a malevolent entity while trying to escape, leaving him ensnared in a web of ancient spells. One-Eye expresses concern over the possibility of a greater evil escaping and trying to access the Great Barrow, a critical location tied to dark forces.

Croaker, troubled by the implications of Raven's predicament, contemplates the intertwined fates of Raven and Darling (Raven's companion) and speculates on the potential for hidden motivations behind Raven's actions. They ponder the need to keep this knowledge from Darling to avoid distracting her from her mission.

The conversation shifts to the practical concerns of Raven's body, which poses a significant problem. The group is uncertain about the risks of retrieving his remains, as this might sever the connection between Raven's spirit and flesh. Croaker grapples with morally complex thoughts regarding



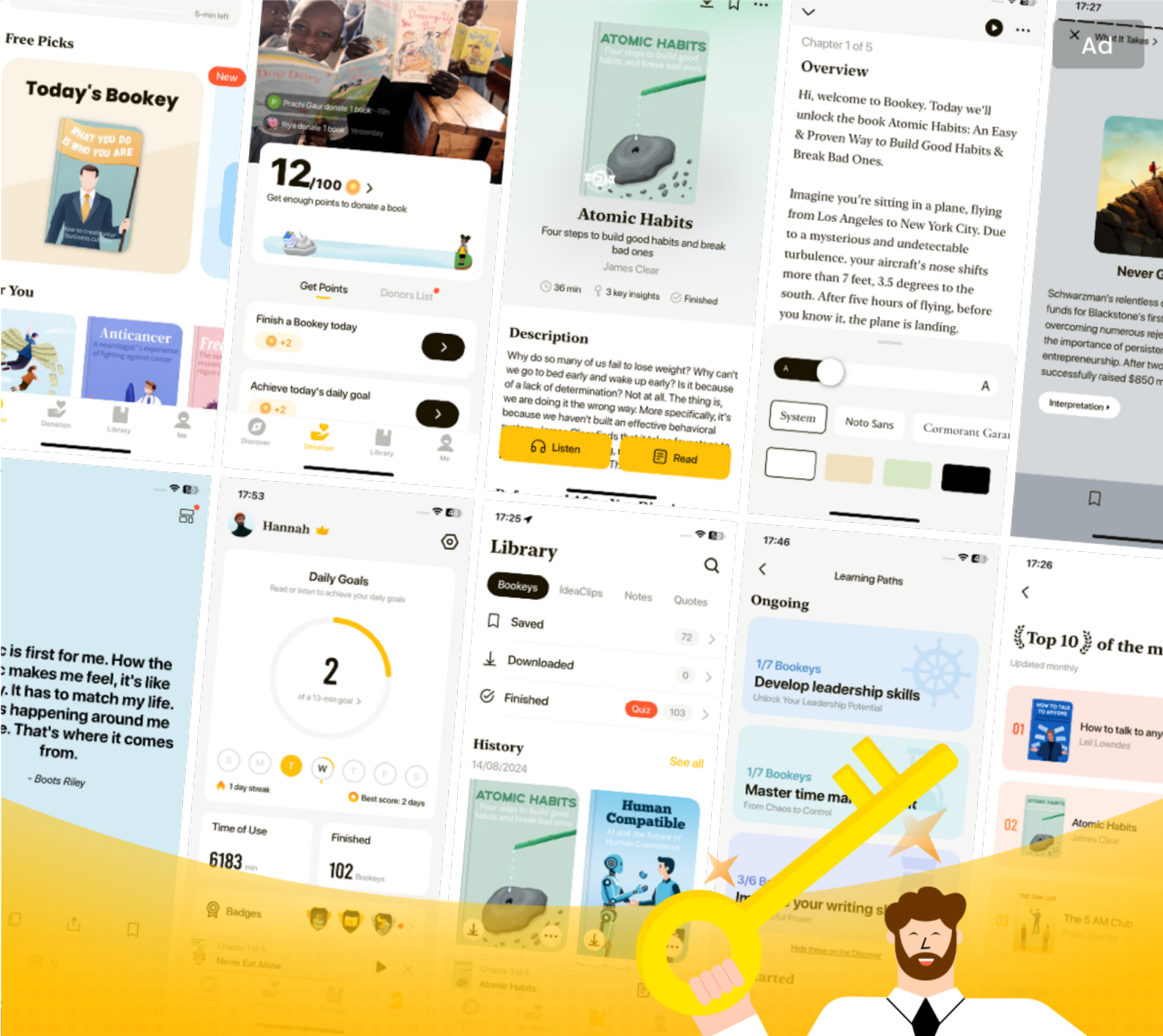
betraying Raven to the Lady, which could serve multiple purposes but may also jeopardize Raven's safety.

As tensions rise, Tracker warns of impending danger, forcing Croaker to rouse One-Eye and Goblin, who are still in trance-like states due to their

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Chapter 37 Summary: THE FOREST AND BEYOND

Chapter Thirty-Seven: The Forest and Beyond - Summary

Two days passed without meals, sustained only by Tracker's hunting skills, as our group navigated the densely wooded terrain of the Old Forest. Tracker knew these woods well and guided us southward, evading patrols. By day three, he felt safe enough to light a small fire, though finding kindling was arduous. Each day became a balance of hardship and hope as we made steady progress.

Amid our struggles, tensions rose concerning Raven, a comrade burdened by his past. One-Eye and Goblin debated whether dragging him along was beneficial, yet no alternative emerged. Goblin confided in me that he had ventured deeper into the forest than One-Eye, only to discover unsettling events—the Dominator was not dormant as we had hoped. He recounted horrific visions of the Dominator laughing at him and mentioned that the old wizard Bomanz was also trapped within the woods, alive but incapacitated.

We rested briefly before leaving the forest, knowing that beyond lay the perilous tamed lands where predators would be on the hunt. I sensed the encroaching danger; the Taken, powerful beings serving the Dominator, were hunting us. My amulet warned of their presence, and Toadkiller Dog's



instincts seemed to enhance our awareness of the impending threat.

The air thickened with tension as the Taken closed in. I felt the weight of responsibility for my companions and the impossibility of ordering them to sacrifice themselves. Just then, a familiar presence permeated the air, a connection that ignited my resolve. In a rash but desperate bid to protect my friends, I stripped myself of my amulets and entrusted them to Goblin and One-Eye. I armed myself with a bow and dashed into the darkness, fueled by the hope that I could distract our pursuers.

As I sprinted down a road illuminated by a sliver of moonlight, I considered stealing a horse to increase my escape chances. My surroundings blurred into one desperate urge to survive. But as my legs began to falter, I was nearly caught. Just when I thought I'd evaded capture, the shadows overtook me, plunging me into unconsciousness.

When I awoke, the cold of the north seeped into my bones, but a sweet aroma of food brought my senses back to life. I discovered myself in a stone cell, dry and sheltered. Just as I began to enjoy a meager meal, the door burst open, revealing an enormous figure—a giant. Four imperials followed closely, marking my return to captivity.

To my surprise, Whisper, our enigmatic adversary, soon entered, demanding to know where our precious documents were. Despite my defiance, my heart

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sank as she revealed that Raven had also been apprehended and unceremoniously dumped onto a cot nearby. Her cold demeanor, reminiscent of her time leading the Rebels, served as a chilling reminder of our precarious position.

As she informed me of the hounds that would soon track down my companions, despair washed over me. With that, she left, leaving me alone to ponder my fate and the fate of my friends. I checked on Raven, who seemed unchanged, and I resolved to meditate on my connection with the Lady, hoping for guidance in this dire moment. Something deep within urged me to keep fighting against despair, for the stakes had never been higher.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: The importance of hope in dire circumstances

Critical Interpretation: In the depths of despair, when all seems lost and the weight of responsibility presses heavily on your shoulders, the spark of hope can become your greatest ally. Just like in the narrative where the character chooses to rely on his connection with the Lady despite overwhelming odds, you too can draw strength from your inner courage and beliefs. This chapter illustrates that even in the most perilous situations, holding onto hope can guide you through darkness and uncertainty. It inspires you to take decisive action, to choose courage over fear, and to believe in the possibility of resilience and recovery. Let this reminder fuel your own journey through life's challenges; when faced with adversity, cling to hope as it can illuminate your path and propel you forward.



