Gregor and the Code of Claw

In the epic conclusion to the *Underland Chronicles*, **Gregor** faces his most harrowing challenge yet as the Underland teeters on the brink of all-out war. The **Prophecy of Time** has foretold a final, devastating battle between the humans of **Regalia** and the rat army led by the monstrous **Bane**.

With the fate of the Underland hanging in the balance, Gregor must:

- **Decipher the Code of Claw**, a cryptic cipher that could turn the tide of war.
- **Confront the Bane** in a showdown that tests his courage and morality.
- **Protect his family**, including his sister **Boots** and his injured mother, trapped in Regalia.

As alliances fracture and losses mount, Gregor is forced to make impossible choices about sacrifice, loyalty, and what it truly means to be a warrior.

Collins delivers a **heart-wrenching, action-packed finale** that explores the cost of war and the power of hope.

Chapter 1

Gregor, the protagonist known as "the warrior" in Underland prophecies, lies exhausted on the stone floor of a prophecy-covered chamber, still reeling from the volcanic ash and recent battles. Clutching a newly acquired sword, he reflects on how the Underland—a war-torn world beneath New York City—has consumed his life. The prophecies, carved centuries ago by Bartholomew of Sandwich, foretell his role in the conflict. Gregor insists on reading the latest prophecy alone, anticipating its grim

contents, but finds himself numb to its revelations despite their dire implications.

The prophecy, titled "The Prophecy of Time," warns of an impending war and a trapped ally, emphasizing urgency with its ticking rhythm. It declares that Gregor must "break the code or die forever," hinting at his inevitable death with the line, "WHEN THE WARRIOR HAS BEEN KILLED." The cryptic verses also reference a "Code of Claw," tied to the rats' treachery, and implicate Gregor's young sister, Boots, as the key to uncovering their plot. The prophecy's relentless repetition of "TIME IS RUNNING OUT" underscores the dire stakes.

Gregor grapples with the prophecy's weight, recalling how even his closest allies, like the rat Ripred and Queen Luxa, hesitated to share its contents. He considers fleeing to the Overland but dismisses the idea, knowing it would abandon his friends to destruction. His bond with Ares, the bat who has sacrificed much for him, reinforces his resolve. Despite his exhaustion and trauma—including witnessing the massacre of mice and the death of the bat Thalia—Gregor feels detached, as if the prophecy's horror hasn’t fully sunk in.

The chapter closes with Gregor acknowledging the Bane, a monstrous white rat, as the prophecy’s "monster" who must be killed. Though drained and emotionally frozen, he recognizes his duty to fight. The imagery of stone tombs from a museum visit lingers in his mind, symbolizing his sense of being trapped in fate. Despite his numbness, Gregor prepares to face the coming battle, knowing the survival of the Underland hinges on his actions.

Chapter 2

In Chapter 2 of *Code of Claw*, Gregor is eager to rejoin his friends in the Firelands, but Mareth, a soldier, stops him, emphasizing that wartime demands discipline. Mareth reveals that Solovet, previously disgraced for weaponizing the plague, has been reinstated as head of the Regalian army due to her strategic ruthlessness against the rats. Gregor is outraged, arguing that her past crimes should not be overlooked, but Mareth insists orders must be followed. The chapter highlights Gregor’s internal conflict between his desire for autonomy and the harsh realities of war.

Gregor realizes he must conceal his intentions to return to the Firelands, as Solovet likely views him as a weapon to be deployed at her discretion. Reflecting on Ripred’s advice to plan carefully, he decides to avoid drawing suspicion. Instead of immediately seeking Ares, he visits his mother, who is severely ill with pneumonia. The encounter underscores Gregor’s guilt and concern for her safety, complicating his priorities as he weighs his responsibilities to his friends against his duty to his mother.

A doctor privately advises Gregor that his mother would be safer in the Overland, given the impending war, but official channels refuse her relocation. This revelation forces Gregor to confront the dire consequences of leaving her in Regalia. The doctor’s whispered warning adds urgency to Gregor’s dilemma, as he grapples with the moral and practical challenges of protecting his mother while fulfilling his role in the conflict.

Determined to act, Gregor seeks Vikus’s help to bypass the council and send his mother home. Vikus, though sympathetic, reveals his previous attempts have been denied, highlighting the bureaucratic obstacles Gregor faces. The chapter ends with Gregor’s frustration mounting, as he realizes he may need to take matters into his own hands to ensure his mother’s survival, even as the war threatens to consume everyone around him.

Chapter 3

In Chapter 3 of *Code of Claw*, Gregor faces a tense confrontation with Solovet, who assigns him two imposing guards to prevent him from leaving. Overwhelmed by his limited options, Gregor chooses inaction, deciding against provoking a fight he might not win. He attempts to feign injury to appear harmless while subtly strategizing how to escape. The guards, Horatio and Marcus, remain vigilant, forcing Gregor to bide his time as he visits the nursery where his sister Boots and the injured mouse Cartesian are cared for by Dulcet.

Gregor finds temporary comfort in Boots' warmth and the playful scene with the baby mice, but his mind races with escape plans. He learns that Cartesian is the uncle of the rescued pups, whose mother's fate remains uncertain. The mice's traumatic past weighs heavily, and Gregor avoids distressing them further. Meanwhile, he distracts the group with cookies, hiding his travel supplies beneath the treat box. Despite the calm atmosphere, Gregor feels urgency, knowing his bond bat, Ares, awaits him.

Dulcet cleverly convinces the guards to wait outside the nursery, exploiting Horatio's apparent fondness for her. Gregor considers using her as an unwitting accomplice but dismisses the idea to protect her. His thoughts spiral as he searches for a way to leave without endangering anyone. Inspiration strikes when Boots suggests playing hide-and-seek, giving Gregor a plausible reason to move the group into the hallway's storage rooms—a potential opportunity to slip away.

Gregor seizes the chance, proposing an expanded game outside the nursery to alleviate the mice's boredom. He removes his sword belt, symbolically shedding his warrior role, though it unnerves him. The chapter ends with Gregor poised to execute his escape plan, leveraging the chaos of the game to evade his guards. His internal conflict—balancing duty, survival, and compassion—drives the tension as he navigates the precarious path ahead.

