Gregor and the Prophecy of Bane

In *Gregor and the Prophecy of Bane*, Gregor's adventures in the **Underland** continue as he is summoned back to fulfill another ancient prophecy—one that speaks of a terrifying creature called the **Bane**, a giant white rat destined to bring destruction to the Underland.

When **Boots**, Gregor's toddler sister, is kidnapped by **rats**, Gregor must team up with his Underland allies—including the brave princess **Luxa** and his loyal bat companion **Ares**—to rescue her and prevent the rise of the Bane. Their journey takes them through treacherous landscapes, from the deadly **Labyrinth** to the eerie **Hadeslands**, where danger lurks at every turn.

As Gregor grapples with his role as the **"Warrior"**, he faces moral dilemmas, battles fierce enemies, and uncovers shocking truths about the Underland's future.

Chapter 1

Gregor awakens to the unsettling feeling of being watched and discovers a cockroach on his windowsill. Despite his cramped living conditions—a makeshift bedroom with no door and minimal space—he takes care to capture the roach without harming it, adhering to a vow he made after a roach once saved his sister's life. Gregor reflects on the recent increase in roaches, which seem to observe him rather than flee. He carefully relocates the insect to the kitchen trash, fearing his mother's intolerance for pests, and notes the sparse food supplies in their struggling household.

The chapter reveals Gregor's family's financial hardships, exacerbated by his father's fragile state after being imprisoned and tortured by rats in the Underland, a

subterranean world beneath New York City. Though reunited, his father suffers from nightmares, illness, and disorientation, leaving the family dependent on Gregor’s mother’s meager income. Gregor’s quiet movements through the apartment highlight his awareness of their precarious situation, as he checks the nearly empty fridge and cabinets, relieved to find enough food for breakfast and lunch.

Gregor’s relationship with Mrs. Cormaci, a neighbor who transitions from being nosy to a supportive figure, is explored. Initially skeptical of her intentions, Gregor eventually accepts her offer to work for her on Saturdays, recognizing the opportunity to contribute financially. Mrs. Cormaci’s subtle kindness, such as bringing a coffee cake and offering employment, contrasts with her earlier blunt demeanor, showing her genuine concern for Gregor’s family.

The chapter concludes with Gregor’s first visit to Mrs. Cormaci’s apartment, where the aroma of food overwhelms him, hinting at the stark contrast between her abundance and his family’s scarcity. This moment underscores Gregor’s resilience and sense of responsibility, as he prioritizes his family’s needs over his own discomfort, setting the stage for his growing reliance on Mrs. Cormaci’s support.

Chapter 2

In Chapter 2, Gregor frantically searches for his younger sister, Boots, in Central Park after realizing she has disappeared. Panicked, he follows her footprints in the snow but struggles due to the fading light and overlapping tracks. A barking dog leads him to a clearing, where he discovers an insect leg from a giant roach—a clue linking the disappearance to the Underland, a subterranean world he had visited before. Finding Boots' mitten near a displaced rock slab confirms his fears: the roaches, who idolized her, have taken her underground. Gregor immediately calls his father, insisting he must return to the Underland to rescue her despite the dangers.

Gregor's father, overwhelmed with fear, begs to accompany him, but Gregor refuses, knowing his father's poor health would hinder the mission. Armed with a small flashlight, Gregor descends into the tunnel, recalling the path he took months earlier with the help of his bond, a bat named Ares. The cold, abandoned tunnels evoke memories of the Underland's eerie inhabitants, including giant roaches, spiders, and menacing rats. Despite his dread, Gregor presses on, determined to save Boots before it's too late.

The chapter flashes back to the family's return from the Underland the previous summer, when Gregor, Boots, and their emaciated father recounted their unbelievable journey to Gregor's skeptical mother. Boots' innocent chatter about "beeg bugs" and riding bats eventually convinced her of their story. Terrified of another disappearance, Gregor's mother sealed their apartment's laundry room grate, the original entrance to the Underland, and banned anyone from entering. However, neither she nor Gregor considered the Central Park entrance, which the roaches now exploit to kidnap Boots.

As Gregor navigates the twisting tunnels, the environment shifts from man-made bricks to ancient stone, signaling his descent into the Underland. The chapter ends with Gregor's resolve hardening as he confronts the reality of returning to a world of

danger and uncertainty. His love for Boots outweighs his fear, setting the stage for a perilous rescue mission. The tension builds as readers anticipate the challenges he will face in the dark, unfamiliar depths below.