Chapter 38 Summary: THE FORTRESS AT DEAL

Chapter Thirty-Eight Summary: The Fortress at Deal

The chapter begins with Croaker in a precarious situation, summoned by Whisper, a powerful sorceress who embodies both beauty and danger. Her cold demeanor reveals that something grave has occurred, and she confronts him about a creature responsible for a massacre, hinting at a dark force they both fear. Croaker, in his typical defiance, tries to resist but is overpowered by the imposing Bruno, and he feels the strain of aging as he attempts to thwart his captors.

As Croaker is forcibly brought to Whisper's makeshift magic chamber, he recalls the violent aftermath of a battle involving his comrades, One-Eye and Goblin. The tension mounts as Whisper's severe gaze alludes to sacrifices made by her men, which emphasizes the stakes of their current predicament. Despite his injuries, Croaker feels a sense of dread and guilt about a potential link to monstrous powers tied to his past, especially as it relates to Raven, a reckless and irresponsible ally who has inadvertently stirred dark forces.

Suddenly, the scene changes. Whisper presents Croaker with the horrifying aftermath of the battle—bodies torn apart, evoking memories of earlier



terrifying encounters with the forvalaka. This makes Croaker question if an even greater threat looms, sparked by their previous actions.

The atmosphere shifts dramatically when the Limper, a ghastly figure and one of the Taken (servants of great evil), unexpectedly visits Croaker in his cell, delivering ominous threats about the fate that awaits him. However, the situation escalates when the Lady, an enigmatic and powerful figure, intervenes. Her presence terrifies the Limper while instilling a sense of hope in Croaker. She commands him to obey her edicts strictly, emphasizing the ironclad rules that govern their shared existence.

After the confrontation between the Lady and the Limper, they fade from the cell, leaving Croaker to contemplate the peril he remains in. He overhears rumors from the guards that the situation outside is deteriorating, hinting at greater chaos beyond the fort's walls.

Later, Croaker is taken out of his cell alongside Raven. They are brought before the Lady, who prepares them for a significant journey, suggesting an unexpected alliance may be in play. As they ascend via the Lady's enchanted carpet to the Tower, Croaker learns she has visited the Barrowland, the site of ominous events related to their past. The chapter concludes with Croaker falling asleep mid-flight, bringing him into a new, unfamiliar prison—the Tower at Charm—suggesting further trials lie ahead. The transition toward something darker foreshadows the ongoing struggle against malevolent



forces.

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Chapter 39 Summary: A GUEST AT CHARM

Chapter Thirty-Nine: A Guest at Charm

The chapter begins with the protagonist, Croaker, being summoned by a colonel of the Lady's household forces. Despite the colonel's effort to appear polite, Croaker reflects on his uncertain status among the Lady's troops, who have never quite understood him. Accompanied by the colonel and a dozen men, he is taken to a restricted area known as the inner Tower, a place associated with danger and secrecy.

Upon entering, Croaker finds the Lady framed by what seems to be a window, though it is part of the Tower. She directs his attention to a burning city, where their adversary, the Taken, is engaged in a fierce battle against the windwhales, monstrous creatures wreaking havoc on the city. Despite the chaos, the Lady reveals her intention to suspend her operations, leading Croaker to mistakenly believe they have achieved victory. This provocation irks the Lady, who clarifies that their struggle is far from over, and she plans to redirect her campaign instead.

The conversation shifts to the documents Croaker had previously taken from Soulcatcher and then Raven, which he had believed to hold critical secrets necessary for their victory. The Lady informs him that he has been



misled—those documents no longer contain her true name, but rather the name of her husband, the Dominator. This revelation sends Croaker into a spiral of realization and anxiety as he grapples with the consequences of being manipulated by powerful figures.

The Lady emphasizes the urgency of their situation: the looming threat of the Dominator breaking free could spell disaster for all. She instructs Croaker to reflect on their conversation before dismissing him back to his quarters. Overwhelmed by the implications of their discussion, Croaker spends his time contemplating the precarious balance of power among them and the fate of their alliances.

After a period of reflection that seemed to blur into a long sleep, Croaker is roused by the arrival of a physician who checks on his condition. The physician expresses surprise at Croaker's relatively quick recovery from the deep mental probe by the Lady. He informs Croaker of his friend Raven's uncertain whereabouts, adding to Croaker's worry.

The colonel returns and offers Croaker a chance to go to the roof for fresh air, a significant development indicating his status may not be as restricted as he initially assumed. Croaker cautiously accepts this gesture of freedom, recognizing that while escape may seem possible, the reality is that he is still very much a part of the Lady's plans.



On the rooftop, Croaker reflects on the battlefield below, recalling the chaos of the recent conflict and the lives lost. The Lady joins him, revealing her troubling visions of multiple futures—one where her deaf child triumphs at a great cost, another where the Dominator prevails, and a third where he is permanently destroyed. She expresses her deep fear of death—a sentiment Croaker empathizes with, as they both wrestle with the inevitability of mortality.

The Lady confesses her desire to escape death, shockingly revealing that she sees death as a consuming force, something she has fought against her entire existence. Croaker responds thoughtfully, acknowledging the complexity of life and death, reflecting on the nature of power, destiny, and the gods, ultimately revealing the struggles they face not just against their enemies, but against the fundamental truths of existence.

As the chapter concludes, the Lady offers Croaker a choice: to leave the Tower and take his chances beyond its walls or to stay and continue combating the predicaments they face together. Croaker, overwhelmed by the magnitude of their situation and the journey ahead, is left in a state of confusion as he contemplates the implications of her offer and the fate of their world, realizing that the war they fight is not just against their enemies but against the very fabric of reality itself.



Chapter 40: MAKING UP MY MIND

In Chapter Forty, titled "Making Up My Mind," the protagonist is grappling with the uncertainties of his situation and the implications of his interactions with Lady, a significant and mysterious figure. The chapter opens with the protagonist reflecting on how the Lady has never overtly pressured him, instead allowing him to come to his own conclusions. After a couple of days, he manages to get permission from the Colonel to see her, suspecting that the Colonel is acting under instructions.

Upon entering the Lady's chamber, he finds her gazing out at the bleak, flood-ridden landscape of the Great Tragic River. The River, always in flood, parallels the unstable and tumultuous events surrounding them. As they converse, the Lady reveals alarming information about the flooding river's impact on the Barrowland, which threatens to unearth the Great Barrow and the dark entity contained within it—her husband. This highlights the stakes at play: if the river's encroachment is not stopped, it could lead to the rise of a malevolent force.

The protagonist expresses his intent to leave the Tower to pursue important tasks, realizing the urgency of the situation. The Lady indicates that she understands this necessity and offers her assistance. She proposes to accompany him on his journey, despite the inherent dangers of her presence being recognized by those who might wish her harm. Initially taken aback,



the protagonist recognizes the wisdom in her plan; she needs to enter the null, a space where magic is nullified, without her spells being compromised.

They discuss the nature of spells and how some can endure while others

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Chapter 41 Summary: A TOWN CALLED HORSE

In Chapter Forty-One, the narrative takes place in Horse, a small town crucial for trade between two wildernesses, the Windy Country and the Plain of Fear. Recently, Horse has served as the logistical base for Whisper's military operations, with remnants of a larger army stationed there in anticipation of conflict. Upon arrival, the protagonist and the Lady witness a bustling scene, dominated by a variety of newly engineered flying carpets—massive, heavily armed, and designed to adapt to enemy tactics.

As the Lady explains, a large Rebel force is advancing toward Horse, significantly bolstered by reinforcements from abandoned cities. She expresses her intent to confront this threat, believing that even without her usual strength, she can effectively counter the rebels. The protagonist, surprised by the sizable Rebel force, prepares to navigate the newly constructed flying carpet, which features advanced weaponry and innovative designs tailored for battle.

The Lady demonstrates a tactical use of magic, requiring the protagonist to learn quickly how to maneuver the carpet. As they soar above the battlefield, they observe the extensive Rebel army, including formidable windwhales and a phalanx of soldiers. Whisper, another powerful figure aligned with the Lady, is seen organizing the attack strategy from a central position.



Amidst the chaos, the protagonist and the Lady engage in an aerial assault, marking enemy positions with smoke bombs while dropping incendiary pots that ignite and cause destruction below. As the chaos unfolds, they dodge enemy fire and navigate the aerial battlefield, showcasing their craft's capabilities under pressure. Despite a few successes, many enemies evade destruction, leading to a retreat as the Lady determines that the cost of continuing the fight is too high.

