Gregor and the Marks of Secret

In *Gregor and the Marks of Secret*, Gregor returns to the **Underland** for a mission that begins as a rescue—and spirals into a chilling discovery. When his bond with the Underland's bats deepens, he learns of a sinister plot: the **rats** are systematically exterminating the **mice**, a gentle species crucial to the Underland's balance.

Teaming up with **Luxa**, **Ares**, and **Boots**, Gregor follows cryptic clues—the "marks of secret"—left by the mice, uncovering a trail of genocide that points to the **Bane**, the monstrous white rat prophesied to destroy the Underland. As tensions escalate, Gregor must confront:

- The **moral weight of war**—can he kill the Bane to save thousands?
- **Luxa's growing ruthlessness** as she vows vengeance on the rats.
- His own role in the **Prophecy of Time**, which foretells a final, catastrophic battle.

Darker and more politically charged than previous books, *Marks of Secret* forces Gregor to grapple with **preemptive violence, loyalty, and the cost of survival**.

Chapter 1

Gregor, the protagonist, reflects on his physical scars from past battles in the Underland, a hidden world beneath New York City. The silvery marks, left by giant ants and vines, make him self-conscious, especially in summer when he can't cover them. He reluctantly applies a fish-scented ointment prescribed by Underlander doctors, though he's been inconsistent with it. His neighbor, Mrs. Cormaci, had warned him about drawing unwanted attention to his scars, highlighting his family's need to avoid questions. Despite his discomfort, Gregor finds solace in the thought of escaping to the

Underland, which has ironically become a refuge from his cramped, stressful home life.

Gregor’s family struggles with absence and illness. His mother remains in the Underland, recovering from a plague, while his father and grandmother cope with their own health issues. The apartment feels incomplete without his mom, and Gregor often catches himself searching for her. He rationalizes that the Underland offers her better care, with Regalia’s doctors and comfortable conditions, even though the city is perpetually on the verge of war. The chapter underscores the family’s fractured dynamic and Gregor’s mixed feelings about the Underland—both a place of danger and a sanctuary.

The morning scene shifts to a breakfast prepared by Mrs. Cormaci, who helps care for the family. Gregor’s younger sister, Lizzie, is anxious about leaving for camp, fearing something might happen to her family in her absence. Her panic escalates until their father reassures her. Gregor accidentally exacerbates her distress by referencing her inability to visit their mom in the Underland due to her paralyzing fear. Mrs. Cormaci intervenes, validating Lizzie’s fears while subtly expressing her own aversion to the Underland, which she knows about from Gregor’s confessions.

The chapter reveals that Mrs. Cormaci is aware of the Underland’s existence, having been told the family’s extraordinary secret. Gregor had explained everything—from his father’s disappearance to the giant talking creatures and prophecies labeling him as a warrior. Surprisingly, Mrs. Cormaci believed him, though she was initially stunned when meeting a talking bat. Her acceptance contrasts with the family’s isolation, offering a rare ally in their chaotic lives. The chapter ends with a sense of uneasy normalcy, balancing domestic struggles with the lingering shadow of the Underland’s dangers.

Chapter 2

In Chapter 2, Gregor is shocked by the rapid growth of the Bane, a massive white rat who has transformed from a small pup into a towering figure. Ripred, another rat, mockingly reintroduces Gregor and the Bane, revealing the latter’s original name, Pearlpelt, which reflects his pearl-like white coat. The Bane’s unique appearance marks him as the prophesied figure from the "Prophecy of Bane," a role that carries ominous implications. Tension arises as the Bane expresses frustration over Ripred’s demeaning nicknames, hinting at their strained relationship and the Bane’s growing resentment.

The Bane’s desire for power becomes evident when he declares his intention to become king, unsettling Gregor, who recalls the prophecy warning of the Bane’s destructive potential. Ripred dismisses these ambitions, attributing them to the influence of the Bane’s manipulative friends, particularly Twirltongue. The Bane, however, remains defiant, accusing Ripred of betrayal and weakness for allying with humans and other creatures. Their verbal sparring escalates into a physical confrontation, with the Bane attacking Ripred despite the older rat’s superior combat skills.

The fight reveals the Bane’s reckless bravery—or foolishness—as Ripred easily overpowers him. After being stunned, the Bane collapses into tears, appearing more like a bullied child than a fearsome warrior. Gregor feels sympathy, but Ripred harshly reminds him of the Bane’s violent past, including the accidental killing of his caretaker, Razor, and other brutal acts. The Bane’s emotional breakdown and self-soothing behavior, such as sucking his tail, further undermine his credibility as a future leader.

The chapter ends with the Bane fleeing after a final defiant outburst, leaving Gregor and Ripred in a tense silence. Ripred’s disdain for the Bane’s immaturity and violence contrasts with the Bane’s delusions of grandeur, highlighting the danger he poses.

Gregor is left grappling with conflicting emotions—pity for the Bane’s vulnerability and alarm at his capacity for cruelty. The encounter underscores the prophecy’s looming threat and the fragile dynamics between the characters.

Chapter 3

In Chapter 3, Gregor is confronted by Ripred, who insists that the Bane—a troubled white rat—must be killed. Gregor is shocked, believing the Bane's violent behavior stems from trauma and could be managed with guidance. He recalls the rat's distress after Razor's death and questions whether execution is justified. Ripred, however, argues that the situation is urgent and cites a prophecy, "The Prophecy of Time," which he interprets as requiring Gregor to kill the Bane. Gregor is skeptical, as he's unaware of this prophecy, but Ripred pressures him to comply, warning him not to involve Vikus or the council.

Gregor reluctantly agrees to meet Ripred the next day, though he's uneasy about the plan. He feels manipulated and unsettled by the idea of secretly killing the Bane. As Ripred disappears, Gregor's mind races with conflicting emotions. He returns to Regalia, where his thoughts are interrupted by Howard, who greets him at the hospital. Howard, now training as a doctor, shows Gregor his mother's progress—she's sitting up for the first time since falling ill. Despite her weak state, her humor and determination lift Gregor's spirits, offering a brief respite from his turmoil.

Gregor's mother inquires about his distracted demeanor, sensing his unease. He avoids revealing Ripred's plan, instead updating her on family matters like Lizzie's camp and their home life. Howard's timely return with medicine allows Gregor to escape further questioning. He leaves to find Luxa and Boots, hoping to distract himself from the moral dilemma posed by Ripred. The chapter highlights Gregor's internal conflict between his role as the warrior and his personal ethics, as well as his desire to protect his family from the Underland's harsh realities.