Chapter 3

Gregor finds himself in immediate danger as Underland rats chase him through the dark tunnels. Realizing he can't outrun or outfight them, he hastily hides in a circular stone opening leading to the Waterway, only to remember rats rely on smell, not sight. The rats quickly discover his hiding spot and mock him, forcing Gregor to choose between facing them or dropping into the abyss. As the rats lunge for him, he lets go, free-falling into the darkness, hoping for rescue.

During his fall, Gregor hears Ares, his bat ally, urging him to drop. Ares catches him midair, revealing he retrieved Gregor’s lost flashlight. Relieved, Gregor vents his anger about the cockroaches kidnapping his sister, Boots, and demands Ares take him to them immediately. Ares, however, diverts course toward Regalia, sparking Gregor’s frustration. Their tension escalates when Gregor insists on going to the roaches, leading Ares to flip him onto a ridge and pin him down.

Ares confronts Gregor, accusing him of behaving like Henry, his former bond who treated him as a servant. Gregor, startled by Ares’s fury, denies the comparison but acknowledges he interrupted the bat. Ares emphasizes he’s not subordinate and is working to reunite Gregor with Boots. The confrontation forces Gregor to reflect on his actions, though he struggles to reconcile his urgency with Ares’s authority.

The chapter highlights the strained but vital partnership between Gregor and Ares. Gregor’s desperation to save Boots clashes with Ares’s insistence on mutual respect, revealing their unresolved dynamic. The tension underscores Gregor’s growth as he navigates trust and leadership in the Underland, while Ares’s past trauma with Henry adds depth to their bond. The chapter ends on an unresolved note, setting the stage for further conflict or collaboration.

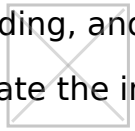
Chapter 4

In Chapter 4, Gregor learns about the ominous "Prophecy of Bane," which foretells the death of a baby—likely his sister Boots—as a key to the rats' power. Ares, his bat bond, reveals the prophecy but refuses to elaborate, leaving Gregor frustrated and fearful. The chapter opens with Gregor's shock at the directive to kill the baby, recalling Luxa’s earlier mention of the prophecy. His dread intensifies as he remembers the devastating consequences of the first prophecy he was involved in, which led to war and countless deaths. Gregor berates himself for ignoring the warning signs and endangering his family by returning to the Underland.

Upon arriving in Regalia, Gregor reunites with Vikus, who attempts to ease tensions between Gregor and Ares. Vikus explains that Boots is safe for now, escorted by roaches and a rescue party including Luxa. Gregor, however, is in no mood for pleasantries and demands answers about the prophecy. Vikus leads him to Sandwich’s prophecy room, where the words of "The Prophecy of Bane" are carved into the walls. The cryptic verses speak of a rising threat, a white rat, and the dire consequences of the baby’s death. Gregor fixates on the line "Die the baby," realizing Boots is central to the prophecy’s dark implications.

Vikus and Gregor analyze the prophecy line by line, with Vikus emphasizing its ambiguity until events unfold. The first stanza references Gregor’s past actions—his leap and Henry’s fall—highlighting how prophecies only become clear in hindsight. Vikus explains that the "something rising from the gloom" is already present, hidden by the rats. The next stanza introduces a white rat, a rare and deadly figure cloaked in evil, whose actions could destabilize the Underland. Gregor struggles to grasp the full meaning but senses the urgency of understanding the prophecy to protect Boots and prevent further catastrophe.

The chapter ends with Gregor and Vikus delving deeper into the prophecy’s implications, though many questions remain unanswered. Gregor’s fear for Boots’ safety drives his determination to decipher the cryptic verses, while Vikus underscores the inevitability of prophecy in shaping their fates. The tension between Gregor’s anger, Ares’ reticence, and Vikus’ measured explanations sets the stage for a looming confrontation with the prophecy’s dark forces. The chapter masterfully blends suspense, foreboding, and the weight of destiny, leaving readers eager to see how Gregor will navigate the impending danger.



Chapter 5

The chapter opens with Gregor reuniting with his younger sister, Boots, who has been riding the cockroach Temp. Gregor expresses concern about Temp taking Boots without warning, but the roach misunderstands, thinking Gregor hates him. Gregor reassures Temp and thanks him for protecting Boots from the rats. The scene shifts to Luxa’s arrival, who appears weary and strained, her regal demeanor masking obvious distress. Their exchange is tense, hinting at unresolved conflicts and the burdens they both carry. Luxa informs Gregor that training will begin the next day, a decision made by Solovet without Vikus’s knowledge, revealing underlying tensions among the Underland leaders.