Ultimately, the assault serves as a warning to the Rebels, demonstrating the Lady's resolve and power without risking her forces unduly. With the conflict settled for the moment, the Lady humorously encourages the protagonist to celebrate their survival. Meanwhile, the protagonist grapples with the adrenaline of battle and the new realities of war unfolding around them, ending the chapter with a mix of relief and anxiety about what lies ahead.

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Chapter 42 Summary: HOMECOMING

In Chapter Forty-Two, titled "Homecoming," Croaker and the Lady journey into the perilous Plain of Fear. Riding on unremarkable horses, they traverse the old trade trail, a route that is generally respected by the Plain's inhabitants. The Lady is now dressed in humble clothing, far from her previous elegance, as they approach the Great Barrow, which is set to open in approximately three months. They are acutely aware of the threats posed by the enigmatic menhirs, towering stones that watch over and protect the Plain.

As Croaker introduces the Lady to the myriad dangers of the Plain, they narrowly escape a sudden change storm, instilling a sense of awe in her—a feeling only heightened when they encounter their first coral reefs, signifying deeper travel into the Plain's strangeness. Croaker tries to maintain a façade of normalcy in their relationship, while the Lady humorously adopts the name Ardath for their travels.

After days of navigating the challenging landscape, they finally spot a menhir, notable for its silent presence, which signifies a shift back to familiar territory. Upon nearing the Hole, they encounter friendly faces: Elmo and Silent, two comrades from Croaker's past, who greet him warmly, although the oddity of his travel companion leaves them curious.



Reunited, they enter the Hole, where they are greeted by Darling and the Lieutenant. Croaker introduces Ardath, who will assist in translating old languages crucial to their mission. Tension builds as he shares troubling news with Darling: Raven, a pivotal figure from their past who had been thought dead, is alive, but the revelation strains their emotional dynamics, particularly Darling's unexpected reaction of disbelief. She processes the pain of the news with a stoicism that surprises Croaker, suggesting a deeper history with Raven.

Croaker then elaborates on the dangers that loom, revealing that the Dominator, an ancient and malevolent force, is stirring once again. Despite the urgency of their situation, Darling retains a pragmatic outlook, dismissing the notion of allowing emotions to dictate their course of action. The chapter culminates in a raw exploration of Darling's feelings for Raven and her struggle with loss and betrayal, adding layers to the emotional landscape of the story.

In summary, this chapter skillfully intertwines character dynamics, the palpable threat of the Dominator, and the journey into the Plain, shaping a narrative rich with suspense and emotional complexity as Croaker navigates these familiar yet ominous terrains alongside Ardath and his returning comrades.



Chapter 43 Summary: PICNIC

Chapter Forty-Three Summary: PICNIC

In a whirlwind of activity, time accelerated for Croaker and Ardath as they dedicated themselves to translating extensive documents, with Croaker often writing until his hands ached, while Ardath read aloud. Their collaboration proved effective as Croaker found no errors in their work. However, a moment of concern arose when he detected a subtle shift in Ardath's breathing upon reading a name from a long list of attendees at a grand soiree, hinting at a deeper connection or emotion linked to that name.

After four days of intense labor, Ardath suggested they take a break. This allowed Croaker to contemplate the dynamics of their relationship—Ardath, a powerful figure like a Lady, offering to fetch tea felt foreign and strangely intimate. As they prepared for this outing, Croaker encountered a tense situation: Otto, a less refined character, cornered Ardath in the tunnel with unwanted advances. As Croaker hesitated to intervene, Elmo recognized the potential trouble and urged action. In a flash, Croaker decided to step in, leading to a confrontation where Otto was swiftly subdued.

Once Ardath returned, still unperturbed by the earlier incident, she proposed a walk outside to discuss matters privately. Croaker, feeling a need to escape



the claustrophobia of their underground environment, happily obliged. They gathered provisions for a picnic, with subtle hints from their companions suggesting an interest in their outing.

When they stepped into the open air, the sun was vibrant, and the desert around them seemed more than just a setting—it was a character of its own, whispering of secrets and ancient history. As they walked, Ardath shared her feelings of confinement and helplessness within the null—a mysterious effect that dulled their senses underground. Their conversation turned to Old Father Tree, an ancient entity tied to the land, which Ardath suggested might conceal something much larger and darker beneath its roots: perhaps remnants of a war long past and a being capable of great power.

Her revelations about the tree connected to a grand cycle of conflict—echoes of a past where light battled dark—queasily aligned with the ever-present threat posed by the Dominator and his returned minions. Suddenly, they were disturbed by Silent, Croaker's shadowy ally, warning of the dangers lurking nearby. The trio attempted to eat in peace, but the atmosphere turned tense as they noticed a gathering of menhirs—standing stones that indicated the presence of others.

As changes began to stir in the air, deeply connected to Old Father Tree's strange powers, it became evident that they were not alone. The Lady held Croaker tightly as ominous figures approached—Darling and other familiar



faces returning unexpectedly from the plains. The tension soared as they faced accusations of betrayal stemming from rumors of Croaker's supposed alliance with darker forces. The presence of the Taken—powerful antagonists—loomed ominously in the background.

Just as they resolved to confront the danger head-on, a sudden, violent change storm surged from Old Father Tree. It affected all present. Amidst the chaos, Croaker witnessed transformations and the spectral might of the tree, which bore a will of its own. The storm reached its peak as Tracker, transformed into a beast, attacked Darling, only to be subdued by the sheer force of the Old Father's voice, compelling him to acknowledge the tree.

As the tumultuous storm subsided, it swallowed the chaos they faced, leaving behind a haunting quiet. The Taken launched an attack, but in a stunning display of power, Old Father Tree defended them, saving Croaker, Ardath, and their comrades as they succumbed to exhaustion. In this moment of grave peril, Croaker's connection to the ancient powers of the Plain deepened, revealing the nexus of conflicts hidden in the shadows of their reality, ensuring battles both past and present were far from over.

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Chapter 44: THE QUICKENING

Chapter Forty-Four: The Quickening

The chapter opens with a haunting sense of dread experienced through the narrator's dreams. The dreams are vivid nightmares that hint at a profound struggle against a god intertwined with a tree, signifying a deep connection to nature and the lurking threat of malevolence bound to its roots. The protagonist, referred to as Croaker, is abruptly awakened by a soft but urgent plea from the Lady, who seeks help moving a figure known as the White Rose.

As the ground begins to tremble violently beneath them, the urgency to escape becomes palpable. A series of cataclysmic events occurs — the earth shudders with increasing intensity, akin to a landslide transforming into an earthquake, and the once-stable surroundings of the Father Tree violently upheave. Compelled by fear, Croaker and the Lady assist Darling, who is paralyzed between dread and disbelief, as they stagger toward safety.

The shaking culminates in a terrifying climax: blue lightning crackles around the Father Tree while a monstrous entity rises from the ground, screaming in agony as it confronts the tree's ancient power. Driven by fear, Croaker refuses to look back at the ancient terror, focused instead on the



desperate need for escape. Their efforts pay off, and they manage to retreat far enough to allow the Father Tree to reclaim its mystifying strength.

Once the chaos recedes, Croaker observes the aftermath; the ground appears surprisingly undisturbed despite the chaos, with his companions shaken but unharmed. Tracker, an unexpected ally who had been an enemy moments before, assists others in dusting off their clothes, showcasing a jarring shift in alliances amidst the mayhem.

As Croaker approaches the Father Tree, he encounters a peculiar and unsettling sight: a human hand protruding from the soil, twisted and claw-like, pulsing with life. This hand sparks revulsion and a primal instinct in Croaker, forcing him to step back with trepidation. The chilling implications of this encounter suggest a deeper threat lurking within the tree's roots, raising questions about its dark past and hidden dangers.

Croaker confers with One-Eye, a companion whose peculiar demeanor indicates disbelief in the unfolding events. The group discusses the status of their allies and the implications of the Taken, powerful beings that pose a threat if left unchecked. The Lady questions the wisdom of pursuing them, hinting at the complex relationship between them, the tree, and the volatile forces at play.