The chapter ends with Gregor seeking solace in his friends, though the weight of Ripred's demand lingers. His mother's recovery and Howard's dedication provide moments of hope, but the looming task of killing the Bane casts a shadow over his

thoughts. The juxtaposition of familial warmth and moral ambiguity underscores Gregor’s struggle to balance duty with compassion, setting the stage for further tension in the story.

Chapter 4

In Chapter 4, Gregor encounters a group of rats led by the silver-furred Twirltongue, who initially appears friendly and charming. The rats, including Gushgore and Reekwell, lounge casually, disarming Gregor with their relaxed demeanor. Twirltongue engages Gregor in conversation, mocking Ripred and sharing humorous anecdotes about his abrasive personality. Gregor, though wary, finds himself laughing along, momentarily lowering his guard as the rats bond over their shared disdain for Ripred’s behavior. The lighthearted exchange masks the rats’ true intentions, lulling Gregor into a false sense of security.

The mood shifts abruptly when Twirltongue signals an attack, revealing her deceit. Gregor, caught off guard, barely evades Reekwell’s lunge as the rats attempt to kill him without leaving traces. Despite his initial panic, Gregor’s combat skills and rager instincts briefly give him an edge. However, when Gushgore destroys his flashlight, plunging him into darkness, Gregor becomes disoriented and vulnerable. The rats exploit his blindness, taunting him with laughter and striking him with their tails, leaving him desperate and helpless.

Gregor’s situation seems hopeless until a lucky blow throws him near the tunnel entrance, where he spots a faint light. Summoning his last strength, he sprints toward the lantern, using it to create a fiery barrier that momentarily halts the rats. Escaping to the palace, he barricades himself behind the stone door, trembling from the close call. The chapter ends with Gregor reflecting on the encounter, realizing the gravity of Ripred’s warnings about the rats’ treachery and his own reliance on light in the Underland.

The chapter highlights themes of deception and survival, showcasing Gregor’s resilience while underscoring the dangers of underestimating his enemies. Twirltongue’s manipulative charm contrasts sharply with her ruthlessness, reinforcing

the unpredictability of alliances in the Underland. Gregor’s narrow escape serves as a pivotal moment, deepening his understanding of the stakes and his dependence on Ripred’s guidance, even as he questions the rat’s motives.

Chapter 5

Gregor grows increasingly concerned about Ripred’s prolonged silence after their mission to kill the Bane. Despite his daily visits to the Underland, there’s no news, leaving him to wonder if the rat is in trouble or has simply moved on. Vikus shares Gregor’s unease, admitting Ripred’s behavior is out of character. Gregor refrains from confiding in Vikus, both to honor Ripred’s advice and to avoid adding to the old man’s burdens, as Solovet faces mounting pressure to stand trial for her role in the plague’s devastating toll.

Meanwhile, Gregor tries to focus on the positives of his summer, like his mother’s improving health and Lizzie’s enjoyment of camp. He also finds joy in Underland activities—swimming, exploring, and attending parties—when not embroiled in danger. The chapter shifts to a lighter tone when Hazard excitedly invites Gregor and Boots to his seventh birthday party. Gregor decides to gift Hazard an Overland toy, a sound-making disc featuring animal noises, knowing the boy’s talent for mimicry will make it a hit.

Gregor and Boots visit a toy store to purchase Hazard’s gift, and Boots is enchanted by a princess dress-up set, which she insists on wearing immediately. Mrs. Cormaci lends Gregor an instant camera to capture the celebration. The party, held in the arena, is lavishly decorated with colorful fabrics, food, and a grand cake. Hazard is thrilled by his gifts, especially Gregor’s toy, while Boots dazzles the cockroaches with her princess attire. Gregor’s mother, now out of the hospital, attends and shares a heartwarming moment with him.

The celebration culminates in dancing, with Underlanders performing a traditional dance called “Bat, Bat.” Gregor recognizes the song from his childhood, realizing it’s a centuries-old nursery rhyme shared between the Overland and Underland. The chapter ends on a nostalgic note, highlighting the cultural connections between the two worlds

and the fleeting moments of joy amidst the underlying tensions.

Chapter 6

In Chapter 6, Luxa’s crown is unexpectedly returned by a messenger bat named Hermes, signaling a potential crisis among the nibblers (mice). Gregor recalls that Luxa had given the crown to the mice as a pledge of aid, and its return suggests they are in trouble. Luxa insists on secrecy, urging Gregor not to reveal the crown’s significance to others, including Hazard and Nike. Her anxious behavior and private conversation with Gregor hint at a deeper concern, though she postpones explaining until after Hazard’s birthday celebrations, leaving Gregor confused and suspicious.

As the chapter progresses, Gregor notices subtle coordination between Luxa, Aurora, and Ares, indicating a plan is forming. Despite his attempts to question Luxa and Ares, he receives vague responses, deepening his unease. Luxa’s suggestion for Gregor and Boots to stay overnight in Regalia further suggests she is preparing for action. Gregor’s mother agrees, unaware of the underlying tension. Throughout the evening, Luxa avoids Gregor, heightening his frustration and curiosity about the impending mission.

Later, Luxa finally confides in Gregor, Ares, and Aurora, revealing that the nibblers face a serious threat, but the council cannot be trusted to act swiftly or without restricting Luxa’s movements. The group decides to investigate independently, planning a secret flight to Queenshead to meet the nibbler who returned the crown. Gregor wrestles with the risks—defying his mother and the council—but feels compelled to support his friends and bond, Ares. Luxa assures him the journey will be brief and unnoticed, though Gregor remains wary.

The chapter concludes with the group preparing for their clandestine mission. They arm themselves and navigate the palace’s hidden passages, using a disused nursery as their exit point. The eerie atmosphere of the nursery, adorned with unsettling carvings, adds to the tension as they prepare to depart. Gregor’s internal

conflict—weighing loyalty against responsibility—underscores the chapter’s themes of trust and duty, setting the stage for their dangerous journey to aid the nibblers.

Chapter 7

The chapter opens with Luxa discovering the lifeless body of Cevian, a mouse who had saved her and Aurora during a perilous journey in the jungle. Aurora recounts Cevian's kindness, emphasizing how the mouse comforted her during her pain and instilled hope. Luxa's grief is palpable, as Cevian was one of the few beings she truly trusted, a rare honor given her guarded nature. The group mourns briefly, but Luxa quickly shifts focus, insisting they must investigate Cevian's death and the looming threat to the nibblers, the Underland's mice.