Chapter 4

Gregor and Ares plunge into the chaotic battleground of the Firelands, where torches illuminate a cavern filled with dust, blood, and the cacophony of war. The air is thick with volcanic ash, forcing Gregor to don a mask to breathe. The scene is gruesome, with blood staining fighters from both sides, and Gregor struggles to reconcile the violence with his mission. Despite the chaos, he searches for Luxa and the Bane, but the dust and masks make identification nearly impossible, leaving him disoriented and uncertain of his next move.

As Gregor grapples with his role in the battle, he hesitates to engage the rats directly, conflicted by the brutality of war. Memories of his loved ones—his injured mother, Boots, and the suffering mice—fuel his resolve. When Ares spots a wounded woman under attack, Gregor's rage surges, and they dive into action. Their first strike severs a rat's ear, drawing attention and sparking panic among the enemy. Gregor embraces the rats' fear of him, using it to his advantage, and reflects on his past humiliation, now determined to prove himself in the light of the torches.

Gregor and Ares navigate the battlefield with precision, their bond tested as they counter relentless rat attacks. Ares warns Gregor to trust his instincts during fast-paced combat, and Gregor agrees, committing to follow his bat's lead. The duo engages in a deadly dance, fending off swarms of rats while Gregor channels his rage without losing control. His training with Mareth proves invaluable, as he recalls the grueling lessons with carcasses that prepared him for the reality of combat. Sandwich's superior sword becomes a lethal extension of his will, slicing through enemies with ease.

The chapter culminates in Gregor's fierce determination to survive and fulfill the prophecy by killing the Bane. Despite the overwhelming odds, he refuses to succumb to fear or recklessness, balancing his rage with focus. The battle rages on, but

Gregor’s resolve hardens—he will not fall until the white rat is dead. The chapter leaves readers on the edge, anticipating the next clash in this brutal war, as Gregor and Ares fight side by side, their fates intertwined with the outcome of the conflict.

Chapter 5

In Chapter 5, Gregor finds himself in a fierce battle against a group of highly skilled and vicious rats. The fight pushes him to his limits as he relies on his "rager" abilities to defend against their coordinated attacks. Despite the chaos, Ripred, a seasoned fighter, taunts Gregor with sarcastic remarks, distracting him with comments about Luxa and the nibblers' rescue. Gregor struggles to focus, but the rats' relentless assault leaves him no room for error. The tension escalates as Ripred’s words hint at Luxa’s possible illness or death, further unsettling Gregor mid-battle.

Gregor’s focus wavers when Ripred suggests Luxa might not survive due to prolonged exposure to toxic air. This news momentarily disrupts Gregor’s combat effectiveness, nearly costing him his life. Fortunately, his bond, Ares, intervenes, saving him by lifting a rat into the air and dropping it to its death. Ripred chastises Gregor for his lack of mental discipline, emphasizing the need for unwavering concentration in battle. Gregor regains his footing and rejoins the fight, positioning himself beside Perdita, a skilled warrior, who reassures him that Luxa is alive.

The battle intensifies as more fighters converge at the tunnel entrance, with Ares proving invaluable in aerial combat. His strength allows him to lift and eliminate rats, earning recognition from desperate soldiers calling for his aid. Gregor takes pride in Ares’s contributions, especially after their bond had been previously criticized. Meanwhile, the humans and rats continue to clash, with Gregor barely managing to stay alive amid the chaos. The chapter highlights the brutality of war and the importance of teamwork, as Gregor and his allies fight to protect the nibblers.

As the battle progresses, the humans succeed in securing the nibblers’ escape into the tunnel. Orders are given to retreat, but Ripred instructs Gregor to hold his position, leaving his fate uncertain. The chapter ends on a cliffhanger, with Gregor still embroiled in combat and the broader implications of the battle unresolved. The

narrative underscores themes of resilience, loyalty, and the psychological toll of warfare, as Gregor balances his personal fears with the demands of leadership in a life-or-death struggle.

Chapter 6

In Chapter 6 of *Code of Claw*, Luxa collapses from severe injuries and illness, prompting Gregor to rush to her aid. Desperate, he cradles her as she coughs up blood, while an Underlander doctor administers medicine. York, Howard’s father and governor of the Fount, arrives, berating the group for allowing Luxa and Howard to remain in their weakened states. He orders them to return to Regalia immediately, and Ares, Gregor’s bat ally, volunteers to transport them. Despite their dire conditions, Luxa insists on ensuring the safety of the nibblers and Aurora, her bat, before departing.

Gregor, Luxa, and Howard embark on a harrowing flight to Regalia, with Gregor holding Luxa upright to ease her breathing. Terrified by her worsening condition, he talks incessantly to keep her conscious, recounting stories from his life in New York. Howard, though frail, occasionally instructs Gregor to administer more medicine. The journey feels endless, and Gregor’s fear peaks when Luxa grows still, only to revive with another coughing fit. The river below appears altered, a sign of the earthquake’s widespread impact, as they near Regalia.

Upon arrival, Luxa and Howard are rushed into emergency care, while Gregor, despite his own injuries, refuses treatment until he learns Luxa’s fate. Mareth eventually convinces him to tend to his wounds, though Gregor remains restless, pacing the halls for updates. The hospital is overwhelmed with casualties, including nibbler pups from the Firelands, highlighting the war’s toll. Gregor’s mother shows improvement, but his focus remains on Luxa’s uncertain survival.

Mareth redirects Gregor’s energy by enlisting his help in the chaotic nursery, where displaced mouse pups are being cared for. The space is overcrowded, with pups undergoing herbal baths and makeshift nests being prepared. Gregor’s earlier discovery of Sandwich’s secret passage proves crucial as more pups arrive. Though

distracted by worry for Luxa, he channels his urgency into aiding the overwhelmed staff, demonstrating resilience amid the crisis. The chapter underscores the characters’ physical and emotional struggles as they navigate the aftermath of battle.

Chapter 7

In Chapter 7 of *Code of Claw*, Gregor is imprisoned in a dark, cold cell after being secretly abducted by Solovet’s soldiers. Overcome with rage and frustration, he struggles against his restraints before freeing himself using his sword. The cell is barren, offering no comfort or means of escape, leaving Gregor to grapple with his isolation and the chilling dampness of his clothes. His anger shifts to despair as he realizes the futility of his situation, with no one likely to notice his absence or come to his aid.

Gregor reflects on Solovet’s motives, suspecting she imprisoned him to assert control and punish him for disobeying orders. Unlike his previous arrest, this detention is secretive, leaving him uncertain whether anyone—like Vikus or Dulcet—knows his whereabouts. He mentally reviews his allies, concluding that most are preoccupied with the war or their own struggles, leaving him utterly alone. The lack of light and communication weighs heavily on him, amplifying his fear and helplessness as he contemplates his role in the prophecy and the Code of Claw.