As conversations continue, a growing tension surfaces regarding the urgency



of their situation: time is running out. The Lady makes it clear that their success hinges on a critical component — the connection to the tree’s power, and hints at a personal bond that must be nurtured amid looming peril.

In a moment of levity amid tension, the Lady suggests a playful return to

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Chapter 45 Summary: BARGAIN STRUCK

Chapter Forty-Five: Bargain Struck

In the darkness of the night, with only a dim crescent moon illuminating our surroundings, the Lady guided me to a sandy clearing, far enough from the null to allow for some solace. She instructed me to sit, and as she closed her eyes, I wondered about my companions back at their tasks and what sort of tangled game I had found myself in.

After a moment, the Lady returned from her introspection, revealing her surprise at the unexpected involvement of Scorn and Blister—characters previously notorious for their malevolence—among the Taken. With her mastery of necromancy, she speculated that perhaps they were striving for independence from their mistress, likely seeking a future that didn't involve serving her.

My thoughts were interrupted by the sudden arrival of Darling, who joined us unceremoniously, and I realized I had been too distracted to notice the return of the null. The Lady continued discussing the circumstances of the Taken, revealing that they were still trapped in coral, nursing their wounds, and possibly unable to escape. This meant there was a chance they would remain immobilized.



The conversation shifted to Darling, who, smart and perceptive in her own right, instinctively put herself in the middle of the burgeoning negotiation between the Lady and me. As I assumed the role of a reluctant interpreter between the two powerful figures, a sense of disbelief enveloped me at how willing both parties were to engage in discussion.

An uneasy agreement was eventually forged—one that necessitated the Lady keeping me between her and Darling, serving as an unwelcome human shield, while Darling maintained proximity to mitigate the Lady's use of her powers.

Following this tense summit, we returned to our companions, making it appear as though our interaction had been a vigorous encounter. The next morning, under the guise of business, the Lady and I escaped to pursue the Taken, who were still trapped in coral. Using her formidable abilities, the Lady managed to end their status as Taken, leaving them vulnerable.

With this swift resolution, I found myself marveling at the stark contrast between her ease in command over such dark forces and my past failures to confront the Limper.

As we busied ourselves with the translation of past events, I realized I had lost track of developments outside our little bubble; the memory of my



meeting with Darling had been rather conveniently wiped from my mind by the Lady. Meanwhile, the alliance among the White Rose, the Lady, and Father Tree stabilized, and the menhirs ceased their jests about strangers on the Plain—two of the three had shed their status as unknowns.

Despite my attempts to connect with Tracker regarding his enigmatic companion, Toadkiller Dog, I found that even Tracker couldn't recall the origins of the name. It was a puzzling yet suggestive hint at Toadkiller Dog's transformation into a being linked with Father Tree, further emphasizing the enigmatic ties binding our group together in this strange, ambitious quest.

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Chapter 46 Summary: SON OF THE TREE

Chapter Forty-Six: Son of the Tree

The chapter opens with a sense of urgency and anxiety as Croaker reflects on the dire situation they face in the West. There is a looming crisis, referred to as the Great Tragic, approaching rapidly while notable characters like Darling and the Lady seem inactive. Meanwhile, Raven and Bomanz are both trapped in their own predicaments, reinforcing the feeling of inevitability as disaster looms over them all.

Croaker, feeling helpless, has completed translations but lacks clarity or insight. Silent, Goblin, and One-Eye are engaged in deciphering complex names and patterns, but progress feels stagnant. Croaker becomes increasingly restless, and in an effort to manage his nervous energy, he starts taking nighttime walks under the full moon, where he becomes acutely aware of his surroundings and the unsettling atmosphere.

One night, during a particularly vivid walk, Croaker encounters a menhir—a stone marker—who informs him that the Father of Trees wants to speak with him. Croaker's anxiety escalates, but he realizes he must comply with this uncanny message. Entering the realm of the Father Tree, he is enveloped by a different, comforting climate, far removed from the bitter wind outside.



Here, he sees a disembodied hand gripping a root, a haunting reminder of the tree's connection to life and death.

As he approaches the tree, the hand suddenly grips him, overwhelming him with pain. In a fierce fit of anger, Croaker lashes out against the unexpected torment, and the heavens respond with stormy tumult—lightning crackles and thunder rumbles. Eventually, the tree releases him, but Croaker, determined to escape, crawls away. It is then he experiences a vivid moment where the Father Tree conveys a critical message about their troubling circumstances and the Dominator.

Soon, Silent, One-Eye, and others arrive, alarmed by the commotion. Croaker calls for One-Eye to attend to his injured ankle, which is now swollen and painful. He reports that the Father Tree wishes to assist them with the Dominator, emphasizing that it is in the tree's interest to do so. As One-Eye applies his unique healing salve, Croaker pushes for help to return to the tree, determined to understand what the Father of Trees has initiated.

The group's dynamic shifts as they witness a sapling emerging from the ground around the Father Tree, an awe-inspiring development that captivates them all. Elmo, with his farming instincts, quickly deduces they need water and a blanket to nurture this sapling properly, displaying a surprising understanding of nature's nuances. As they work together, Croaker continues to struggle, guided by curiosity and pain.



As the chapter concludes, the atmosphere thickens with a mixture of disbelief and hope as Croaker, supported by his companions, makes his way back to the Father Tree, eager to see this new growth and what it signifies for their fight against the encroaching darkness. The interplay between the natural world and the imminent battle against malevolent forces underscores the urgency of their situation, as Croaker and his allies gear up for the challenges to come.

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Chapter 47 Summary: SHADOWS IN SHADOWLAND

Chapter Forty-Seven: Shadows in Shadowland

As Raven finds himself ensnared within the Barrowland, a realm devoid of time and filled with haunting shadows and flickering fires, he grapples with profound feelings of helplessness and despair. Here, amidst the spectral remains of Domination monsters—creatures so malevolent they were sealed away during the era of the White Rose—Raven observes the eternal struggle of the sorcerer Bomanz. The wizened wizard, silhouetted against the ghostly remnants of dragon fire, is still driven by a futile desire to advance into the depths of the Great Barrow, unaware of his past failures.

Meanwhile, Raven is left to ponder his fate, questioning whether his earlier messages for help ever reached anyone and whether rescue is imminent, or if he is merely waiting for chaos to erupt around him. The distress of the guardians who protect against the encroaching darkness manifests as the river that threatens to engulf them grows ever closer, signifying the uncontrollable forces at play. In this moment of reflection, Raven realizes that had he been in charge during those critical times, he would have taken different paths in ensuring their safety.

Shades flicker past, ephemeral presences like himself, but their identities

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elude him in the swirling disorientation of his imprisonment. The world, once familiar, appears transformed from this shadowy vantage point. Now, he undergoes the most profound trial of his existence: confronting his own fears, regrets, and failures. The memories of his choices—both good and bad—surface relentlessly, revealing the emotional armor he constructed to navigate life's challenges. This introspection brings forth painful admissions: he has been his worst enemy, repeatedly rushing toward self-destruction in a quest for atonement.

As his thoughts coalesce into a dark realization, a surge of anger erupts within him, echoing through the ethereal space. The other lost souls surrounding him take delight in his torment, reminding him of the weight of his past decisions and the isolation he now endures in this desolate realm. In this bleak landscape, Raven faces the ultimate reckoning, grappling with the consequences of a life spent in pursuit of power and purpose, yet haunted by the shadows of his own making.

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Chapter 48: FLIGHT WEST

Chapter Forty-Eight: Flight West

In the wake of my exoneration by the tree, I found my relationships with my comrades strained. Despite the relief of no longer being under suspicion, I sensed an unspoken envy towards my newfound status, attributed to the Lady's influence, and the trust we once shared felt fragile. Having been part of this band since boyhood, the shift in dynamics left me pained.

The transition to our new reality began awkwardly; I was teased about using crutches to dodge work, but the heavy burden of my responsibilities loomed over me. The papers from the past, which I had memorized, offered little help in unlocking the truths we sought, as names and spells had become muddled through decades of history under the oppressive Domination.

News traveled that the Company was preparing to move out, and it struck me how quickly the impermanence of relationships had morphed into uncertainty. On the eve of our departure, I climbed aboard a windwhale, a massive, sentient creature summoned by Father Tree. My travel companions would be the Lady, Goblin, One-Eye, Silent, Tracker, and the tree's child, whom Tracker protected.