Gregor and Boots are taken to bathe, where Gregor insists on keeping their clothes despite the Underlanders’ concerns about scent detection by the rats. After a hearty meal, Boots falls asleep quickly, but Gregor remains restless, haunted by guilt over Boots’ abduction and dread of the looming threats. He reflects on his mixed feelings toward the Underlanders—grateful for their help yet resentful for being dragged back into their conflicts. Unable to sleep, he wanders the palace, observing its layout and the privacy afforded by curtains instead of doors.

During his walk, Gregor overhears a heated argument between Vikus and Solovet about his impending training. Vikus opposes arming Gregor, believing his strength lies outside conventional weapons, while Solovet insists he must be prepared for combat to survive. Their debate highlights the clash between Vikus’s protective instincts and Solovet’s pragmatic militarism. Gregor’s name is central to their disagreement, emphasizing his reluctant role as the prophesied "warrior." The tension between the two leaders underscores the broader struggle between peace and war in the Underland.

The chapter ends with Gregor retreating to his room, his mind racing with the implications of the argument. The overheard conversation leaves him unsettled, foreshadowing the challenges ahead. His sleepless night reflects the weight of his destiny and the external pressures shaping his path. The chapter effectively captures Gregor’s internal conflict, the strained dynamics among the Underlanders, and the inevitability of his involvement in their ongoing struggles.



Chapter 6

Gregor wakes up exhausted and in a bad mood, preparing for his first day of training in Regalia. Unsure of the location, he recalls Luxa mentioning a field, which he assumes is the sports arena. After navigating the palace and descending via a platform—renewing his fear of heights—he arrives in the bustling city, where Underlanders recognize and respect him as the warrior who saved their city. Despite the admiration, Gregor worries about the impending mission to confront the giant white rat, wondering how many soldiers will accompany him.

At the arena, Gregor joins a training session led by Mareth, a friendly Underlander soldier. The exercises include stretches, calisthenics, and running, where Gregor excels, earning Mareth’s praise. However, he struggles with tumbling, much to Luxa’s amusement. She demonstrates flawless gymnastic moves, earning applause, while Gregor repeatedly fails at basic cartwheels. Their lighthearted interaction is interrupted by the arrival of Luxa’s cousins from the Fount, whom she clearly dislikes.

Luxa introduces Gregor to her cousins: Howard, Stellovet, the twins Hero and Kent, and a young girl. While Howard is polite, Stellovet immediately provokes Luxa with veiled insults, referencing her late cousin Henry’s betrayal. Gregor recognizes Stellovet’s cruel nature, feeling instant disdain for her. The tension highlights Luxa’s lingering grief and trauma over Henry’s actions, which her cousins exploit. Gregor sympathizes with Luxa, understanding the emotional toll of her past.

The chapter underscores the contrast between Gregor’s physical prowess in running and his clumsiness in gymnastics, as well as the social dynamics of the Underland. Luxa’s strained relationship with her cousins reveals the political and personal tensions within Regalia. Meanwhile, Gregor’s growing connection to Luxa and his role as the “warrior” weigh heavily on him, foreshadowing the challenges ahead in his mission against the rats. The chapter blends action, character development, and underlying

conflict, setting the stage for future confrontations.



Chapter 7

Gregor, overwhelmed by his unexpected success in hitting all fifteen blood balls during a sword drill, feels sickened by the sight of the red liquid staining his hands. As the Underlanders react with excitement, he retreats with Ares, his bat companion, to a secluded cave. The cave, once shared by Ares and Henry, now serves as Ares's solitary refuge, highlighting his social isolation despite avoiding official banishment. Gregor reflects on their strained bond, realizing he knows little about Ares's past and the circumstances of his partnership with Henry, who had exploited Ares's rebellious nature.

During their conversation, Gregor learns that Ares is shunned by most bats, save for Aurora, Luxa, and Vikus. The bat admits that his alliance with Henry was mutually beneficial but ultimately flawed. Gregor apologizes for his earlier harsh treatment, and Ares acknowledges his own unresolved anger. Their reconciliation is tentative, as Gregor struggles to reconcile Ares's complex history with his own perceptions. The arrival of Luxa and Aurora shifts the mood, as they celebrate Gregor's feat and mock Stellovet, a rival who had hoped to humiliate him.

Luxa recounts a humorous incident where Henry tricked Stellovet into eating moth cocoons, lightening the atmosphere. However, the laughter fades as they remember Henry's betrayal, which had far graver consequences for them than for Stellovet. Luxa reassures Ares that Gregor's impressive performance will improve his standing among the bats, offering a glimmer of hope. Gregor, meanwhile, begins to take pride in his achievement, seeing it as a rare and skillful act rather than a source of shame.