As time passes, Gregor slips into a semi-conscious state, haunted by visions of battle and nightmares of Luxa’s possible death. He awakens to find food has been delivered, but the meager meal does little to alleviate his hunger or despair. Forced to relieve himself in the mug, he retreats to his corner, clinging to memories of home in a futile attempt to escape his grim reality. The darkness and isolation push him to the brink of madness, as he yearns for connection and updates on Luxa’s condition.

The chapter culminates in Gregor’s growing desperation, as Solovet’s psychological torture becomes unbearable. Cut off from the outside world, he oscillates between anger and hopelessness, questioning whether anyone cares about his disappearance. Just as his distress peaks, an unexpected event occurs, hinting at a potential shift in his circumstances. The chapter underscores Gregor’s vulnerability and the brutal

tactics used to break his spirit, setting the stage for a pivotal turning point in the story.

Chapter 8

Gregor is furious after Ripred and Mareth reveal his feelings for Luxa to Solovet, fearing she will use this information to manipulate him. He storms out, feeling betrayed and embarrassed, especially since Luxa's feelings for him are unclear. His anger escalates when Ripred blocks his path, leading to a physical confrontation. Mareth intervenes, pinning Gregor down, while Ripred mocks him. Despite his rage, Gregor eventually relents, realizing his friends are trying to protect him from Solovet's harsh punishments, as evidenced by Hamnet's past suffering in solitary confinement.

Mareth and Nerissa explain their actions were meant to spare Gregor a similar fate, emphasizing Solovet's ruthlessness. They reveal how Hamnet was broken after a month in solitary, which likely contributed to his later instability. Gregor begins to understand their motives, though he remains worried about Luxa discovering his feelings. Mareth assures him Solovet won't reveal the information, as it would undermine her control. Gregor's anger subsides, and he agrees to help with the code-breaking mission, though he initially insists on visiting Luxa first.

The group heads to the code room, where Gregor is given time to clean up before joining the effort. The room is arranged like a zoo, with designated spaces for different species, including a spider, mouse, bat, and cockroach. Boots, Gregor's younger sister, is entertaining the creatures with a loud rendition of "The Itsy-Bitsy Spider," much to the discomfort of the arachnid. Her energetic performance captivates the room, though it's clear her antics have been ongoing for some time.

The chapter highlights Gregor's internal struggle with his rage and trust issues, while also showcasing the dynamics between the Underland's diverse inhabitants. The tension between personal emotions and larger responsibilities is central, as Gregor balances his desire to see Luxa with the urgent need to decipher the code. Meanwhile, Boots' innocent exuberance provides a stark contrast to the darker themes of

manipulation and control, underscoring the complexity of the Underland’s political and personal conflicts.

Chapter 9

Gregor rushes to the code-breakers' room after receiving an emergency alert, fearing Boots has been harmed. His mind races through possibilities—whether she was injured, threatened by Ripred, or trapped by the green spider. Upon arriving, he slips on a trail of blood, heightening his panic. Boots appears unharmed but distressed, leading him to discover Lizzie, his other sister, in the midst of a severe panic attack. Gregor quickly shifts focus to calming her, recognizing the signs from past experiences. Lizzie’s presence in the Underland is shocking, as even the thought of it usually triggers her anxiety.

Lizzie’s panic attack is intense, leaving her trembling and struggling to breathe. Gregor learns she was brought to the Underland by the bat Hermes, who was injured in a gnawer ambush. The other creatures, sensing her distress, keep their distance while Nerissa attempts to help. Lizzie reveals their family crisis: their grandmother is hospitalized, and their father has fallen ill again, leaving her overwhelmed. Gregor realizes his father’s letters may have hidden the truth to protect him. The urgency in Lizzie’s plea for him to return home underscores the gravity of the situation.

Gregor comforts Lizzie, using a paper bag to regulate her breathing and rubbing her back to ease tension. Boots, though usually carefree, is visibly concerned and assists by fetching Lizzie’s backpack. The Underlanders discreetly clean up after Lizzie vomits, maintaining a quiet presence to avoid worsening her anxiety. Ripred unexpectedly enters and adopts an uncharacteristically gentle demeanor, engaging Lizzie in math problems to distract her. His kindness surprises Gregor, who notes the rat’s unusual tenderness toward Lizzie, contrasting with his usual brusqueness.

The chapter highlights Gregor’s dual burdens—his responsibilities in the Underland and the crisis at home—while emphasizing Lizzie’s vulnerability and resilience. Ripred’s unexpected support adds a layer of complexity to his character, suggesting a deeper

connection to Lizzie. The scene underscores themes of family loyalty and the toll of stress, as Gregor grapples with how to address both his sister’s immediate needs and the looming threats in the Underland. The chapter ends on a tense yet hopeful note, with Lizzie slowly calming down through the combined efforts of her siblings and Ripred.

Chapter 10

Gregor is shocked when Ripred implies that Lizzie, not Boots, is the princess mentioned in the prophecy. Fearing for her safety, Gregor insists on taking Lizzie home immediately, but Ripred blocks their escape, arguing that the rats are guarding all possible exits. Daedalus supports Ripred, revealing that even the laundry room shaft is now dangerous. Gregor realizes sending Lizzie alone is impossible, but Ripred threatens to imprison him if he tries to leave Regalia. Desperate, Gregor protests that Lizzie isn't the princess, but Ripred counters that her logical mind makes her invaluable to their cause.

Lizzie explains how she solved Ripred's puzzle, deducing that the rat ate the cheese by process of elimination. Her reasoning stuns Gregor, but he remains focused on getting her home. Ripred, however, manipulates Lizzie by asking if she'd stay if her departure meant the Underlanders' doom. Lizzie, distressed, agrees to stay, believing it's her duty. Gregor worries about their sick father, but Ripred promises to send money and instructions to their Overlander ally, Mrs. Cormaci. Nerissa, visibly weakened, confirms Lizzie's role in the prophecy, solidifying her decision.

Ripred, now cheerful, introduces Lizzie to the code-breaking team, assuring her they share her intellectual quirks. His whispered encouragement about their shyness comforts Lizzie, who struggles with social interactions. Gregor reflects on Lizzie's only friend, Jedidiah, another socially awkward child, highlighting her isolation. The code-breakers' relief at her dislike of singing hints at their own peculiarities, making Lizzie feel less alone. Ripred's tactics shift from intimidation to subtle persuasion, exploiting Lizzie's empathy and intellect.