Gregor is taken aback by Luxa's abrupt decision to venture into the jungle immediately. Aurora delivers an uncharacteristically forceful speech about avenging Cevian, revealing her deep bond with the mouse. Luxa, however, dismisses Gregor's concerns and insults his courage, provoking him. Despite their tension, Gregor and Ares secretly agree to follow Luxa and Aurora, though they take a moment to conceal Cevian's body respectfully. Before leaving, Gregor notices a mysterious mark scratched into the ground, possibly a clue to Cevian's killer.

The mark, resembling an incomplete letter, sparks speculation about whether Cevian was identifying her attacker. Gregor and Ares consider the possibility of Ripred or the Bane being involved, adding urgency to their mission. After a brief delay to maintain appearances, they fly after Luxa and Aurora, catching up to them as they reach the jungle's oppressive, dangerous environment. The group's arrival is met with silence from the nibblers, heightening the sense of unease.

Luxa cautiously calls out to the mice, but no one responds, prompting her to suggest checking nearby caves. The chapter ends on a suspenseful note, with the jungle's inherent dangers and the mystery of Cevian's death looming large. The tension between Luxa and Gregor persists, but their shared goal—uncovering the truth—forces them to press forward despite their differences. The stage is set for a perilous

exploration into the heart of the jungle.

Chapter 8

In Chapter 8, Gregor, Luxa, Ares, and Aurora find themselves under attack by a swarm of snakes in the jungle canopy. The snakes, ranging from pencil-thin to baseball-bat-thick, blend seamlessly with the vines, making them difficult to distinguish. Gregor and Luxa fight desperately to defend their position on a flat rock, using swords and torches to decapitate the snakes. Despite their efforts, the snakes continue to advance, forcing the group to retreat to a nearby cave for better defense. The situation grows dire as the snakes close in, and Gregor realizes their current strategy is unsustainable.

Gregor taps into his "rager" abilities, embracing the adrenaline and heightened senses to fight more effectively. Unlike previous battles, he maintains awareness of his actions, feeling more in control. However, the bats, Ares and Aurora, are helpless in the confined space, unable to fly or fight. As the snakes overwhelm them, Gregor recalls Ripred’s spinning combat technique and decides to emulate it. He spins rapidly with his sword and torch, creating a deadly blur that decimates the snakes. The tactic works, but it leaves him disoriented and nauseated, forcing Luxa to intervene to stop him.

After the battle, the group escapes to a tunnel, where Gregor recovers from his dizziness. Luxa, Ares, and Aurora express unease about his behavior during the fight, noting his altered demeanor and inhuman sounds. Luxa cautiously suggests that Gregor seemed to enjoy the violence, a claim he vehemently denies. The others, however, confirm that he smiled during the combat, unsettling Gregor. He reflects on his actions, questioning whether his excitement stemmed from survival or something darker, like an inherent pleasure in battle.

The chapter ends with Gregor grappling with the implications of his rager instincts. While he rationalizes his behavior as strategic—inspired by Ripred—he is disturbed by the possibility that he might have taken pleasure in the violence. The group’s silent

journey home underscores the tension, leaving Gregor to ponder his identity and the moral complexities of his abilities. The encounter raises questions about the nature of rage and the fine line between survival and savagery.

Chapter 9

In Chapter 9, a basket containing six unusually large, frightened mouse pups is discovered in the river by the Underlanders. The mice, described as pink with gray fuzz, are initially cared for by Boots and Hazard, who feed them bread and communicate with them through squeaks. The Underlanders, particularly Vikus and Mareth, express concern over the basket's origin, recognizing it as one used to send gifts to the nibblers near the Fount. The mice's survival is deemed miraculous given the river's violent currents, prompting questions about why their mother would place them in such peril. Hazard reveals the mother acted out of fear, though the exact threat remains unclear.

The mice are moved to the old nursery, where Dulcet, the nanny, creates a safe nest for them. She comforts the pups with food and lullabies, while Boots and Hazard join in, forming a peaceful scene. Meanwhile, Luxa confides in Gregor, urging him to investigate the nibbler colony near the Fount, suspecting a dire threat. Gregor resists, but Luxa draws a parallel to his own actions in the jungle, where he sent Boots away to safety. This comparison forces Gregor to acknowledge the mother's desperation, and he reluctantly agrees to accompany Luxa. The chapter underscores the growing tension and mystery surrounding the nibblers' plight.

Preparations for the journey begin, with Luxa and Gregor planning to leave the next morning under the guise of a picnic. Gregor gathers supplies, including flashlights, batteries, and binoculars, while Luxa arranges for their departure. The chapter highlights the characters' exhaustion and emotional strain, particularly Luxa, whose reddened eyes hint at her grief over recent events. The urgency of their mission is tempered by logistical challenges, such as ensuring their bats, Aurora and Ares, are rested and finding a legitimate route to avoid suspicion.

The chapter closes with a sense of foreboding as Gregor and Luxa set out to uncover the truth behind the mice’s abandonment. The discovery of the basket and the mice’s fearful state suggest a larger crisis affecting the nibblers, possibly endangering their entire species. Luxa’s determination and Gregor’s reluctant involvement set the stage for a perilous journey, with the fate of the nibblers hanging in the balance. The emotional weight of recent losses and the unknown dangers ahead create a tense atmosphere, leaving readers anticipating the next steps in their quest.

Chapter 10

In Chapter 10, Hazard remains deeply unsettled after encountering a scythe symbol in the cave, which symbolizes death in the Underland. Despite Luxa and Howard's attempts to comfort him, Hazard associates the mark with past trauma, including his mother's death from a deadly insect swarm. Gregor, unfamiliar with such symbols, learns from Howard that the scythe represents death in Overland lore. The group's efforts to lighten the mood with a picnic are overshadowed by the eerie atmosphere of the abandoned mouse colony and the lingering sense of danger.

The conversation shifts to the mysterious threats facing the nibblers (mice), as Luxa and Howard speculate about the reasons behind their abandoned colonies. Hazard shares that twisters (snake-like creatures) and nibblers typically avoid each other, suggesting the twisters only moved in after the nibblers fled. Howard hints that the rats, known enemies of the nibblers, may be responsible, though evidence is lacking. The group grapples with the urgency of the situation, fearing it may already be too late to help the nibblers, as Temp the cockroach ominously suggests.

Gregor struggles with the weight of these revelations, especially after seeing a basket of dead baby mice, which haunts him. Luxa expresses frustration that their findings—such as the scythe marks and abandoned colonies—won’t be enough to convince the Regalian council to act. She believes a grave injustice is unfolding but acknowledges the lack of concrete proof. Howard and Gregor worry about being confined or sent home upon their return, limiting their ability to investigate further.