The moment is interrupted by a warning horn, signaling an imminent rat invasion of Regalia. Ares and Gregor swiftly depart the cave, joining Luxa and Aurora in response to the emergency. The chapter ends on a tense note, as the group prepares to confront the new threat, underscoring the precariousness of their world and the bonds

that unite them in adversity.



Chapter 8

In Chapter 8, Gregor fears for his sister Boots' safety when he learns rats have infiltrated Regalia. Rushing back to the arena on Ares's back, he envisions a rat army targeting her. Upon arrival, they witness two rats—one small and one large—fighting Underlanders. The larger rat, moving with incredible agility, dominates the battle. Gregor soon recognizes it as Ripred, a rat ally, and intervenes to stop the fight. Despite the tension, Ripred laughs at the Underlanders' shock, lightening the mood momentarily.

The Underlanders halt their attack upon hearing Ripred's name, though they remain wary. Ripred introduces his companion, Twitchtip, a smaller rat who reacts aggressively to Gregor's greeting. Solovet, a leader among the Underlanders, arrives and reprimands Ripred for the chaos. Ripred claims they arrived early for their scheduled meeting and presents Twitchtip as a "gift" to help Gregor locate the Bane, a dangerous rat. Twitchtip's hostility and peculiar behavior puzzle Gregor and the others.

Ripred reveals Twitchtip's extraordinary ability: she is a "scent seer" with an unparalleled sense of smell. To prove it, she accurately describes Boots' location and condition, astonishing Solovet. Ripred explains Twitchtip was exiled by other rats due to her unnerving gift, making her an outcast but a valuable asset. Solovet, intrigued, agrees to accommodate Twitchtip in a remote cave to minimize her discomfort from human scents.

The chapter ends with Solovet acknowledging Gregor's recent achievements in training, hinting at his growing importance. Ripred and Solovet share a moment of camaraderie, arranging for a meal together. The introduction of Twitchtip sets the stage for her role in the quest to find the Bane, while Ripred's humor and unpredictability continue to shape the dynamics between the characters.

Chapter 9

In Chapter 9, Gregor finds himself in a dark cave beneath Regalia, where Ripred, the formidable but slouching rat, insists on teaching him echolocation. Despite Gregor's skepticism about humans mastering the skill, Ripred argues that even rudimentary abilities could be lifesaving in the Underland. To prove his point, Ripred knocks Gregor's flashlight away, plunging them into darkness, and demonstrates how sound can reveal location. Though frustrated and exhausted, Gregor reluctantly begins practicing the technique, making clicks and listening for echoes, but struggles to distinguish between sounds. Ripred's impatience grows as Gregor repeatedly fails, but the rat emphasizes the critical importance of the skill for survival.

The tension between Gregor and Ripred escalates as the lesson continues, with Ripred warning Gregor that his combat skills will mean little if he cannot navigate in the dark. Despite his irritation, Gregor agrees to practice, sensing the gravity of Ripred's warning. As they leave the cave, Gregor reflects on their uneasy alliance, questioning whether Ripred would hesitate to kill him once he's no longer useful. The chapter highlights Gregor's vulnerability and the precarious nature of his relationship with the rat, who remains both mentor and potential threat.

Exhausted and disoriented, Gregor wanders through Regalia's empty corridors, eventually stumbling upon the prophecy room, where he encounters Nerissa, Henry's frail and haunted sister. Her gaunt appearance and eerie demeanor unsettle Gregor, but she engages him in a conversation about her brother's betrayal. Nerissa candidly admits that Henry's death was preferable to the catastrophic consequences of his alliance with the rats, though she still grieves for him. Her unsettling smile and cryptic remarks leave Gregor uneasy, hinting at her possible foresight or instability.

The chapter concludes with Nerissa's unsettling focus on "The Prophecy of Bane," her fingers tracing the letters as if deciphering hidden meanings. Gregor's encounter with

her adds to the growing sense of foreboding, reinforcing the weight of the prophecies and the uncertain path ahead. The interactions with both Ripred and Nerissa underscore the dangers and mysteries of the Underland, leaving Gregor—and the reader—with lingering questions about trust, survival, and the future.



Chapter 10

Gregor, exhausted and sleepless, grapples with the daunting task of killing the Bane, a massive white rat far larger and stronger than Ripred. He reflects on Vikus's tendency to withhold harsh truths, imagining how the elder might casually reveal the prophecy's demands at the last moment. The weight of his new reality contrasts sharply with his previous worries, like affording Christmas presents, highlighting how the prophecy has upended his life. The council meeting underscores the urgency of his mission, as the rats may soon hide the Bane or target his sister, Boots.