Gregor, though resigned to Lizzie staying, remains uneasy. He eats while plotting alternatives, but Ripred's control over the situation is clear. Lizzie's willingness to help contrasts with Gregor's protectiveness, underscoring their differing priorities. The

chapter ends with Lizzie tentatively engaging with the code team, her shyness momentarily eased by Ripred’s manipulation. Gregor’s frustration lingers, but the focus shifts to Lizzie’s potential role in deciphering the Code of Claw, setting the stage for her integration into the Underland’s struggle.

Chapter 11

Gregor struggles with the weight of his impending mortality, a reality he has tried to avoid but now confronts head-on. Despite his fear, he resolves to keep moving forward, finding solace in the shared resolve of the Regalians, who also face the grim prospects of war. Their collective determination makes him feel less isolated, though it does little to ease his dread. Seeking body armor as instructed by Ripred, Gregor heads to a bustling armory, where the atmosphere reflects the urgency of preparation for battle.

At the armory, Gregor meets Miravet, a skilled armor-maker who quickly assesses his needs. Their interaction is interrupted by Solovet, who insists Gregor be outfitted entirely in black to project an aura of strength and darkness. Miravet disapproves, arguing the attire emphasizes Gregor’s youth, but Solovet overrules her, asserting the psychological impact on their human allies. As Gregor dons the black armor, he wrestles with mixed feelings—apprehensive about appearing villainous yet acknowledging its intimidating power. The tension between Miravet and Solovet reveals their familial relationship, adding depth to their disagreement.

Solovet takes Gregor aside, addressing their strained dynamic and the importance of discipline in war. She questions his ability to follow orders, to which Gregor responds ambiguously, hinting at his moral boundaries. Their conversation underscores the conflict between individual judgment and military hierarchy. Solovet’s pragmatic approach contrasts with Gregor’s internal resistance, setting the stage for their uneasy alliance as they prepare for the impending battle.

The chapter culminates as Solovet and Gregor fly to the front lines, where Regalia’s forces are mobilized. The scene is tense, with humans and bats positioned defensively against the eerily disciplined ranks of rats. The torch-lit cavern reveals the scale of the confrontation, emphasizing the high stakes. Gregor’s perspective highlights the

strategic preparations and the looming clash, leaving readers anticipating the inevitable conflict and his role in it.

Chapter 12

Gregor is furious when Solovet orders him to undergo additional training, seeing it as a humiliating dismissal from battle. Despite his protests and insistence on his combat skills, Solovet and Ripred undermine his confidence, suggesting his past missions were more about supervision than capability. Gregor nearly loses his temper but restrains himself after a subtle warning from Perdita. He realizes their criticism was a test of his self-control, which he barely passed. The exchange leaves him frustrated, feeling his only valued skill is being dismissed.

After leaving the battlefield, Gregor and Ares tend to their wounds at the hospital. Exhausted, Ares departs to rest, leaving Gregor alone with his thoughts. Overwhelmed by the war and his family's precarious situation, he seeks solace with his recovering mother. Though she probes for details about the conflict, Gregor avoids sharing the grim reality, reassuring her instead. Her comforting presence briefly alleviates his stress, but he leaves before emotions overwhelm him, determined to shield her from the truth.

Needing an outlet, Gregor visits Luxa, who is recovering but in better spirits. Their playful banter lightens his mood, especially when she jokes about Solovet's favoritism. Luxa reassures him that Solovet's high standards are universal, not a personal slight. Gregor relaxes, appreciating the camaraderie and the chance to be himself without pretense. Their conversation shifts to Luxa's confinement in the hospital, hinting at the broader control Solovet exerts over their lives.

The chapter highlights Gregor's emotional turmoil as he grapples with doubt, responsibility, and the weight of war. His interactions with Solovet, his mother, and Luxa reveal his struggle to balance anger, duty, and vulnerability. While he finds temporary comfort in loved ones, the underlying tension of the conflict and his prophesied fate linger, underscoring the chapter's themes of resilience and the cost of

leadership.

Chapter 13

Gregor and Ares arrive at a crowded arena turned refugee camp for mice displaced by the Bane’s attacks in the Firelands. The space reeks of sickness and overcrowding, with makeshift stations for food and medical care. Hazard, a young boy, is tasked with reuniting mouse pups with their parents, aided by Gregor’s loud voice to call out names. The emotional scene highlights the chaos and desperation as parents scramble to claim their children, though some pups remain unclaimed, hinting at the tragic toll of the conflict.

Gregor steps in to help Hazard manage the overwhelmed mice, urging order to prevent injuries. He assists in distributing pups, witnessing both joyous reunions and heartbreaking silence when no one claims a pup named Newton. The mice’s patience and grief underscore the devastation wrought by the Bane. Gregor’s frustration and helplessness solidify his resolve to confront the Bane, fueling his determination to train and fight more effectively.

Training with Perdita and Ajax, Gregor learns to wield a dagger alongside his sword, improving his combat skills. Ares also refines his aerial maneuvers under Ajax’s critical guidance. Ripred joins their drills, pushing Gregor and Ares to fight aggressively, leaving both bloodied but better prepared. The session reveals their progress, though Ripred points out lingering weaknesses, such as Gregor’s tendency to favor his sword over the dagger.

The chapter closes with Gregor and Ares exhausted but more skilled, their bond and combat abilities strengthened. A messenger bat summons Ares for another mission, leaving Gregor to reflect on their progress and the looming battle against the Bane. The training and emotional encounters with the mice reinforce Gregor’s motivation to end the conflict, driven by both vengeance and a desire to protect the vulnerable Underlanders.

Chapter 14

In Chapter 14, Gregor encounters a sudden and terrifying threat when massive claws erupt from the ground, nearly striking him. Initially fearing the Bane, he quickly realizes the claws belong to enormous, unfamiliar creatures. These animals, with their dark fur, powerful tails, and rose-colored, tentacle-rimmed blossoms where their noses should be, resemble star-nosed moles but are far larger and more formidable. Gregor recalls a childhood memory of rescuing a small star-nosed mole, which fills him with curiosity rather than fear toward these strange beings.