As we ascended into the evening sky, the beauty of a sunset from five thousand feet was breathtaking. However, sleep evaded me for long. One-Eye eventually put me under, but not before I noted how rather oddly our whale, flying at the edge of our formation, seemed positioned specifically for the Lady's benefit.

When dawn broke, panic set in as the Taken—a group of powerful beings once considered our enemies—arrived in a show of force around our whale. Tensions bubbled as Goblin and One-Eye traded barbs, their quarrel interrupted by the Lady, who encouraged cooperation among disparate allies. Goblin, upon recognizing the Lady from an earlier encounter, was struck with disbelief and retreated, his humor turning anxious at the unforeseen connection between us.

Amidst the flurry of emotions, I began to worry about our unity. Darling, our leader, had made a choice that brought us all here together with beings like the Taken, yet the implications of such an alliance lingered unsettlingly. One moment of clarity struck me: Darling learned strategy from Raven, a master of deception, and I found myself questioning his true intentions.

As night fell, we flew over the old city of Forsberg, transformed by time, our spirits high despite the oppressive winter conditions that followed. The cold winds carried biting snow, and My companions huddled close for warmth, reminding me of our vulnerability even amidst camaraderie. As we traveled,



I felt a sense of foreboding about the future.

The Lady and I shared tense conversation regarding the Annals, the chronicles of the Black Company, and I confided my desire to return them to Khatovar, the place from which our legacy originated. Despite the weight of

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Chapter 49 Summary: THE INVISIBLE MAZE

Chapter Forty-Nine: The Invisible Maze - Summary

In this chapter, tensions and uncertainties loom as the narrative focuses on Case's panic as he navigates the convoluted dynamics among various characters. The Lady's attempts to assuage his fears only exacerbate his anxiety, and Tracker's presence in his natural form does little to alleviate the situation. Ironically, it is One-Eye, known for his eccentricities, who manages to calm Case by diverting the conversation towards Raven's well-being.

Meanwhile, the Lady seeks to refine their translations with the help of Whisper and Limper. Whisper is tasked with ensuring that no crucial documents have gone missing, while Limper, a figure from the early Domination known for his misdeeds, is expected to recall historical connections that might prove useful. His presence evokes skepticism in Croaker, who struggles to reconcile Limper's past of destruction with his current role in their inquiry.

Croaker's concern shifts to Raven, who is under observation. Raven's state is worrisome; he appears unchanged but is spiraling into a dire situation as indicated by the Lady. She conveys feelings of being trapped, with fewer



options available that all seem increasingly perilous. Their conversation reveals the strain she is under as she processes her own vulnerabilities.

As Croaker examines Raven's well-being—a reflection of his role as protector—he probes into the Lady's rationale for seeking Bomanz, a deceased necromancer. The Lady's response of puzzlement reveals her oversight of critical information, prompting Croaker to share what he knows about Bomanz's current state, which suggests a deeper entanglement of events than previously acknowledged.

In a bid to uncover pivotal details from Raven's past, Croaker retrieves the originals of documents that Raven had worked from. Together with the Lady, they study these manuscripts with fresh eyes. The Lady points out a crucial gap in the narrative—the identity of Bomanz's wife—hinting at an unexplored connection that could unlock new avenues of inquiry. Their discussion posits that Bomanz wrote the majority of the original manuscript, but the lack of first-person perspective leads to further speculation about the authorship and the implications surrounding his wife's disappearance.

Their collaborative analysis ignites a fervor to dig deeper. The Taken, spectral entities serving darker purposes, embark on various searches, racing against time in pursuit of elusive answers. Initial efforts yield little success—one search retrieves a stone that proves useless, affirming the urgency of their task. Meanwhile, Croaker endures Limper's meticulous



criticism of their earlier transliteration mistakes, emphasizing the complexities of the ancient UchiTelle and KurreTelle languages.

In the midst of this, Silent, a keen observer, uncovers a pattern hidden within Limper's analysis, signifying that their quest for clarity amidst chaos is starting to bear fruit.

The chapter unfolds against a backdrop of tension and intrigue, weaving character dynamics and historical revelations into the fabric of the plot. Amidst the turmoil, the search for truth drives the narrative forward, setting the stage for potential breakthroughs and conflicts yet to come.

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Chapter 50 Summary: GNOMEN?

Chapter Fifty Summary: "Gnomens?"

In this pivotal chapter, we witness Darling's remarkable self-discipline as she refrains from seeking out Raven during her time away at Blue Willy, despite her evident longing for him. After an agonizing month, she eventually visits Croaker, with the Lady granting her permission. Wanting to respect her privacy, Croaker keeps Silent, Goblin, and One-Eye away, despite Silent's initial reluctance.

During their meeting, Darling struggles with her feelings for Raven, admitting that, although she cannot deny her affection, he must earn his way back into her life. Croaker finds himself empathizing more with Silent, who he respects, than Raven, whom he has never truly liked. Their conversation is laced with an awareness of the harsh realities they face, as Darling acknowledges that her heart was broken long before and that she holds no fairy-tale expectations.

After her visit, which brings her sorrow for her lost dreams, Darling departs, leaving a lasting impression on Croaker. As the group analyzes the Limper's records, they uncover information regarding Baron Senjak from a distant kingdom, who had four daughters, one named Ardath. The revelation leads

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to speculations about the identities of the remaining sisters, including the enigmatic Soulcatcher.

Croaker and his companions recognize the challenge they face in piecing together the family connections, needing to sift through complicated genealogies to unearth crucial information. The task ahead is daunting, as Croaker laments the intricacies of the genealogical records housed at Blue Willy. Inspired, Croaker proposes that Tracker, who has little else to occupy him, be assigned the task of researching the old documents.

After an amusing struggle to convey the message to Tracker, Croaker is finally successful. The chapter concludes dramatically with Darling unexpectedly appearing in Croaker's quarters at night, urging him to rise and join her for a flight—an event that promises to usher in new developments and challenges ahead. In the world of magic and complex relationships, this chapter highlights themes of unrequited love, the burden of expectations, and the commitment to uncovering hidden truths.



Chapter 51 Summary: THE SIGN

Chapter Fifty-One: The Sign

On a frigid night marked by a treacherous rain, everything outside glimmered as if encased in ice. The narrator attempts to lighten the mood with humor, but his companion, known as the Lady, is unamused. Together, they head to a carpet—an airborne vehicle with a recent enhancement: a crystal dome covering the front seats, designed by Limper, a character reformulated as an engineer with a knack for modifications.

The Lady uses minor magic to clear the ice from the dome and instructs the narrator to ensure it is securely sealed. As they ascend, the daunting speed flips the narrator onto his back, heading towards the starry expanse above. They climb higher, breaking through the cloud cover, revealing the significance of the dome: it maintains breathable air within the carpet, preventing the mythical windwhales from soaring higher than those who are Taken—beings influenced or controlled by powerful forces.

As they reach their destination, the Lady points out a familiar sight: the Great Comet, identifiable by its distinctive silver scimitar shape. The narrator is stunned; this celestial body was not expected to appear for another twenty years, challenging the long-held notions of celestial cycles.



The Lady suggests documenting this anomaly but cautions against spreading it widely, knowing the unease such revelations could incite among their people. The comet's reappearance is fraught with significance, stirring fears and superstitions.

Upon returning to the ground, they navigate through a dreary Barrowland night, passing over the ominous Great Barrow. The atmosphere is thick with the presence of ghosts, symbolic of past conflicts and unresolved histories. The narrator feels a heavy numbness as he enters the barracks, realizing that only twelve days remain until a pivotal event unfolds. Thoughts of an antagonist—laughing and reveling with a sinister canine companion named Toadkiller Dog—linger ominously in his mind, hinting at the impending turmoil that lies ahead.

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Chapter 52: NO SURPRISE

Chapter Fifty-Two Summary: NO SURPRISE

The chapter opens with the narrator experiencing an unsettling insomnia, plagued by thoughts swimming just below the surface of consciousness. Amidst this restless night, he combs through papers and uncovers key information: a guest list revealing a Lord Senjak and his daughters—Ardath, Credence, and Sylith. He gleefully deduces that if the Lady is a twin and Dorotea—who is noted as unable to attend—is indeed the youngest, that narrows the search for the Lady down to Credence or Sylith.