The council debates the safest route to the Labyrinth, where the Bane is reportedly hidden. Every land route is deemed too dangerous, leaving the Waterway as the only viable option, despite the looming threat of serpents during their mating season. Gregor insists on bringing Boots, refusing to leave her behind despite the risks, and the council reluctantly concedes. His determination reflects his protective instincts and distrust of the Underlanders' ability to keep her safe, even if his bluntness strains protocol.

Preparing for the journey, Gregor gathers supplies from the museum, including flashlights, life jackets, and duct tape, pragmatic choices that reveal his growing adaptability. He reclaims his old clothes and boots, a small comfort amid the chaos. The discovery of the boats, equipped with fish fins for navigation, surprises him, as he realizes the journey will be slower and more perilous than expected. The presence of Twitchtip, the unpredictable rat, adds to his unease.

As the group assembles at the docks, Gregor secures a life jacket for Boots and Temp, the cockroach, showing his concern for his companions' safety. The boats, suspended above the river, are a strange blend of ancient and aquatic design, emphasizing the Underland's unique technology. Vikus explains that the bats cannot cross the vast Waterway, forcing them to rely on the boats for much of the journey. Gregor's

resignation to the slow pace and unknown dangers ahead underscores his acceptance of his role as the prophecy’s reluctant hero.



Chapter 11

In Chapter 11, Gregor and his companions navigate the Waterway aboard boats, accompanied by bickering fireflies, Photos Glow-Glow and Zap, whose constant arguing irritates everyone, including Boots. Mareth attempts to mediate, revealing that firefly disputes are common but harmless. Temp, the roach, asserts his loyalty solely to Boots, while Twitchtip the rat silences the fireflies with a threatening remark. The group's dynamics are tense, yet they rely on each other for the journey. Gregor, exhausted and uneasy, observes the unfamiliar underwater landscape as they drift farther from land, with Mareth and Howard managing the sails.

The chapter delves into Gregor's growing concern for Boots' safety, as the prophecy's ominous lines haunt him. He questions Ares about the journey's duration and the possibility of flying, to which Ares admits he's considered attempting the feat alone. Their conversation shifts to Lindbergh, the Overland aviator, highlighting the cultural gap between Gregor and the Underlanders. Gregor's anxiety escalates as he reads the prophecy, which foretells Boots' death, and he grapples with the moral weight of protecting her from the rats actively seeking her.

Gregor seeks practical advice from Ares on how to kill a rat, revealing his inexperience and discomfort with violence. Ares matter-of-factly describes lethal techniques, but Gregor struggles to envision himself executing them. Their bond deepens as Ares reassures Gregor of his support, acknowledging their mutual indebtedness. The chapter underscores Gregor's internal conflict—his love for Boots clashes with the brutal reality of their mission, leaving him emotionally and physically drained.

As night falls, the group organizes shifts for guard duty, with Photos Glow-Glow reluctantly taking the first watch under Twitchtip's threat. Gregor volunteers for guard duty despite his exhaustion, preferring to stay awake rather than face interrupted sleep. The boats' gentle rocking lulls him toward sleep, but his worry for Boots and the

looming threat of the Bane keep him on edge. The chapter ends with Gregor teetering between exhaustion and vigilance, symbolizing his precarious position as both protector and reluctant warrior.



Chapter 12

The chapter opens with Gregor being violently pulled into the water by a tentacle, barely saved by Ares, his bat companion. A fierce tug-of-war ensues, with Gregor biting the tentacle to break free. Once back on the boat, he realizes the crew is under attack by squid-like creatures, their tentacles latching onto everything. Armed with a sword, Gregor joins the chaotic battle, fighting instinctively to protect himself and others. The scene is illuminated by the eerie glow of phosphorescent water, adding to the surreal and desperate nature of the struggle.

Gregor’s focus narrows to a primal state when he sees his sister, Boots, in danger. Temporarily losing awareness of his surroundings, he hacks at the tentacles with uncontrolled precision. The battle ends when Mareth snaps him out of his trance, revealing severed tentacles littering the boat. Boots, terrified, cries for home, while Temp the cockroach loses two legs defending her. Gregor comforts her, shaken by his own violent actions and her distress. Howard distracts Boots with a playful rhyme, lightening the tense atmosphere.