As the moles continue to emerge, Gregor attempts to communicate with them, but they respond only with wheezing sounds. He realizes they may be unaware of the ongoing war and the danger they're in by tunneling behind human defenses. Concerned for their safety, he tries to shoo them away, warning them of the humans' likely hostile reaction. However, his efforts to protect them backfire when the moles suddenly become enraged, particularly after he mentions the land belongs to the humans.

The situation escalates as the moles attack Gregor with their razor-sharp claws, forcing him into a defensive spin to fend them off. Despite his reluctance to harm them, he struggles to block their relentless assaults, noting the surprising hardness of their claws. A brief moment of hesitation—after he injures one mole's tentacles—nearly costs him dearly as a claw rips into his side. The chapter highlights Gregor's internal conflict between self-preservation and his desire to avoid unnecessary violence.

Throughout the confrontation, Gregor reflects on Vikus's advice about restraint in war, but the moles' aggression leaves him little choice. The chapter ends on a cliffhanger, with Gregor wounded and the battle far from resolved. The encounter underscores themes of misunderstanding, the brutality of war, and the challenges of diplomacy in the face of instinctual hostility.

Chapter 15

Gregor struggles with guilt and moral conflict after killing the moles, realizing they may have been justified in their fight against the humans. Wounded and drugged, he grapples with the idea that he might be on the wrong side of the conflict, unlike his previous battles where he felt morally clear. The weight of his actions leaves him emotionally drained, and he seeks solace in pain medication to numb both physical and emotional pain. His internal turmoil highlights the complexity of war and the blurred lines between right and wrong.

The palace is overrun with wounded soldiers and displaced families as the war intensifies, with rats advancing closer to the city walls. Gregor leaves the crowded hospital to reun with his sisters, Lizzie and Boots, in the code room, where efforts to decipher a critical message continue. The sense of urgency grows, as breaking the code could determine their survival. Gregor’s relief at finding his sisters safe is tempered by the grim reality of their situation and the looming threat of the Bane.

In the code room, Gregor reunites with Luxa, who has recovered from her injuries, and their interaction is warm despite past tensions. The group, including bats and other allies, shares a meal and prepares for rest under Ripred’s orders. Gregor’s bond with Luxa and his sisters provides a fleeting sense of normalcy, but the war’s pressures remain ever-present. Ripred’s brief mention of Gregor’s potential return to the battlefield underscores the ongoing danger.

Gregor attempts to maintain a semblance of routine by tucking his sisters into bed, though he avoids sharing a cheerful story, unable to muster the emotional strength. His exhaustion and worry keep him awake, and he longs for parental guidance in the absence of his incapacitated mother. When he discovers Lizzie missing, likely working on the code, Gregor’s role as the de facto caretaker is reaffirmed, highlighting his burden of responsibility amidst the chaos.

Chapter 16

Gregor wakes up overwhelmed by the weight of impending war, his mind clouded with uncertainty. Ripred clears the room, leaving only the code team, and instructs Gregor and Luxa to meet him at the city wall in half an hour. Sensing the gravity of the situation, Gregor interprets the time as a chance to say goodbye. He leads Luxa to the deserted museum, seeking privacy amidst the chaos of the crowded palace. There, they share a quiet moment, flipping through photos from Hazard's birthday party, their emotions oscillating between laughter and sorrow as they reminisce.

The pair use an instant camera to take pictures together, their playful antics briefly masking the looming dread of war. The final photo captures their unspoken sadness, a silent acknowledgment of their grim reality. Gregor keeps the image, wanting Luxa to remember their happier times. As their half-hour nears its end, they struggle to express their feelings, their words heavy with unspoken love and fear of separation. The urgency of war accelerates their emotions, culminating in a tender kiss, a fleeting moment of connection before duty calls them back.

Their intimate moment is interrupted by Miravet, who arrives to outfit Gregor in his battle armor. She urges Luxa to prepare as well, emphasizing that everyone, including children, may soon fight for survival. Dressed for battle, Gregor and Luxa head to the city wall, where Ripred and Solovet are strategizing. Solovet insists Luxa return to the war room for negotiations, deeming her presence too distracting for Gregor. Despite Luxa's reluctance, she departs with Ajax, leaving Gregor to refocus on the battle ahead.

Gregor struggles to shake thoughts of Luxa as he surveys the battlefield, the weight of their goodbye lingering. Ripred notes her distracting influence but understands the emotional toll of their separation. The chapter ends with Gregor forcing himself to concentrate on the dire situation before him, the war's brutality contrasting sharply

with the tenderness of his final moments with Luxa. Their love, though profound, is overshadowed by the inevitability of conflict and loss.

Chapter 17

The chapter opens with Gregor witnessing the brutal onslaught of rats attacking humans in Regalia. The rats mercilessly slaughter civilians, many of whom are defenseless, while the Regalian army shifts focus from combat to rescue missions. Ares, Gregor's bat ally, saves two children just as their mother is killed, delivering them to the High Hall. Despite his severe injuries, Gregor urges Ares to continue helping others, though he himself is in excruciating pain and unable to call for aid. The chaos around him is overwhelming, with the hall filled with wounded survivors and frantic rescuers.

Gregor, convinced he is dying, reflects on the prophecy linking his fate to the Bane, the giant white rat. He believes both are nearing death, as he suffers from a debilitating back injury and the Bane bleeds profusely from its severed tail. The rats' invasion intensifies, scaling buildings and evading the human army's counterattacks. Gregor's thoughts drift to the nibbler refugees in the arena, their safety uncertain. As his vision blurs and pain clouds his mind, he slips into a haze, barely aware of his surroundings until Howard, a familiar face, arrives to help.

Howard and a doctor work to stabilize Gregor, forcing him to endure agonizing breaths to realign his ribs. The process is torturous, but eventually, his ribs snap back into place, relieving the worst of his pain. The doctor confirms no internal damage, and Howard administers pain relief before bandaging Gregor's wounds. Throughout the ordeal, Gregor's resilience mirrors Ares's stubborn determination, as Howard notes his bravery in severing the Bane's tail despite his injuries. The chapter highlights Gregor's physical suffering and his unwavering sense of responsibility, even as he teeters on the brink of collapse.

The chapter concludes with Gregor stabilized but still concerned about Ares's whereabouts and condition. Howard reassures him that Ares continues rescuing

others, despite his own injuries. Gregor’s relief at his recovery is tempered by the ongoing battle and the unresolved threat of the Bane. The scene underscores the themes of sacrifice and endurance, as Gregor and his allies persevere amid devastation. The ticking clock metaphor emphasizes the urgency of their struggle, leaving readers anticipating the next phase of the conflict.