The chapter ends on a somber note, with the group resigned to the likelihood of being separated and unable to aid the nibblers. Gregor reflects on Temp’s warning that it may be "too late for the doing," fearing the worst for the nibblers. Luxa’s determination to find more evidence clashes with the reality of their constrained circumstances, leaving them in a tense and uncertain position as they prepare to

return to Regalia.

Chapter 11

In Chapter 11, Gregor and his companions face a life-threatening crisis as an earthquake strikes while they are flying through the tunnels on their bats. Ares, Nike, and Aurora manage to stay airborne, but Thalia, carrying Hazard, is thrown off balance. Hazard refuses to leave Thalia, insisting they are bonded, but Howard intervenes, rescuing Hazard as Thalia struggles to fly. The chaos intensifies as the tunnel collapses, rocks fall, and water begins flooding in. Gregor realizes they left Temp behind, but the cockroach miraculously clings to Ares. The group races toward the tunnel exit, but the rising water and collapsing structure put them in grave danger.

As the tunnel collapses further, a powerful wave of water engulfs the group, tearing Boots from Gregor’s arms and separating everyone. Gregor is tossed violently in the water, nearly drowning before being rescued by a bat. He regains consciousness on a stone outcropping alongside Howard, Luxa, and Aurora, but the others are missing. Panic sets in as Gregor and Luxa desperately search for Boots and Hazard. Ares rescues Thalia and Hazard, but Hazard appears lifeless, with Howard frantically attempting to revive him. Luxa is distraught, and Gregor struggles to restrain her while grappling with his own fear for Boots.

Gregor and Ares continue searching the flooded area, their hope fading until Gregor hears Boots’ faint cries. Her waterproof princess scepter provides a tiny beacon of light, leading them to her. She is alive but traumatized, clinging to Temp in a small pool. Gregor rescues her, though she angrily blames him for letting go during the chaos. Temp is also saved, though not without difficulty. Meanwhile, Howard’s efforts to revive Hazard are interrupted by another aftershock, leaving the group uncertain of their next move. The instability of the environment leaves them with no clear escape route.

The chapter ends on a tense note as the group remains trapped in the unstable cavern, with Hazard’s survival still uncertain and the threat of further collapses looming. Gregor reflects on the fragility of their situation, realizing there is nowhere safe to run. The emotional and physical toll of the disaster weighs heavily on the characters, highlighting their vulnerability and the strength of their bonds. The chapter masterfully blends action, suspense, and emotional depth, leaving readers anxious for the next developments in their harrowing journey.

Chapter 12

The chapter opens with the group recovering from an avalanche that sends waves crashing into their refuge, leaving everyone drenched. Howard focuses on reviving Hazard, who nearly drowns, while the others watch anxiously. Luxa, initially resigned to Hazard's fate, springs to life when Howard successfully restarts the boy's heart. Hazard vomits water, and Howard tends to him with a first-aid kit, stitching a head wound and administering pain relief. The group, though shaken, finds momentary relief in Hazard's recovery, and Howard lightens the mood with humor, prompting laughter from everyone.

With the immediate danger over, the group confronts their larger predicament: the avalanche has blocked their only known exit, the Swag, trapping them in Hades Hall. Howard explains that the only other way out is through the Firelands, a journey of five days. Gregor worries about the lack of light, as their flashlights won't last the entire trip, and Hazard expresses fear of the dark. Howard insists they rest and recover before moving, especially for Hazard's sake, though no one feels like eating due to the river water's effects on their stomachs.

Luxa takes the first watch, overwhelmed by concern for Hazard and the missing mice. Gregor joins her, recognizing her emotional strain and reflecting on how loving someone makes one vulnerable. As the others sleep, Gregor reviews their dire situation: his family will panic when he and Boots don't return, and their unauthorized trip has led them into a dangerous, inescapable tunnel. He hopes Regalia might deduce their whereabouts from the river's altered flow, but Luxa doubts it, noting the flood could erase all traces of their presence.

The chapter highlights the group's resilience amid disaster, their camaraderie, and the looming challenge of navigating Hades Hall. Gregor's guilt and worry for his family underscore the stakes, while Luxa's emotional vulnerability adds depth to her

character. The chapter ends on an uncertain note, emphasizing the perilous journey ahead and the group’s reliance on each other to survive.

Chapter 13

In Chapter 13, Gregor and his companions are shocked to encounter the fireflies—Zap and Photos Glow-Glow—in Hades Hall, given their past betrayal. Howard reacts with fury, drawing his sword and demanding they show themselves, while Gregor remains indifferent, doubting the fireflies' threat. The fireflies, however, play the victims, claiming they were wronged by the humans for not receiving promised food. Luxa intervenes, recognizing their potential usefulness as a light source, and cleverly lures them with cake, diffusing the tension despite the group's lingering resentment.

Luxa's diplomatic approach highlights her strategic thinking, as she prioritizes survival over vengeance. The fireflies, enticed by the offer of frosted cake, reveal themselves, illuminating the surroundings and exposing details Gregor had missed in the darkness. This moment underscores the group's vulnerability and the fireflies' value, even as their laziness and ineptitude remain apparent. Luxa's actions mirror Ripred's pragmatic style, earning Gregor's admiration for her shrewdness in a dire situation.

The fireflies explain they were driven from their homeland by snails—a fact Howard mocks, further straining their already contentious relationship. Despite their comical incompetence, Luxa proposes an alliance, emphasizing their knowledge of Hades Hall. Howard and Nike reluctantly acquiesce, though they remain skeptical of the fireflies' trustworthiness. The chapter delves into the fireflies' perspective, revealing their grievances, but their credibility is undermined by their petty squabbles and blatant self-interest.

Ultimately, the fireflies agree to accompany the group, motivated by the promise of food and lack of better options. Their exaggerated sense of importance adds a layer of humor, as they pretend to juggle nonexistent commitments. The chapter balances tension and levity, showcasing Luxa's leadership and the group's adaptability while reinforcing the fireflies' role as unreliable yet temporarily indispensable allies. The

dynamic sets the stage for further challenges in their treacherous journey through the Underland.

Chapter 14

In Chapter 14, Gregor and his companions stumble upon a grim scene in the Underland: a graveyard of dead mice, their bodies strewn across the tunnel floor. Boots innocently mistakes them for sleeping, prompting Gregor to quickly dim the fireflies' light to shield her and Hazard from the horrific sight. The group lands further ahead, leaving Howard to care for the younger ones while Gregor, Luxa, and Zap return to investigate. The stench of decay is overwhelming, and they discover the mice were driven off a cliff, likely by rats, with no survivors initially apparent. The brutality of the scene leaves even the usually indifferent Zap disturbed.