In the aftermath, the group tends to their injuries. Gregor’s arm bears painful sucker marks, which soon become infected, causing him to collapse. Howard, previously distant, shows kindness by caring for Boots, revealing a softer side. The fireflies feast on the squid remains, while Temp remains unfazed by his lost limbs, confident they will regrow. Gregor’s condition worsens, and he slips into a feverish dream filled with nightmarish visions of the battle, his family, and Temp’s sacrifice.

The chapter ends with Gregor regaining consciousness, disoriented and in pain. The ordeal leaves him physically and emotionally drained, hinting at lingering consequences. The attack underscores the peril of their journey and the bonds forming among the group, particularly between Gregor and Howard. The mix of action, tension, and character development drives the narrative forward, leaving readers eager to see

how Gregor recovers and what challenges lie ahead.



Chapter 13

The chapter opens with Luxa reprimanding Gregor for getting into trouble during his absence, while Mareth expresses anger at Luxa’s disobedience for joining the dangerous journey. Luxa defends her decision, stating it’s too late to turn back, but Mareth warns of the consequences if she dies, leaving Nerissa as Regalia’s ruler. Tensions rise when Luxa accuses Howard of tormenting Nerissa, referencing an incident involving a lizard. Howard vehemently denies the accusation, blaming Henry’s influence on Luxa’s suspicions. The argument highlights lingering distrust among the group, exacerbated by past betrayals.

Gregor, recovering from a venomous squid attack, learns Howard saved his arm by extracting the poison. He admits fault for falling asleep during guard duty, but Mareth emphasizes the critical importance of vigilance. Luxa and Howard’s conflict continues, revealing deeper familial tensions, particularly Luxa’s unresolved feelings about Henry’s treachery. Meanwhile, Boots lightens the mood with her playful antics, providing a brief respite from the group’s strained dynamics. Gregor reflects on his exhaustion and the challenges ahead, feeling unprepared for their mission to confront the Bane.

As the group pauses for dinner, Gregor realizes he’s been unconscious for two days, leaving him anxious about their progress. He attempts echolocation practice but struggles to focus, distracted by thoughts of his uncontrollable aggression during battles. Luxa sharpens her sword, expressing grim doubts about their survival. When Gregor questions her motives for joining the mission, she cites loyalty to him and Ares, but her evasiveness suggests deeper personal reasons. The chapter underscores the group’s emotional and physical burdens as they navigate danger and unresolved conflicts.

The chapter closes with Gregor sensing Luxa’s unspoken motivations, hinting at her inner turmoil. Their conversation remains unfinished, leaving room for further exploration of her character. The group’s tensions, combined with the looming threat of the Bane, create a sense of urgency and unease. Gregor’s introspection about his violent impulses adds a layer of psychological complexity, foreshadowing potential challenges in their mission. The interplay of personal conflicts and external dangers drives the narrative forward, setting the stage for future confrontations.



Chapter 14

In Chapter 14, Gregor and the Underlanders encounter a sudden and terrifying whirlpool while traveling by boat. The chaos is immediate, as the group realizes they have no prepared strategy for such a disaster. The whirlpool, massive and powerful, threatens to drag both boats into its vortex. Howard, recognizing the danger, severs the rope tethering the boats to prevent both from being lost. The lead boat, carrying Howard, Pandora, Twitchtip, and Zap, is swept into the whirlpool, leaving the second boat moments away from the same fate.

The bats, including Aurora and Andromeda, manage to lift the second boat to safety, but the lead boat remains trapped. Howard is rescued by Pandora, but Twitchtip, a rat, is left struggling in the water. Gregor is horrified as the Underlanders refuse to attempt a rescue, citing the impossibility and danger. He accuses them of abandoning Twitchtip because she is a rat, highlighting their prejudice. The Underlanders' reluctance contrasts sharply with their usual unity, revealing deep-seated biases against rats.

Gregor, furious and determined, decides to act. He dons a life jacket and prepares to jump into the whirlpool to save Twitchtip, knowing the Underlanders will have no choice but to rescue him—and by extension, her. Howard, shamed by Gregor's words about his oath to save those in peril, ties a lifeline to Gregor. Despite Luxa's protests and attempts to forbid him, Gregor leaps into the whirlpool, driven by both anger and a sense of justice.

The chapter ends with Gregor plunging into the icy water, fully aware of the immense danger but resolved to challenge the Underlanders' prejudices. His actions force the group to confront their moral failings, even as he risks his life. The whirlpool becomes not just a physical threat but a catalyst for exposing the tensions and ethical dilemmas within the group. Gregor's bravery and defiance set the stage for a pivotal moment in

their journey.