Chapter 18

The chapter opens with Gregor and Howard hearing the eerie sound of rats scratching on stone surfaces, a tactic reminiscent of Ripred’s earlier ploy to intimidate Gregor’s family. Gregor admits the noise unsettles him, and Howard confesses his own fear, though they rationalize it as psychological warfare since the rats cannot breach the palace. Gregor, recovering from a rib injury, insists on returning to the code room despite the chaos in the High Hall, where wounded Underlanders are strewn about. As he navigates the crowded corridors, he notices the Underlanders’ relief at his survival, realizing rumors of his death have spread.

Upon arriving at the code room, Gregor finds Lizzie distraught and weeping, convinced of her failure to decipher the rats’ code. Ripred reassures her of her value, emphasizing her unique skills as a code-breaker. Boots and the rest of the team are visibly distressed, creating a somber atmosphere. Gregor downplays his injuries to avoid adding to the tension, but Lizzie’s emotional outburst highlights the group’s desperation and the pressure to crack the code. Ripred commits to staying with Lizzie to work on the cipher, prioritizing the mission over the ongoing war.

Luxa joins Gregor, expressing concern for his well-being, and they share a moment of camaraderie, joking about their frequent injuries. Ripred interrupts, urging them to make themselves useful by testing Boots’s ability to interpret the code. Luxa explains how the rats transmit messages through taps, clicks, and scratches, which Temp demonstrates with astonishing speed. Gregor reflects on the complexity of the code, comparing it to Morse code, while Luxa details the Underlanders’ methods of intercepting and recording these messages.

The chapter underscores the psychological toll of the war, with fear and uncertainty permeating the characters’ interactions. Gregor’s resilience and Lizzie’s self-doubt contrast with Ripred’s pragmatic leadership, as the group grapples with the urgency of

decoding the rats’ communications. The scratching sounds serve as a constant reminder of the looming threat, heightening the tension as the characters race against time to uncover the code’s flaw and turn the tide in their favor.

Chapter 19

In Chapter 19, Lizzie and the code team make a breakthrough in deciphering the rats' communication. Lizzie deduces that the code relies on a fixed set of letters—G, O, R, and E—while the rest follow a simple shift cipher. The team tests the system successfully, translating a message about diggers arriving near Regalia. Their success sparks a jubilant celebration among the group, with characters like Reflex, Daedalus, and Heronian expressing their joy in unique ways. Ripred, however, insists on secrecy, warning the team not to reveal their breakthrough to outsiders, as it could compromise their advantage.

Despite the victory, underlying tensions remain. Luxa and Gregor exchange a knowing glance, hinting at the unresolved prophecy of Gregor’s death. Gregor masks his worries to preserve the moment, praising Lizzie and the team for their collective effort. Hazard, eager to share the news with the nibblers, is swiftly shut down by Ripred, who emphasizes the need for discretion. The team shifts focus to decoding fresh messages, uncovering strategic details about alliances and enemy movements, though much of the information is outdated.

Gregor, exhausted and injured, struggles to stay awake but eventually succumbs to sleep. Upon waking, he finds the others resting and quietly tends to his hunger and pain. His thoughts drift to his family—his mother’s care at the Fount, his father’s potential recklessness, and the overwhelming conditions in Regalia’s hospital. Despite his discomfort, Gregor returns to decoding, sifting through old messages until he stumbles upon a heartbreaking revelation about Twitchtip, the outcast rat who once saved him.

The chapter ends on a somber note as Gregor deciphers a message about Twitchtip’s fate, flooding him with memories of their bond. The discovery contrasts sharply with the earlier triumph, underscoring the personal costs of war. Gregor’s emotional turmoil

lingers as he grapples with the past and the uncertain future, leaving readers with a poignant reminder of the stakes at hand.

Chapter 20

In Chapter 20, Ripred takes charge of the code team’s safety as the threat of rat invasion looms. He orders the group to split up: Min, Reflex, and Luxa head to the war room; Lizzie, Daedalus, and Heronian remain to destroy evidence; and Gregor, Hazard, Boots, and Temp are sent to the prophecy room with Nerissa. Gregor protests, wanting to join the fight, but Ripred insists he’s unfit for battle due to his injuries. The group reluctantly follows orders, with Gregor worrying about Lizzie’s exposure to the truth of the "Prophecy of Time." The chapter highlights the tension between duty and personal concern as the characters prepare for imminent danger.

Gregor and his group reach the prophecy room, where Nerissa locks them in for protection. Though the wooden door offers some security, Gregor doubts its effectiveness against a determined attack. With limited defenses—Nerissa’s lack of combat skills, the children’s vulnerability, and Temp’s limited strength—Gregor focuses on recovering his strength. Days pass in isolation, with only distant sounds of conflict hinting at the outside chaos. Gregor grows increasingly restless, but Nerissa insists he wait, emphasizing that this is not his battle yet. Her cryptic faith in a future "Peacemaker" contrasts with Gregor’s frustration and desire for action.

Nerissa tries to distract Gregor by sharing prophecies, particularly "The Peacemaker," a poem she finds comforting. Gregor dismisses it as another vague prediction by Sandwich, the discredited prophet. However, he recalls a past conversation where Solovet and Vikus debated his role as "the warrior," contrasting it with the elusive "peacemaker." This sparks a fleeting curiosity, but Gregor remains focused on the present crisis. He resolves to steal Nerissa’s key to peek outside, convinced he’s recovered enough to defend the group if necessary. The chapter underscores Gregor’s impatience and the claustrophobic tension of their confinement.

As night falls, Gregor seizes his chance when Nerissa and the others sleep. He quietly retrieves the key, determined to assess the situation outside. Just as he’s about to unlock the door, distant shouts and footsteps interrupt him, leaving the outcome unresolved. The chapter ends on a cliffhanger, emphasizing the uncertainty and danger surrounding the characters. Gregor’s internal conflict—between obedience and the urge to act—mirrors the larger themes of fate and free will woven throughout the story.

Chapter 21

In Chapter 21, Luxa is forcibly taken away by guards after Gregor betrays her trust, leaving him heartbroken as she hurls accusations of disloyalty. Despite her anger, Gregor clings to the memory of their bond, symbolized by a photograph he keeps. Solovet justifies his actions as necessary, but her approval offers no comfort, as Gregor despises her ruthless tactics. Vikus attempts to console him, suggesting Luxa's hatred may fade, but Gregor remains resigned to her rejection, focusing instead on the impending mission.