Luxa and Gregor debate how to honor the dead, but practical constraints—lack of resources and time—prevent proper burial or cremation. Instead, they carve a symbolic mark, the scythe of secret, into the cliff as a warning and memorial. Luxa then delivers a solemn vow of vengeance, her formal oath highlighting her role as Regalia's future queen and her deep connection to the Underland's conflicts. Gregor feels both moved and alienated by her intensity, recognizing the cultural divide between them. The oath reverberates through the tunnel, drawing unseen creatures' attention, and Luxa's enigmatic smile hints at her awareness of their audience.

Their search reveals one surviving mouse, Cartesian, whom they rush to Howard for treatment. Luxa stays behind to ensure no other mice are alive, while Gregor and Ares assist. Howard tends to Cartesian's injuries, setting broken bones and administering medicine. Boots, eager to help, sings soothing songs to comfort the wounded mouse, blending tunes from their home world with Underland melodies. The chapter underscores the group's resilience and compassion amid tragedy, as well as the growing tension between Luxa's duty and Gregor's outsider perspective.

The chapter closes with Gregor struggling to wash away the lingering smell of death, haunted by the images of the fallen mice. The encounter leaves a lasting impact,

foreshadowing future conflicts and Luxa's unwavering commitment to justice. The blend of horror, duty, and fleeting hope encapsulates the Underland's harsh realities, while the characters' responses reveal their evolving roles in the unfolding crisis. The chapter sets the stage for deeper exploration of vengeance, loyalty, and the cost of leadership in a war-torn world.

Chapter 15

The chapter opens with Gregor reflecting on the quiet, decisive moments that spark wars, contrasting it with the dramatic battles he imagined. Luxa, frustrated by the rats' oppression of the nibblers, declares war, while Gregor urges caution, though he lacks an alternative solution. Their argument highlights the tension between impulsive action and measured response, with Luxa mocking Gregor's inability to propose a viable plan. The exchange underscores the ease with which conflict begins and the difficulty of reversing course once set in motion.

Gregor grapples with the complexity of the rats' fractured society, questioning who Luxa's declaration truly targets. With no unified leadership among the rats, he wonders if innocent rats will be caught in the crossfire. Memories of Hamnet, Hazard's pacifist father, surface, reminding Gregor of the futility and collateral damage of war. Hamnet's philosophy of minimal violence resonates with Gregor, but he struggles to articulate this to Luxa, especially given his own violent past. The weight of these contradictions leaves him feeling powerless and conflicted.

The group's practical struggles mirror their moral dilemmas. Scarce food supplies force tough choices, with Gregor and Howard prioritizing the children. Luxa's sharp criticism of Howard's shellfish offering sparks petty defiance from Gregor, revealing lingering resentment. Meanwhile, Cartesian's delirium and Hazard's injuries complicate their journey, turning the bats into makeshift ambulances. These logistical challenges underscore the broader theme of survival amid chaos, where even small decisions carry weight.

As they prepare to depart, the chapter closes with a sense of unresolved tension. Gregor's internal conflict—between Hamnet's wisdom and the urgency of action—remains unresolved. Luxa's determination contrasts with his hesitation, while the group's physical and emotional burdens grow. The final image of Boots insisting on

her minor injury adds a touch of innocence, highlighting the stark contrast between childhood simplicity and the grim realities of war. The chapter leaves the reader questioning whether diplomacy or force will prevail.

Chapter 16

In Chapter 16, Gregor and his companions, including Aurora, Ares, Nike, Howard, Luxa, and Boots, take refuge in a shallow cave to avoid detection by a horde of rats. The group remains hidden as the Bane, a massive white rat, addresses the gathered rats. The Bane’s commanding voice draws more rats to the assembly, and he begins a speech aimed at rallying them. He acknowledges their past dominance and recent struggles, blaming their decline on humans and other creatures. His words are calculated to stir resentment, and the rats respond with growing agitation.

The Bane’s speech takes a darker turn as he shifts focus to the nibblers, accusing them of being the true architects of the rats’ suffering. He claims the nibblers orchestrated the plague that devastated the rat population while ensuring their own safety. This theory, seemingly new to the rats, sparks outrage and calls for vengeance. The Bane’s rhetoric is persuasive, blending half-truths with inflammatory accusations to paint the nibblers as irredeemable enemies. The rats, whipped into a frenzy, begin chanting for action, their anger directed toward the nibblers.

As the Bane continues, he invokes the law of nature, asserting the rats’ right to dominate the weak. He urges them to harness their hatred for strength, targeting not just the nibblers but also humans and other creatures. The speech crescendos with the Bane’s battle cry, and the rats erupt in violent enthusiasm. Gregor, observing from hiding, realizes the Bane’s words have been carefully crafted, likely with Twirltongue’s influence, to manipulate the rats into unquestioning loyalty and brutality.

The chapter ends with Gregor and his companions shaken by the Bane’s speech and its impact on the rats. Howard and Luxa express disbelief at the Bane’s accusations, while Ares admits the logic was compelling. Aurora voices concern about the Bane’s ominous threat to drive the nibblers to a point of no return. Gregor, recognizing the danger of the Bane’s growing influence, is left to grapple with the consequences of the

rats’ escalating hostility and the looming threat to the Underland’s fragile peace.

Chapter 17

In Chapter 17, Gregor and his companions face a life-threatening encounter with two enormous scorpions in the Underland. The creatures, measuring ten and twelve feet long, wield deadly stingers and pinchers, forcing the group to evade their attacks. Gregor struggles to defend himself while holding his curious younger sister, Boots, who mistakes the scorpions for spiders. The bats maneuver frantically to avoid the scorpions' tails, but the situation grows dire as Howard and Luxa are unable to mount an effective counterattack due to their precarious positions and the need to protect others.

Boots’ innocent fascination with the scorpions adds tension when she spots baby scorpions on the smaller creature’s back, revealing the scorpion is a protective mother. Her attempt to sing "Itsy-Bitsy Spider" leads to disaster as she loses her grip and falls from the bat’s back. Ares rescues her, but the commotion causes Thalia and Temp to tumble to the ground. The mother scorpion swiftly pins Thalia, poised to kill her with its stinger. Hazard leaps to Thalia’s defense, pleading for the others not to attack and attempting to communicate with the scorpion using hissing sounds.

Hazard’s efforts to negotiate with the scorpion create a momentary standstill. Recognizing the scorpion’s confusion, Gregor suggests trying Spider language, and Hazard switches to drumming and vibrating sounds. Temp joins in with Cockroach speech, while Boots eagerly contributes her own mix of clicks and English. The scorpion hesitates, seemingly baffled by the barrage of communication attempts. Boots’ energetic babbling becomes the focal point, as her innocence and persistence might hold the key to diffusing the confrontation.