Chapter 15

In Chapter 15, Gregor settles on the boat with Boots and Ares, who expresses guilt over not being able to rescue Gregor earlier due to his duty to hold the boat. Gregor reassures Ares, acknowledging his loyalty as a bond. The conversation shifts to Boots' safety, and Gregor insists Ares prioritize saving her over him if a crisis arises. Ares reluctantly agrees, easing Gregor's mind as he drifts off to sleep, comforted by the thought of Boots being protected by Ares and Temp.

Upon waking, Gregor discovers Twitchtip, the rat, curled against his leg, revealing her deep loneliness after years of isolation in the Dead Land. He tactfully avoids embarrassing her, and their conversation turns to her past. Twitchtip explains how her ability to smell secrets led to her exile from rat society. She then reveals Gregor's hidden nature as a "rager," a natural-born fighter who loses control in combat, a truth Gregor struggles to accept.

Gregor is horrified by the idea of being a "rager," associating it with mindless violence, but Twitchtip clarifies it's an innate ability, not a moral failing. She advises him to seek guidance from Ripred, another rager who has learned to control his instincts. Gregor, unsettled, tries to dismiss her claims but privately considers the implications, especially given the prophecies labeling him a warrior. The chapter ends with him biting back tears, resolved to confront Ripred if he survives.

As the group awakens, Gregor reflects on the passage of time in the Underland and worries about his family's suffering in his absence. His thoughts spiral into images of his father's illness, his mother's exhaustion, and his sisters' fear, leaving him anxious and guilt-ridden. The chapter captures Gregor's emotional turmoil, balancing his role as a protector with his fear of his own nature and his longing for home.

Chapter 16

The chapter opens with Howard's desperate reaction to Pandora's disappearance, as he attempts to dive into the water to save her. Mareth restrains him, insisting Pandora is beyond help, and ultimately knocks Howard unconscious to prevent him from endangering himself. Meanwhile, Ares, Gregor's bat, is pursued by a swarm of flesh-eating mites. Gregor, panicked, urges Ares to dive into the water, a strategy that unexpectedly works when fish surface to attack the mites, allowing Ares to escape. The group flees the area, with the bats towing the boat to safety, while Ares later confirms he drowned the remaining mites clinging to him.

After the chaos, the group tends to their wounds and emotions. Gregor and Luxa care for Howard, who remains unconscious, while Ares is treated for his injuries. The bats, including Andromeda, who had previously shunned Ares, now comfort him. The atmosphere is somber as everyone processes Pandora's death. Gregor and Luxa sit together, silently grieving, until Luxa asks Gregor to distract her by describing life in the Overland. Gregor shares details of his last day aboveground, focusing on pleasant moments like sledding with Boots, avoiding darker topics to keep the conversation light.

Luxa expresses a longing to see the Overland, particularly the snow, and Gregor enthusiastically imagines showing her New York City. They joke about disguising her distinctive Underlander features to blend in, momentarily uplifted by the fantasy of escape. However, Luxa acknowledges the impracticality, as the council would never allow it. Their brief respite is cut short when Howard awakens, disoriented and heartbroken, forcing them to confront the reality of Pandora's loss once more.

The chapter concludes with Howard's painful realization of Pandora's death, as Mareth gently reaffirms that her fate was unavoidable. The weight of grief settles over the group, underscored by the Underlander's harsh realities. The emotional toll of the

journey is palpable, leaving characters and readers alike to grapple with loss and the relentless dangers of their world. The chapter balances action with introspection, highlighting the bonds between characters amid tragedy.



Chapter 17

The chapter opens with Gregor and his companions sharing their meager supper, prioritizing Boots' needs by giving her their bread and meat while they eat raw fish. As they prepare to sleep, Twitchtip warns of approaching rats and deadly serpents, unsettling Gregor, who is already troubled by thoughts of the prophecy and the Bane. The tension escalates when Temp alerts the group that the shiners (fireflies) have abandoned them, leaving them in darkness. Howard and Mareth express frustration, while Twitchtip dryly remarks that the shiners likely defected to the rats in exchange for food and information, lightening the mood with her unexpected humor.

Gregor quickly devises a solution to their light crisis by distributing flashlights from his bag, securing them to everyone's arms with duct tape. Boots eagerly joins in, delighted to have her own mini flashlight. The group's spirits lift momentarily as they marvel at the practicality of Gregor's idea, though they remain aware of their dwindling resources. Howard confirms their fuel supply is low, emphasizing the critical role light plays in their survival. Gregor, tasked with confronting the Bane, is urged to conserve his batteries, as his mission hinges on visibility in the Underland's oppressive darkness.