Preparations for departure intensify as Gregor spends his final hour with his sisters, Lizzie and Boots, who are to accompany the group for their strategic value. Ripred assures Gregor of their safety, but the weight of the upcoming battle looms. Gregor undergoes a somber routine—eating, bathing, and dressing in armor—each act feeling like a last ritual. Howard tends to his wounds, and their emotional farewell underscores the gravity of the situation, with Gregor entrusting Luxa's care to him.

The Underlanders conduct funeral rites for the fallen, sending bodies on torch-lit rafts down the river, a poignant contrast to the discarded rat corpses. Gregor learns of the recent battle's brutality from Ares, including the rats' invasion and Cartesian's heroic death defending the nursery. The loss of Cartesian and others highlights the war's toll, leaving Gregor to grapple with the uncertainty of his allies' fates. The chapter's mood grows heavier as the group assembles for departure, with the younger children blindfolded to shield them from the horrors.

As the traveling party prepares to leave, Gregor joins Vikus on Euripedes, while Ares carries Ripred. The chapter closes with a sense of foreboding, emphasizing the finality of their journey and the sacrifices already made. Gregor's internal conflict—between duty, loss, and love—mirrors the broader themes of war and loyalty, setting the stage for the challenges ahead. The Underland's grim reality is laid bare, leaving little room

for hope but underscoring the resilience of its people.

Chapter 22

In Chapter 22, Gregor and the others anxiously await news of the ambush involving Solovet, Marcus, and Horatio. The code team works diligently, while Boots sleeps unaware. Gregor wrestles with mixed feelings about Solovet, recalling her harsh actions but also moments of kindness, such as giving him her dagger. Vikus and Ripred are tense, and Gregor’s guilt over his earlier criticism of Solovet weighs on him. When Heronian confirms their deaths, Ripred remarks on Solovet’s warrior spirit, and Vikus is visibly devastated, his grief compounded by the fraught history between Solovet and their son, Hamnet.

Vikus suffers a stroke upon hearing Hazard’s innocent remark about Solovet’s indifference toward him, triggering memories of family strife. The doctor rushes Vikus away, leaving Gregor fearful of losing his trusted ally. Ripred reassures Hazard that his words weren’t the cause, but the incident underscores the emotional toll of the war. Gregor struggles to process the losses, worrying about Luxa’s reaction and his own unresolved tensions with her. The cave feels emptier without Vikus and Solovet, and Ripred appoints Perdita as the new leader, emphasizing the need for trust in their dire situation.

Gregor’s thoughts turn to Luxa, and he attempts to write her a message using a nearly dried-out marker and his own blood. The act reflects his desperation and unresolved emotions, as he fears this might be his last chance to communicate with her. The chapter highlights the personal costs of war, with characters grappling with grief, guilt, and the fragility of relationships. Gregor’s internal conflict—balancing his resentment of Solovet with recognition of her sacrifices—mirrors the broader tensions in the Underland.

The chapter ends on a somber note, with Gregor’s unfinished message symbolizing the uncertainty of their future. Ripred’s pragmatic shift to battle planning contrasts with

Gregor’s emotional turmoil, underscoring the divergent ways characters cope with loss. The deaths of Solovet and the others, along with Vikus’s stroke, mark a turning point, forcing the survivors to adapt while mourning. Gregor’s focus on Luxa reveals his longing for connection amid the chaos, leaving readers with a sense of impending reckoning.

Chapter 23

In Chapter 23, Gregor is stunned when Ripred reveals his skepticism about the prophecies that govern life in the Underland. The rat explains that he only pretends to believe in them to manipulate others, as the prophecies are vague enough to fit almost any event. Ripred argues that people interpret them to justify their actions, citing the plague and the starshade incident as examples. Gregor struggles to reconcile this with his own experiences, but Ripred insists that prophecies are tools, not truths, and that their power lies in people’s willingness to follow them.

Ripred challenges Gregor’s belief in his own inevitable death, suggesting that Sandwich’s prophecies may be mere coincidence or manipulation. He points out how easily they adapted the Prophecy of Time to replace Boots with Lizzie, emphasizing that outcomes are shaped by choices, not fate. Gregor is torn, recalling Nerissa’s accurate prediction about Hamnet, but Ripred dismisses it as a rare coincidence. The rat urges Gregor to fight the Bane not because of prophecy but because it’s the right thing to do, instilling in him a newfound hope for survival.

Gregor reflects on Ripred’s words, realizing his own disdain for Sandwich and the prophecies. He embraces the idea that his actions are his own, not dictated by Sandwich’s words. This shift in perspective lifts his spirits, and he reconnects with his playful side, teasing Boots and sharing a heartfelt moment with his sisters before parting. He gifts Lizzie a chessboard and Boots cookies, symbolizing his renewed determination to live beyond the prophecy’s grim expectations.

As Gregor and Ares prepare for battle, Ripred reminds Gregor to stay hidden until the Bane appears. Gregor practices his echolocation skills, feeling more confident in his abilities. The chapter ends with them arriving at the Plain of Tartarus, where Gregor’s newfound resolve and clarity of purpose set the stage for the impending confrontation. His journey from despair to hope underscores the chapter’s central theme: agency

over destiny.

Chapter 24

Gregor mounts Ares in a desperate rush to save his sisters, Boots and Lizzie, from an impending rat attack. Ignoring Ripred’s advice to stay hidden, he reveals himself, shocking the enemy rats. Despite his urgency, Gregor realizes they might not reach the girls in time. His fears escalate until he spots Ripred scaling the cavern wall to aid Nike, who is defending the sisters. Gregor and Ares join the battle, with Gregor unleashing his rage, fighting ruthlessly to protect his family. The chaos intensifies as the rats swarm, but Ripred’s arrival offers a glimmer of hope.

During the fight, Gregor’s focus is shattered when Ares alerts him to the Bane’s sudden appearance. The white rat, now visibly deranged and scarred from their last encounter, attacks with reckless fury. Gregor recognizes the Bane’s deteriorated state—his missing tail affecting his balance and his eyes reflecting madness. Ares maneuvers to draw the Bane away from the battle, seeking a more open space to fight. Gregor reluctantly agrees, trusting others to protect his sisters, and prepares to face the Bane alone in a decisive confrontation.