The chapter highlights the group’s desperation and ingenuity in the face of overwhelming danger. Hazard’s bravery and linguistic skills, combined with Boots’ unintentional diplomacy, offer a glimmer of hope. The scene underscores the theme of

communication as a tool for survival, even among seemingly hostile creatures. The outcome remains uncertain, but the characters’ willingness to explore nonviolent solutions reflects their growth and adaptability in the Underland’s perilous environment.

Chapter 18

In Chapter 18, Gregor and his companions grapple with the unsettling revelation that humans in the Underland are universally referred to as "killers" by other creatures. Hazard explains that names in the Underland are based on actions, such as "fliers" for bats and "stingers" for scorpions, and humans are no exception. Luxa and Howard express discomfort with the term, noting it’s an old label they wish to discard, but Hazard insists it’s widely used across languages. The conversation forces Gregor to confront his own role as the "warrior" and what it means for his future in the impending war.

The group’s mood remains tense as they plan their next move with the scorpions, who guide them through safer tunnels to evade the rats. Luxa declares the scorpions allies, emphasizing peaceful relations, though the translation’s accuracy is uncertain due to language barriers. Gregor reflects on the rarity of survival and the budding trust between species, partly thanks to Boots’s innocent bond with the scorpion babies. The chapter highlights the fragile hope for unity amid longstanding animosity, with Gregor acknowledging Vikus’s diplomatic influence.

As they travel, Gregor’s thoughts oscillate between the weight of his responsibilities and lighter moments with Luxa. Their banter about peace and battle contrasts with the grim reality of their situation, including the Bane’s rise and an ominous prophecy. Howard’s disapproval of their closeness hints at societal barriers, but Gregor dismisses these concerns, though he dreads the possibility of being sent home. The chapter captures his conflicting emotions—relief, dread, and a growing attachment to Luxa.

The chapter ends with the group navigating a tunnel with glossy black walls, pausing at a spring-fed pool. Gregor notices the slick surface, hinting at the unfamiliar terrain ahead. The shift in environment mirrors the uncertainty of their journey, both physically and morally, as they move deeper into the Firelands. The chapter leaves

readers with a sense of impending challenges and the unresolved tension between Gregor’s personal struggles and the larger conflict brewing in the Underland.

Chapter 19

In Chapter 19, the group encounters Ripred, a formidable rat, trapped in a pit with his teeth locked together, rendering him helpless. Gregor turns to Howard for medical advice, but it is Luxa who takes decisive action. She slides into the pit and uses her sword to break Ripred’s teeth, freeing his jaws despite the pain it causes him. Ripred acknowledges her intervention as repayment for a past debt, but Luxa asserts that he now owes her. The tension between them underscores their complex relationship, blending grudging respect with mutual distrust.

After being rescued, Ripred is tended to by Howard, who smooths his damaged teeth, while Gregor prepares fish mash to nourish the weakened rat. Ripred’s vulnerability is a rare sight, given his usual dominance, and Gregor tactfully distracts the others to spare him further humiliation. The group’s care for Ripred highlights their uneasy alliance, as they balance their animosity with the practical need to cooperate in dangerous circumstances. Ripred’s recovery allows him to question their presence in the Firelands, leading to a revealing conversation.

Luxa admits they are searching for the nibblers, who are being driven into the Firelands by the Bane, a young rat with growing influence. She reveals she invoked "The Vow to the Dead" to rally Regalia’s armies, signaling her readiness for war. Ripred, though critical of her impulsiveness, acknowledges her resolve. The discussion shifts to Gregor’s past failure in battling three rats under Regalia, a story Ripred recounts with sardonic amusement. Gregor’s embarrassment is palpable as Luxa learns of his earlier missteps and the risks he inadvertently posed to the city.

The chapter concludes with Luxa confronting Gregor about his secrecy regarding the Bane’s presence near Regalia, emphasizing the gravity of his oversight. Howard’s quiet remark—"They are everywhere, Gregor"—drives home the pervasive threat of the rats. The exchange underscores the group’s mounting challenges and the consequences of

their individual choices. Ripred’s mix of mockery and mentorship, coupled with Luxa’s growing leadership, sets the stage for escalating conflicts ahead.

Chapter 20

In Chapter 20, tensions rise as Ripred, the rat, reveals the Bane’s sinister plan to exterminate the nibblers (mice) under the guise of relocating them. Luxa, initially hostile, is forced to confront the grim reality when Ripred explains that the phrase "a place from which there is no return" signifies death. Howard and Luxa grapple with the scale of the threat, questioning how the Bane could overpower thousands of nibblers. Ripred suggests the mice are unaware of their fate, believing they are being moved to safety, which makes them vulnerable to massacre. The group is shaken by the revelation, and Cartesian, a feverish nibbler, confirms Ripred’s claims, urging them to fight back.

Cartesian’s frantic outburst adds urgency to the situation. He insists the nibblers must resist the gnawers (rats) and warns that the Bane’s promises are lies. Luxa, moved by his desperation, assures him of her belief, but Cartesian’s delirium causes him to lash out at Ripred. Howard sedates him, leaving the group to reflect on his words. Gregor realizes Cartesian’s faction had opposed surrender, symbolized by a scythe carved into a cave wall. Ripred challenges the group to act, emphasizing the need to warn the nibblers before it’s too late. Gregor, convinced of the danger, insists they must intervene despite Luxa’s lingering distrust of Ripred.

The group debates whether to allow Ripred to join their mission. Luxa resists, but Howard persuades her to compromise, arguing Ripred’s knowledge is invaluable. Ripred agrees to follow Luxa’s lead, though he offers sarcastic remarks about her leadership. As they travel, Gregor grows increasingly concerned about the nibblers’ fate, speculating on possible methods of mass execution. Meanwhile, Ripred struggles to keep pace, exhausted from his imprisonment. Gregor notices his distress and confronts Luxa, accusing her of cruelty for pushing Ripred too hard. Luxa dismisses his concerns, but Gregor insists on stopping to rest.

A heated argument erupts between Gregor and Luxa, escalating into a personal clash. Gregor vents his frustration, accusing Luxa of being controlling and ungrateful, even suggesting their friendship is temporary. His outburst stuns Luxa, leaving her visibly hurt. The tension underscores the group’s fraying dynamics as they face the looming threat. The chapter ends with Gregor regretting his words, unsure why he lashed out, while the group prepares to continue their mission amid unresolved conflict.