Despite his initial excitement, time drags on without further leads—efforts to investigate Bomanz's wife yield little. Concerned for the Lady's safety, the narrator suggests she confront Bomanz directly, but she isn't ready for that risk yet. Progress comes when Tracker, a seemingly slow-witted ally, recalls genealogies that reveal essential details about the sisters' marriages and fates.

Through Tracker's notes, the narrator learns of Ardath's mortality at the hands of bandits and Sylith's unknown fate after drowning, while Credence fell victim during the early conquests of the Dominator and Lady. Dorotea's whereabouts remain uncertain, leaving a veil of mystery looming over the



sisters' histories.

Connecting the dots leads to a growing confidence that Dorotea is indeed Soulcatcher. As they sift through this tangle of familial ties, the narrator ponders whether it was Sylith who escaped death, suggesting a complicated web of deception and potential abandonment of truths. The revelation that the Lady called for an assembly indicates urgency, as new information reveals that credible sources of intelligence may have led them astray regarding the identity of the Dominator.

The Lady acknowledges the inadequacy of their current documents, prompting a shift towards alternatives. In a poignant moment, the narrator realizes the impact of his discoveries—having unintentionally shared potentially outdated information about a priest named Erin NoFather, who effectively erased his past and the history of Vye.

As anticipation builds, a messenger from the Taken presents the Lady with a carved chest containing amulets meant for the Eternal Guard. The discovery reignites hope in their quest, leading the Lady to announce their intention to pursue Bomanz. Driven by a mix of alarm and curiosity, the narrator returns to his room, where he encounters the Limper working covertly with the documents. Unsettled yet entranced by the Limper's activities—deciphering languages and unraveling codes—he feels a profound sense of unease, amplifying his insomnia as he grapples with the layered complexities of



their mission and the looming confrontation with the truth.

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Chapter 53 Summary: THE RECOVERY

In Chapter Fifty-Three, titled "The Recovery," a heavy snowfall envelops the barracks where Croaker, the protagonist and physician, finds himself waking from a troubled sleep. He is unnerved by the presence of the Limper, a sinister figure connected to the enemy forces. Despite the harsh winter weather, the urgency of preparations is palpable, as the Taken—influential and powerful figures within their world—have arrived while he slept.

Croaker shares a breakfast with One-Eye, a cunning, mischievous ally, who reveals that they have acquired snowshoes and are planning something bold. The mission appears to center on the enigmatic Darling, who is precariously caught between powerful and dangerous forces. The looming dread of time running out weighs heavily, especially as they hastily prepare for an uncertain confrontation.

The atmosphere shifts dramatically when the Lady, a significant and commanding figure, orders Croaker to suit up for a crucial mission. Despite his initial confusion and reluctance, Croaker complies. They depart from the barracks aboard carpets that sweep low over the snow-covered landscape. The scenery reveals remnants of death, as exposed skeletons hint at darker histories.

The journey takes them to the Great Barrow, where they aim to locate



Bomanz, a once-great sorcerer now thought to be buried beneath the snow. The group uncovers Bomanz's preserved body after a grueling excavation, revealing a spark of life still within him. Suddenly, they are ambushed by Toadkiller Dog, a terrifying creature associated with death and destruction, which briefly shifts the chaos in their favor, allowing the group to escape with Bomanz.

In the aftermath, Croaker struggles with the unsettling reality of their situation and the lives potentially lost, particularly One-Eye and Goblin, his friends who had bravely ventured out. Meanwhile, Bomanz is revived through sorcery, returning to life but vastly changed. His first request is to be taken to the "White Rose," a significant location tied to their ongoing struggles.

As they navigate unexpected dynamics within their group, the tension between Bomanz and the Lady reveals deeper complexities of power and manipulation. Bomanz's resurrection leads to insights about their current threats and the emotional weight carried by the Lady, who appears conflicted about her role in the unfolding events.

The chapter speaks to the cost of survival and the moral quandaries they grapple with. The Lady reveals her unease about the escalating stakes and the darkness emerging around them, leaving Croaker in a state of confusion as he attempts to make sense of both their immediate dangers and the truth



about their intertwined fates. This chapter, filled with tension and revelations, sets the stage for the struggles to come, emphasizing the delicate balance between life, death, and control in a world steeped in magic and danger.

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Chapter 54 Summary: AN EVENING AT HOME

Chapter Fifty-Four: An Evening at Home

As time passed under the oppressive shadow of imminent conflict, the situation grew stagnant. The Lady, previously proactive, halted all investigations, preferring to conspire with her Taken allies. The protagonist, known as Croaker, and Bomanz found themselves sidelined, their exclusion deepening Croaker's sense of isolation.

In desperate need of comfort, Croaker relocated to share housing with Goblin and One-Eye, whose chaotic companionship felt less stressful than the tension surrounding him. Meanwhile, Raven remained a quiet figure, largely overlooked by everyone except his steadfast companion, Case. Silent occasionally visited on behalf of Darling, revealing layers of unexpressed emotion he carried toward her, which was the result of a vow of silence imposed upon him by forces beyond his control.

Despite Tracker's efforts to uncover familial ties among the Lady's sisters, he found little success in the sorcerous genealogies, leaving them shrouded in mystery. Goblin and One-Eye even attempted to use hypnosis to access Tracker's ancient memories, but their efforts were fruitless, likened to chasing shadows.



The Taken were desperately trying to manipulate the Great Tragic to gain the upper hand, but their over-engineering resulted in a dangerous gorge forming in the ice, threatening a catastrophic rise in river levels. Their attempts were futile against the harsh reality of the natural world, worsened by a relentless cold snap that left the snow unyielding.

One day, Case approached Croaker with a warning: “The Lady wants you, sir. Right away.” Croaker reluctantly left his game of Tonk, sensing the weight of urgency in Case's tone. As they stepped away from the chaos of Goblin and One-Eye, Case added, “Be careful. She’s in a dark mood.” Croaker acknowledged this warning, though his own spirits were already low.

Upon entering the Lady's newly adorned quarters, complete with carpets and a crackling fire, Croaker noted the careful curation of the space—a stark contrast to the grim reality outside. The Lady, her gaze distant and sorrowful, beckoned him to sit beside her on the couch, directly expressing the gravity of her feelings.

She revealed a painful decision she faced: to surrender and become another of the Taken, or to resist in a battle fraught with futility. Though this seemed a less dire outcome than Croaker feared, it underscored the emotional and moral weight of her predicament. She clarified that while she may not



emerge victorious, she could determine who would win, showing a warrior's resolve even in despair. Croaker admired her courage, recognizing the familiar spirit of a soldier facing insurmountable odds.

In the intimate warmth of the cozy room, they fell into a contemplative silence, the flames casting flickering shadows on the walls. Finally, the Lady revealed that the final conflict would commence at sunrise, sharing how she was preparing to confront a shadow—a metaphor for the darkness that loomed over her life—with little hope for survival.

Her admission that she would prefer death over surrender resonated deeply with Croaker, shaking his confidence. The complexity of her emotions became clear as she asked him to hold her—a request that surprised him. However, he complied, feeling the unexpected weight of their connection as she cried against him, her vulnerability stark against the backdrop of war.

As the weight of her fears and loneliness poured out, Croaker became acutely aware of the depth of her isolation. Though she spoke of lacking friends and feeling alone, he reassured her, promising that they would be with her. The moment encapsulated a profound bond, transcending mere duty and creeping into the realm of companionship.

Eventually, she gathered herself, stoked the fire, and exchanged a quiet farewell before retreating to another room. Croaker was left in reflective



silence, struck by an emotion he hadn't quite anticipated. Returning to his chaotic roommates, he found their presence no longer irksome, yet sleep eluded him as he grappled with the evening's revelations. The tensions of the impending battle hung heavy in the air, leaving him awake with thoughts too burdensome to rest.

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Chapter 55 Summary: OPENING ROUNDS

Chapter Fifty-Five Summary: OPENING ROUNDS

The chapter begins with the protagonist awakening from a troubling sleep, beset by the presence of a null, an artifact or phenomenon that induces a disorienting state. After realizing he is alone in the barracks, he ventures into the almost deserted mess hall, where he encounters The Lady, a strong and confident figure whose problems from the previous night seem forgotten. The atmosphere is tense, with a foreboding chill in the air despite a fierce fire, signaling the anticipation of the day ahead.