Ares leads the Bane through a series of tunnels and caverns, exhausting the enraged rat. They eventually reach a secluded plateau, where Gregor plans to fight the Bane one-on-one. The Bane, now weakened and bleeding, arrives, but their duel is interrupted by Twirltongue, the manipulative rat who has groomed the Bane into a weapon. Gregor, seething with hatred for her role in the violence, taunts her for staying safe while the Bane suffers. His words sow distrust between the Bane and Twirltongue, exposing her scheming nature.

The chapter climaxes as Gregor exploits the Bane’s paranoia, accusing Twirltongue of betraying him. The Bane, already unhinged, turns on her, questioning her loyalty. Twirltongue tries to placate him with flattery, but the Bane’s rage is uncontrollable. The tension between them escalates, leaving Gregor poised to capitalize on their

discord. The scene sets the stage for a brutal showdown, with Gregor determined to end the Bane’s reign of terror and Twirltongue’s manipulations once and for all.

Chapter 25

Gregor awakens in a hospital, disoriented and in pain, after believing he had died in the cave. He is greeted by his younger sister, Boots, who accidentally showers him with cookie crumbs, and his father, whose presence surprises him. Confused and weak, Gregor struggles to move and comprehends that he was rescued from the Dead Land. Howard, a friend, explains that the fireflies Photos Glow-Glow and Zap saved him, motivated by their love of cake. Gregor laughs at the absurdity, though it pains him, and learns he has been unconscious for two weeks.

Howard reveals that Gregor’s hand is still clenched around Ares’s claw, a grim reminder of his bat’s sacrifice. Overwhelmed by grief, Gregor replays Ares’s final moments in his mind, unable to respond to Howard’s questions. His father comforts him, assuring him that things will eventually be okay. As Gregor drifts back into sleep, he is haunted by memories of the battle and Ares’s death, but his father’s voice offers a glimmer of hope amid the darkness.

When Gregor wakes again, Mareth updates him on recent events. The Bane’s death and the cracked Code of Claw led to the collapse of the rat forces, ensuring victory for the humans and their allies. Vikus is recovering, though impaired, and Luxa is stepping into leadership. Gregor’s mother is also improving and will soon join them. Mareth lists the survivors, including Luxa, Hazard, and others, but the news takes a dark turn when he reveals Ripred’s fate.

Mareth explains that Ripred died defending the group, overpowered by flesh-eating mites in a tunnel. Despite Gregor’s disbelief, Mareth describes the evidence of Ripred’s final struggle. Gregor recalls Ripred’s earlier words about ragers being outnumbered, realizing the inevitability of his death. The chapter ends with Gregor grappling with the loss of Ripred, a mentor and ally, as he faces the long road to physical and emotional recovery.

Chapter 26

The chapter opens with Ripred’s dramatic return, shocking the crowd who believed him dead. Lizzie’s joyful reaction contrasts with Luxa’s icy skepticism as Ripred declares his intent to represent the gnawers in post-war negotiations. The rats, initially hesitant, rally behind him after Lapblood’s endorsement, signaling a shift in alliances. Ripred’s cunning and strategic positioning suggest he has long planned this moment, challenging Luxa’s authority and setting the stage for a tense confrontation over the future of the Underland.

Nerissa’s revelation that Ripred bears the “X” scar described in the prophecy adds a layer of mythic significance, framing him as the prophesied peacemaker. The crowd erupts in debate, but Luxa remains unmoved, dismissing the idea. Ripred, ever the opportunist, plays along with the prophecy while subtly mocking its inevitability. Gregor, observing Ripred’s smirk, suspects the rat may have engineered the scar himself to manipulate the narrative, highlighting the tension between destiny and calculated action.

The conflict escalates when Luxa demands the gnawers relocate to the Uncharted Lands, a proposal Ripred vehemently rejects. Their exchange grows hostile, with threats of renewed war and Ripred questioning Luxa’s reliance on Gregor. The tension peaks as both turn to Gregor, forcing him to choose sides. Overwhelmed by their disregard for the sacrifices made during the war, Gregor’s rage erupts. He breaks Sandwich’s sword, symbolically rejecting his role as the warrior and condemning their willingness to return to violence.

Gregor’s act of defiance stuns the crowd, and Nerissa declares the prophecy fulfilled. Ripred, ever pragmatic, acknowledges Gregor’s point and shifts the focus to the looming threat of the cutters. The chapter ends with an unresolved tension, leaving the future of the Underland hanging in the balance as characters grapple with the

consequences of their choices and the weight of prophecy.

Chapter 27

The chapter opens with Gregor and his family returning to their New York City apartment late at night after an unexplained absence. Exhausted, they navigate a broken elevator and take the stairs, with Gregor noticing how small and cramped their home feels. His parents reveal that his grandmother is hospitalized due to heart issues, a fact his mother had been unaware of until then. Gregor falls asleep to the familiar sounds of the city but is soon tormented by a vivid nightmare of being hunted by rats in the Underland, culminating in a terrifying fall onto sharp rocks—a recurring dream that resurfaces after the loss of his bond with Ares.

Upon waking, Gregor is disoriented, unsure of the date or how much time has passed since his last visit home. He examines his scar-covered body, a physical testament to his traumatic experiences in the Underland, and worries about how to explain these injuries in the Overland. The scars, particularly the claw marks from the Bane, feel like permanent reminders of battles he can never fully escape. Dressing in ill-fitting clothes, he leaves the apartment, where his neighbor Mrs. Cormaci greets him with breakfast and practical advice, subtly acknowledging his unspoken struggles.

Over French toast, Mrs. Cormaci updates Gregor on his grandmother’s critical condition and gently probes his emotional state, recognizing the weight of his unshared experiences. She draws parallels to her late husband’s wartime trauma, validating Gregor’s nightmares and offering reassurance. Despite her kindness, Gregor feels isolated in his suffering, convinced that no one can truly understand or help him process the horrors he’s endured. Mrs. Cormaci provides him with old sneakers and notes his need for school clothes, revealing that it’s already mid-October—a stark reminder of how disconnected he is from his old life.

The chapter closes with Gregor babysitting his sisters while his parents and Mrs. Cormaci visit the hospital. His internal turmoil contrasts with the mundane tasks,

highlighting the dissonance between his traumatic past and the ordinary world he must reintegrate into. The scars, nightmares, and lost time underscore his struggle to reconcile his dual identity as both a warrior and a boy, leaving him grappling with a future where his wounds—physical and emotional—may never fully heal.