Chapter 21

The chapter begins with Gregor and his companions caught in a chaotic windstorm within an Underland cavern. A sudden blast of air slams them against the ceiling, pinning Gregor, Cartesian, and the bat Nike in place. As the winds shift, they are propelled violently through tunnels before being flung into a vast open space. Gregor is separated from Nike and tossed between competing air currents, feeling utterly helpless. Despite the disorientation, he manages to keep hold of his flashlight, catching glimpses of the others equally at the mercy of the storm.

Gregor initially panics, struggling against the unpredictable winds until Ripred, the rat, advises him to stop fighting the currents. Reluctantly, Gregor relaxes his body and discovers he can ride the air streams like a leaf on the wind. The sensation of flying fills him with exhilaration, and he revels in the newfound freedom. However, his joy is short-lived as Ripred reminds him to check on the others. Gregor observes that Luxa has mastered the winds, carrying Boots effortlessly, while the bats—especially Ares—struggle with their wings catching multiple currents.

Realizing the bats are in danger, Gregor impulsively tries to help Ares, but Ripred intervenes, dragging him toward a cave to form a safe base. The rat uses his tail as a makeshift rope to pull Luxa and Boots to safety. Gregor distracts Boots by assigning her a pretend scouting role with his binoculars, keeping her occupied while they strategize. Ripred positions himself at the cave entrance, ready to rescue the remaining companions as Gregor signals with his flashlight.

The chapter highlights the group’s adaptability in the face of chaos, with Gregor learning to surrender control and trust the environment. Ripred’s leadership proves crucial as they work together to navigate the deadly winds. The bats’ vulnerability contrasts with the humans’ ability to adapt, underscoring the unpredictability of the Underland. The chapter ends with the team regrouping, poised to rescue the others

while Boots innocently narrates her observations, unaware of the danger.

Chapter 22

In Chapter 22, Gregor and his companions witness a harrowing scene as the nibblers (mice) are herded by rats down a treacherous path toward a pit at the base of a volcano. The path is lined with a sheer cliff and a stone wall, obscuring the pit until the mice are nearly trapped. Panic erupts when the mice realize their fate, and their attempts to escape are thwarted by a boulder sealing the tunnel entrance. Luxa impulsively wants to intervene, but Ripred cautions against rash actions, emphasizing the need for strategy over brute force to maintain their advantage of surprise.

The nibblers quickly regroup and devise an escape plan, forming a pyramid-like structure called the Isosceles Maneuver to climb out of the pit. Gregor and the others observe with cautious hope as the mice begin freeing themselves, starting with the pups. However, Luxa senses something amiss, questioning why the rats would allow their escape. Ripred speculates that the rats may be relying on another threat to eliminate the mice, hinting at an unseen danger beyond lava. Temp, the cockroach, grows agitated, warning of an imminent but inexplicable threat, which Boots likens to "breathing."

The situation escalates when the mice suddenly collapse in the pit, convulsing and gasping for air. Gregor realizes they are suffocating, though the cause remains unclear. Chaos ensues as Luxa demands immediate action, but Ripred physically restrains her and Aurora, preventing a suicidal rescue attempt. Howard comforts Hazard while Cartesian, overwhelmed by despair, attempts to leap into the pit. The chapter ends with the group paralyzed by horror as the nibblers' screams echo, underscoring the brutal efficiency of the rats' trap and the fragility of their own survival.

The chapter highlights themes of desperation, strategic thinking, and the□□ of war. Ripred's insistence on□□ over□□ contrasts with Luxa's emotional urgency, while

Gregor's observations bridge the gap between their perspectives. The nibblers' ingenuity and tragic fate emphasize the high stakes of their struggle, leaving the group to grapple with helplessness and the looming threat of the unknown. Temp's cryptic warnings and the suffocation phenomenon add a layer of mystery, foreshadowing greater dangers ahead.

Chapter 23

In Chapter 23, Gregor and his companions witness a horrific massacre of mice (referred to as "nibblers") trapped in a pit, killed by gas. Gregor struggles to shield his younger sister, Boots, from the truth, telling her the mice are merely sleeping. The group is deeply shaken by the senseless violence, as the mice were defenseless, including pups and non-combatants. Ripred, the rat, confirms there’s nothing they can do, and Luxa, visibly distressed, insists on seeing the scene through Gregor’s binoculars, only to confirm the grim reality. The group grapples with the brutality of the act, contrasting it with past battles where both sides had a fighting chance.

Boots, oblivious to the tragedy, begins singing and dancing to a nursery rhyme about nibblers, mimicking their movements. Gregor is disturbed by her innocent portrayal of the mice’s suffering, as the song’s lyrics eerily mirror the massacre they just witnessed. He abruptly stops her, realizing the song’s words—"Catch the nibblers in a trap, watch them spin and snap"—describe the mice’s agonized movements before death. The song’s next line, "Quiet while they take a nap," further unsettles him, as it aligns with his lie to Boots about the mice sleeping.

Gregor becomes convinced the nursery rhyme is actually a prophecy by Sandwich, the Underland’s ancient seer. He argues the song’s verses predict the nibblers’ fate, pointing to lines like "Father, mother, sister, brother, off they go," which reflect the extermination of entire families. The group is skeptical, but Ripred takes interest, focusing on the first verse: "Dancing in the firelight, see the queen who conquers night." They debate whether Luxa could be the prophesied queen, though she dismisses the idea, noting she lacks gold. However, a volcanic eruption soon provides a literal interpretation, as lava—described as "gold, hot and bright"—flows from the mountain.

The chapter ends with the group beginning to accept Gregor’s theory, as the volcano’s eruption seems to fulfill the prophecy’s imagery. Ripred acknowledges Gregor’s insight, identifying the lava as the "gold" and the volcano as the "queen." The discovery leaves them with a sense of foreboding, as the prophecy’s dark implications unfold, hinting at further tragedies to come. The chapter underscores themes of innocence, violence, and the unsettling power of ancient words shaping their reality.

Chapter 24

The chapter opens with chaos as the group scrambles to mount their bats amid a second, louder rumble from the volcano. Ripred urges everyone to flee, but confusion ensues as riders struggle to find their designated seats. Gregor retrieves Boots and gathers scattered supplies before Ares organizes the group's seating arrangement. As they take off, a powerful wind current sweeps them toward the glowing volcano, forcing the bats to navigate treacherous air streams. Despite the danger, the bats manage to stabilize, though the wind's intensity makes progress difficult.