With daylight breaking, The Lady takes command of a flying carpet, surveying the Great Barrow, which is on the brink of collapse. They discuss the upcoming comet that, despite its visibility, may become obscured. Below them, Guards are preparing for an imminent confrontation, assembling light siege machinery and setting up colored pennons, indicating an organized approach to the day's activities. The protagonist notes with unease the meticulous planning taking place outside, though he feels somewhat sidelined from the reasons behind it.

Suddenly, a creature reminiscent of a cross between ancient monsters bursts forth, creating chaos. The protagonist watches as Darling, a prominent



figure, urges her white horse into action, with Silent and the Lieutenant accompanying her. Wizardry rains down from above, effectively dispatching the creature within moments, marking a brutal and swift success with The Lady keeping count.

The day unfolds with a series of confrontations, as various creatures emerge, only to be systematically eliminated. The protagonist grows restless and questions whether there's sufficient time to eradicate them all before the sun sets, insinuating a deeper concern that success won't remain this easy as the situation escalates.

Upon returning to the barracks, he finds the Limper, a being of significant power, still laboring—potentially towards something dire. The atmosphere in the barracks is heavy with unspoken concerns, especially regarding their absent ally, Raven. Silent joins the protagonist for supper, revealing that the day was challenging yet filled with moments of risk for Darling, who almost faced disaster.

Later, The Lady invites the protagonist to participate in the crucial mission to rescue Raven, but he declines, feeling unfit to contribute. The chapter closes on a suspenseful note, with One-Eye, another comrade, awakening him with the news that they managed to retrieve Raven, although the process was grueling. The protagonist inspects Raven's condition, ultimately deeming him stable but in need of care to recover fully, all the while



reflecting on the tense atmosphere surrounding both Raven's rescue and the unfathomable endeavors of the Limper. The protagonist grapples with mixed feelings about Raven's survival and accountability for their actions towards Darling, foreshadowing potential conflicts to come.

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Chapter 56: TIME FADING

Chapter Fifty-Six Summary: Time Fading

As dawn breaks, anticipation fills the air amid an unsettling atmosphere of foreboding. The day is reserved for executions, and the presence of the Limper, a mysterious and powerful figure, adds a layer of tension to the proceedings. His satisfaction with their preparations provides a false sense of security as he takes a rest in the protagonist's bed, an unsettling reminder of the precarious state of their situation.

Throughout the day, the protagonist, known as Croaker, is consumed by thoughts of Raven, a once-remarkable warrior now trapped in a fragile state, stirring only near consciousness and mumbling in his sleep. Croaker's worry for Raven intensifies, but he remains focused on his duties, instructing his comrade Case to keep Raven nourished and monitored. The haunting quiet of the barracks and strained relationships weigh heavily on him, leading to feelings of isolation and longing for human comfort, particularly from the Lady—his complicated romantic interest.

The events of the day culminate as the remnants of the Dominator's pets are disposed of, prompting the Lady to declare a day of rest before the anticipated assault on the Dominator's stronghold. The weight of their



impending confrontation hangs over Croaker, who grapples with a deep sense of apprehension about their mission.

As practice begins for their decisive encounter, Croaker is distracted by a sense of coming doom, despite the rehearsals appearing to go well. His concerns become more immediate when he visits Raven, who is recovering but still not in control of his faculties. Raven's blurred grasp on reality and his disheveled state serve as a stark reminder of the fragility of life and the stakes involved in their quest against the Dominator.

The Lady's pragmatic leadership surfaces as she includes Croaker in conversations about their strategy for the upcoming battle. She supplies him with enchanted arrows intended for Raven's husband—a powerful sorcerer—demonstrating the depth of their bond and the complexities of their impending challenges. While both share unspoken fears about the battle, they find solace in each other's company, exchanging glances filled with understanding and unsaid feelings.

As night falls, Croaker acknowledges the sorcery at play that will ensure everyone, except the duty section, will be rendered unconscious for rest. In a moment of vulnerability, the two share a brief embrace, reinforcing their humanity amid the looming threat of war. This simple act of connection offers Croaker a fleeting moment of peace before the storm that awaits them—a poignant reminder of their shared struggles in a world steeped in

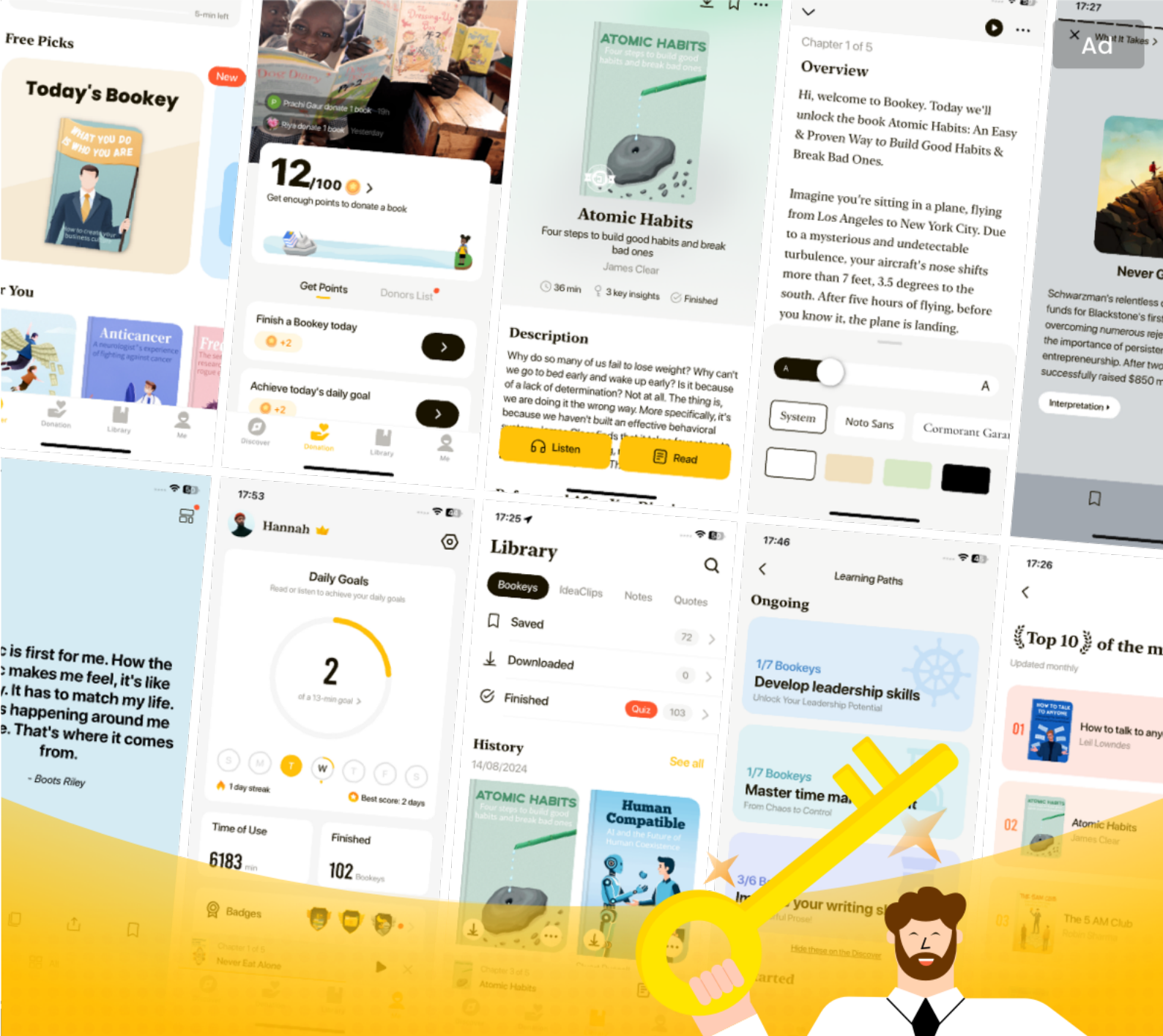


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Chapter 57 Summary: THE LAST DAY

Chapter Fifty-Seven: The Last Day

In a momentous and tense morning, the protagonists are afforded a brief respite before the looming battle at the Great Barrow, where the fate of many will be decided. As the heroes gather, it is evident that the stakes are high; the Great Barrow is set to remain functional only until noon, meaning time is of the essence. The tension is palpable, and the presence of the Limper—a sinister character driven by his own motives—and Bomanz, who grapples with the burden of his honor, adds layers to the atmosphere of impending conflict.

The Lady, a courageous leader, is determined to confront her husband, the Dominator, directly, while Croaker, sarcastically attempting to ease the tension, jokingly offers a future dinner if they succeed. The underlying anxiety is evident as they prepare for a fierce confrontation. As the battle muster aligns, the civilians evacuate towards Oar, but their troops, delayed and coming in droves, will arrive too late to be of help.

As the Lady approaches the Great Barrow, the narrative becomes increasingly chaotic, with elements like windwhales, mantas, and Taken carpets swirling around, hinting at the otherworldly forces at play. The



impending clash is underscored by the arrival of a dragon, a significant and terrifying entity that breaks free from the earth, causing shock and awe among the fighters.

The dragon, more monumental than anticipated, draws attention away from the true goal: capturing the Dominator. As the characters focus, fierce aerial engagements ensue, and the volatile dominance of the dragon reveals its capacity for destruction. Amidst this turmoil, there is a fierce commitment to pursue victory, despite the presence of Toadkiller Dog and the attacking tribes.

The battle escalates into a chaotic frenzy where arrows fly, and the Dominator seeks to assert his power by naming the Lady. The power dynamics shift unpredictably, revealing hidden strengths and weaknesses among the fighters. A chaotic interplay unfolds as Tracker engages the Dominator, wrestling with the embodiment of dark magic and powerful curses, bolstered by others who join the fray while the Lady remains steadfast.

With the Lady wounded by the Limper's crossbow bolt, a desperate fight to extract it results in a powerful moment of clarity and determination. Signs of rallying emerge as chaos reigns, with allies and enemies alike pushing towards a decisive conclusion. The battle's crescendo leads to a final confrontation, where alliances are tested, and the ultimate goal becomes



clearer.

As the chapter unfolds to its climax, the actions of Bomanz and the collective efforts of the protagonists emphasize the themes of sacrifice, loyalty, and the quest for redemption. The darkness that looms over the battlefield hints at the heavy toll of warfare, yet the glimmers of hope remain alive in their fight against the Dominator, revealing the intertwined fates of love, courage, and destiny.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: The importance of unwavering courage in the face of overwhelming odds

Critical Interpretation: As you stand on the precipice of your own challenges, reflecting on the courage exhibited by the Lady and her allies in Chapter 57 of 'The White Rose' can inspire you to summon your inner strength. Much like her resolve to confront the dark powers opposing her, you too are capable of facing adversity head-on. The chaos of battle might mirror the tumult in your own life, but the commitment to push through despite fear can transform obstacles into opportunities for growth and triumph. Embrace the lesson that courage, especially in the most daunting moments, can illuminate the path forward, foster resilience, and unite allies in the quest for a brighter future.



Chapter 58 Summary: END OF THE GAME

Chapter Fifty-Eight: END OF THE GAME

As chaos continued to unfold around us, I noticed Raven, a figure driven by a singular purpose. He leaned on Case, bearing a sword, his demeanor deceptively feeble as he approached the mangled remains of the Dominator, intent on avenging Darling's suffering. The tension in the air was palpable; I found myself caught between the looming threat posed by Raven and the frail state of the Lady, who was clearly at the limits of her strength.

The disrupting scene highlighted the ongoing struggle against the Dominator, who had managed to kill several men even in death. The remnants of our fight were chaotic; goblins and guards worked frantically, intent on binding the dark spirit of the Dominator, while Raven's determination hopelessly complicated matters.

With the Lady weakened and magic fading from the battlefield, the ritual to name and bind the fallen had taken its toll on both her and Darling. As they exchanged names, it symbolized their relinquishment of power, revealing their vulnerability in a world drenched in conflict. The moment they completed the ritual, a wave of tumult engulfed the field, ultimately leading to the demise of the Taken, showing the depth of the Lady's sacrifice.



Yet, the danger persisted with Raven's approach. His intent to claim Darling's affection drove him like a relentless force. Struggling with my own emotions, I stepped forward, bow in hand, urging him to halt. The battlefield fell silent as all eyes turned to witness the confrontation that now felt destined.

"It's over, Raven. No more killing," I implored, growing increasingly desperate. My heart pounded as he took another step, unyielding and defiant. I could see how he had become a casualty of his own rage and drive for revenge.

One-Eye and Goblin hovered nearby, uncertain of their allegiances in this moment, but I knew this confrontation had to exist solely between Raven and me. Emotions surged as I recalled our fallen comrades—Elmo, my best friend, had been lost in this struggle. I couldn't let Raven continue his path of destruction.

In a moment defined by a mix of fear and determination, I released the arrow aimed at Raven's hip. He fell in disbelief, caught off guard and unprepared for my resolve. As chaos settled once more, I slung my bow over my shoulder, acknowledging the shift in power among us.

As I approached the Lady, feeling her fragile form in my arms, the remnants



of our fight began to fade, signaling a potential peace amidst the devastation. Together with Silent, we began to make our way back to the remnants of our camp, filled with the uncertain promise of a meeting that might finally bring our fractured company back together. My ankle throbbed, but it felt like a distant pain compared to the weight of what had just transpired. In carrying the Lady, I felt both her power and defeat—symbols of a battle that had altered the very fabric of our lives.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: The importance of confronting destructive emotions

Critical Interpretation: In the chaotic showdown with Raven, you learned that unchecked emotions can spiral into ruin, leading to devastation not only for yourself but for those you care about. This moment teaches you the value of facing destructive impulses before they escalate, as well as the strength that comes from standing firm against them. Embracing this principle in your life encourages you to confront and resolve your inner conflicts before they manifest into harmful actions, ultimately guiding you toward a path of healing rather than chaos.

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Chapter 59 Summary: LAST VOTE

Chapter Fifty-Nine: Last Vote

In a desolate version of Blue Willy's common room, Croaker limps in, using his bow as a crutch while struggling with an injured ankle. He is accompanied by the Lady, who appears weak and lost in despair—a stark contrast to the other members of the Black Company present: Goblin, One-Eye, Otto the immortal, Murgan, and Darling. Tension hangs in the air as Croaker observes the frayed relationships between them, particularly between Raven and Darling, who has expressed dissatisfaction with Raven's emotional shortcomings and has made it clear she won't be treated as a prize by him or any man.

The sense of loss is heavy in the room, as Croaker announces the pressing need to elect a new leader after their captain's passing. Unsurprisingly, no one offers a name. With reluctance, Croaker is nominated out of necessity; despite his protests about being a mere physician, he ultimately accepts the role. Following this, he initiates a discussion on their escape strategy, emphasizing urgency as they're surrounded by enemies.

The Company is in shock, paralyzed by their situation, and Croaker proposes formally disbanding. While some oppose giving up their long-standing

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identity as the Black Company, they understand the need to proceed without the burden of desertion stigma. A rare few wish to part ways, but as the tension builds, agreements are made, and it is decided to stay together for safety until they reach the forest's edge.

Once those who wish to leave are formally discharged, Croaker begins organizing their departure, sending Hagop to find animals for transport. As bleak as their circumstances are, he attempts to instill a sense of purpose in his comrades. They partake in a solemn ceremony to bury their fallen companions, emotions breaking free as Croaker grieves the loss of his best friend, Elmo.

Controlled yet anguished, he leads a reluctant Lady out of the compound. Her spirit appears crushed, yet as they prepare to leave, she shows fleeting signs of mischief. Croaker reminds her of a promised dinner in Opal, momentarily lifting her spirits. He expresses the need for her to help retrieve the Annals from the Tower, although he withholds the fact that he hasn't yet secured them.

With the Great Comet lighting their path, Croaker leads the group out, feeling a mix of sympathy and regret for Raven, who is left behind, grappling with the shift in power dynamics. As they ride away from their past, the narrative hints at a troubling presence emerging from the Great Forest—a beast that is both a symbol of their struggles and a foreshadowing



of future challenges.

They may have survived another day, but the uncertainty of the empire looms large, and the journey ahead remains fraught with peril as the Great Comet fades from the night sky, signaling the end of one chapter and the beginning of another.

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