The group is swiftly carried toward the volcano, which Gregor describes as both majestic and terrifying. Steam and molten lava erupt from its fissures, and the air grows searingly hot. Gregor forces himself to witness the pit of dead mice, knowing he must remember their fate to convey the tragedy to Regalia. The noxious fumes begin to affect him, causing dizziness, while Boots grows drowsy, alarming Gregor. The bats press on, racing against time to escape the poisonous gases enveloping them.

As they near a stone wall, Ripred shouts for the bats to find a tunnel for refuge. The group darts in and out of openings until Howard signals a viable escape route. Just as they enter the tunnel, the volcano erupts violently, unleashing a deafening explosion and a suffocating cloud of ash. Gregor loses consciousness, overwhelmed by the blast. He later wakes alone, buried in ash, coughing and disoriented. After clearing his flashlight, he surveys the desolate tunnel, realizing he has been separated from the others.

Gregor searches frantically for his companions but finds no trace of them in the ash-covered tunnel. The eerie silence and absence of footprints deepen his isolation. Reflecting on his narrow survival—thanks to landing on a rock rather than being buried—he struggles forward, hoping to reunite with the group. The chapter ends with Gregor's desperate, unanswered question echoing in his mind: "Where are the

others?”

Chapter 25

The chapter opens with Gregor mourning the death of Thalia, a young bat who succumbed to poisonous fumes during their perilous journey. He reflects on her bravery and childlike innocence, recalling how she had once laughed at his jokes. As Gregor kneels beside her lifeless body, the group grapples with guilt and grief, each blaming themselves for her death. Ripred, however, insists no one is at fault, emphasizing the inevitability of her fate due to her small size and the toxic environment. Meanwhile, Boots, confused by death, struggles to understand why Thalia won’t wake up, leading Howard to comfort her by explaining Thalia now lives in their hearts.

The group is forced to leave the hazardous area, but Hazard, Thalia’s close companion, resists saying goodbye, resulting in a heartbreaking struggle. Howard eventually calms him with a sedative and shares his own loss of his bond, Pandora, to help Hazard process his grief. Hazard, though devastated, finds solace in the idea of carrying Thalia’s memory in his heart alongside others he has lost. The group remains silent, unwilling to disturb Hazard’s fragile peace, as they await a safer location scouted by Aurora and Nike.

After relocating to a cleaner area near the jungle, the group attempts to recover, washing off ash and resting. Boots and Hazard sleep, while others remain awake, lost in thought. Luxa appears unnaturally calm, and Gregor observes her quietly. When Ares and Ripred return, they reveal Thalia’s body was taken to lie with the nibblers, victims of the Bane’s cruelty. Ripred acknowledges Gregor’s earlier suspicions about the prophetic nature of their song, now dubbed "The Prophecy of Secrets."

The chapter concludes with the group analyzing the prophecy’s final verse, recognizing its hidden significance. Luxa recites the words solemnly, stripped of their playful melody, as they ponder its implications. The weight of their losses and the urgency of

their mission hang heavily over them, setting the stage for their next steps in unraveling the prophecy’s secrets and confronting the Bane’s growing threat.

Chapter 26

In Chapter 26, Gregor insists on joining Luxa and the others in their mission, but they resist, citing concerns about his ability to fight after his earlier panic during a battle. Gregor confronts them, accusing them of doubting his skills, but Howard reassures him that their hesitation stems from something else. Ripred reveals that Gregor must return to Regalia to retrieve Sandwich’s sword, a weapon tied to a prophecy about killing the Bane. Gregor is confused, as Vikus had never explained the sword’s significance, and he initially refused to accept it. The group implies that the prophecy’s contents are dire, but they avoid detailing it, leaving Gregor frustrated and in the dark.

The conversation shifts to Vikus’s optimistic but often impractical decisions, with Luxa and Ripred exchanging anecdotes about his naivety. Gregor defends Vikus, recalling how the elder once saved his life. Ripred presses Gregor to retrieve the sword, emphasizing its importance, but Gregor remains skeptical about its connection to him. The group’s evasiveness about the prophecy’s specifics heightens Gregor’s unease, as they hint at grim outcomes but refuse to elaborate. Ripred suggests Nerissa or Vikus will explain, further delaying Gregor’s understanding of his role in the impending conflict.

Luxa assigns Temp, the cockroach, to protect Hazard and rally the crawlers, praising his keen sense of danger and bravery. This moment highlights Luxa’s growth, as she once mocked roaches but now relies on Temp’s loyalty. The exchange provides a rare moment of warmth amid the tension. Meanwhile, Gregor volunteers to keep watch while the others rest, but Luxa remains awake, visibly distressed. Gregor is drawn to her, his concern for her evident, though she seems unaware of his gaze.

Ripred, observing Gregor’s attention to Luxa, offers unexpected advice, urging him to embrace his feelings for her given the uncertainty of war. Gregor dismisses the idea as impractical, but Ripred counters that the future is too uncertain to overthink. The

chapter ends with Gregor approaching Luxa, though his thoughts remain unresolved. The scene underscores the emotional and strategic complexities facing the characters as they brace for war, with personal bonds and prophecies intertwining their fates.

Chapter 27

In Chapter 27, Gregor urges Luxa to rest before their impending battle, using humor to persuade her by threatening to involve Ripred. She eventually sleeps alongside Hazard and Boots, while Gregor keeps watch. Ripred wakes the group after four hours, and Cartesian, the mouse, insists on joining the mission to rescue the nibblers, despite Ripred’s objections. Howard intervenes, administering a powerful sleeping potion to Cartesian to prevent him from endangering himself, showcasing the group’s protective dynamics and moral dilemmas.

As the group prepares to split up, Gregor gives Luxa his backpack with essential supplies, emphasizing their mutual care and shared responsibility. Their emotional farewell hints at the gravity of their mission, with Gregor acknowledging the possibility of never seeing his friends again. The moment is poignant, underscored by Ripred’s cryptic advice and Luxa’s lingering presence in Gregor’s thoughts as he departs with Ares, Boots, Hazard, and Temp.

During the flight, Gregor struggles with insomnia, hyper-aware of the sounds around him, including Hazard’s drugged murmurs about secrets. This triggers Gregor’s reflection on the burdens of secrecy, from hidden prophecies to the rats’ atrocities against the nibblers. He dreads the impending revelation of Sandwich’s new prophecy, suspecting it foretells death—either his or a loved one’s—adding to his emotional exhaustion.

The chapter culminates in tension as Gregor and Ares encounter a rat army heading for Regalia, realizing the city is unprepared. Upon arrival, Gregor urgently warns the guards and rushes to retrieve Sandwich’s sword, stumbling upon photos of happier times. The contrast between past joy and present chaos highlights the stakes, leaving Gregor shaken but determined as he braces for the coming battle.