As they approach the Tankard, a deep water-filled shaft where serpents lurk, Twitchtip detects the Bane's presence by its distinct scent, confirming Gregor's fears. The group discusses their dwindling options, realizing their original plan to sneak into the Labyrinth is compromised by the shiners' betrayal. Mareth and Howard admit their lack of a backup plan, leaving them with only two choices: fight or flee. With escape routes cut off by rats and deadly terrain, fighting becomes their sole recourse. Howard distributes swords, preparing the group for imminent battle.

The chapter ends on a cliffhanger as the group braces for confrontation, their unity and resourcefulness tested. Gregor's leadership shines through his quick thinking, but

the looming threat of the Bane and the rats casts a shadow over their resolve. The interplay of humor, tension, and camaraderie underscores the dire stakes, setting the stage for a high-stakes conflict in the chapters to come.



Chapter 18

In Chapter 18, Gregor and his companions face a life-and-death struggle against serpents in a tunnel. As a serpent attacks Twitchtip, Gregor leaps into action, driving his sword into the creature’s tongue. The wounded serpent retreats, but the battle leaves the group battered. Howard tends to Mareth, who suffers a severe bite, while Gregor remains on high alert for further attacks. The chaos eventually subsides, but the group is left with injuries and dwindling supplies, setting the stage for a desperate effort to survive and regroup.

The focus shifts to the aftermath of the battle as Howard and Andromeda work to stabilize Mareth and Twitchtip. Gregor learns that Twitchtip’s nose has been crushed, leaving her unable to smell—a critical loss, as her tracking abilities were key to finding his sister, Boots. Ares reassures Gregor that Boots was caught by Luxa and Aurora, but Twitchtip’s vague account of their scent fading underwater casts doubt on their safety. Gregor’s dread grows as the possibility of Boots being dragged under the water becomes horrifyingly plausible.

Gregor’s worst fears are confirmed when Ares returns from searching for Aurora with no response. The prophecy’s chilling words—“DIE THE BABY, DIE HIS HEART”—echo in his mind as he grapples with the realization that Boots may be dead. Overwhelmed by grief and rage, Gregor envisions returning home alone, his heart shattered. The gnawers’ victory feels absolute, and Gregor’s despair hardens into a cold, unshakable resolve to seek vengeance.

In the chapter’s climax, Gregor’s numbness gives way to a chilling determination. He instructs Howard and the others to return home with the wounded while he prepares to confront the Bane alone. With nothing left to lose, Gregor embraces his role as a warrior, vowing to destroy the Bane at any cost. The chapter ends with a stark transition from despair to ruthless purpose, setting the stage for a deadly

confrontation.



Chapter 19

In Chapter 19, Gregor asserts his ability to confront the rats alone, revealing his identity as a "rager"—a fighter with a unique, detectable scent during combat. Twitchtip confirms this trait, explaining she sensed it during their battles. Despite Howard's protests, Gregor insists on proceeding without him, arguing that Howard must return to Regalia to inform others of their losses and ensure his family knows the truth. Ares and Twitchtip pledge to accompany Gregor, while Howard struggles with the weight of his responsibilities and the potential consequences of abandoning the mission.

Howard reluctantly accepts Gregor's decision after Andromeda sides with the Overlander, prioritizing Mareth's survival and the need to relay critical information to Regalia. The group devises a plan to construct a makeshift raft from boat wreckage, allowing Andromeda to rest during the journey back. Ares and Gregor retrieve supplies, including food and Howard's first aid kit, which he uses to treat the group's injuries. Howard insists Gregor take most of the resources, acknowledging the greater dangers he will face in the Labyrinth.

Gregor and Ares share a moment of understanding, recognizing their bond has deepened through shared hardship. Ares declares he has no reason to return to Regalia without Luxa and Aurora, solidifying his commitment to Gregor. Their partnership transcends formal gratitude, embodying the oath they swore earlier. Gregor reflects on their journey's trials and losses, realizing their bond is now unbreakable, as they prepare to face the rats together.

The chapter concludes with practical preparations: Gregor equips himself with Mareth's sword, food, and extra flashlight batteries, while Howard and Andromeda ready Mareth for transport. Howard's concern for Gregor's safety lingers, but he ultimately focuses on his duty to return. The group's division marks a turning point,

with Gregor and Ares resolved to confront the Bane, while Howard and Andromeda embark on their perilous journey home, underscoring the themes of sacrifice and loyalty.



Chapter 20

In Chapter 20, Twitchtip, despite her severe injuries, guides Gregor and Ares through the treacherous Labyrinth using her memory of scents from the Tankard. The maze proves challenging, with winding tunnels, sudden caverns, and tight passages, particularly difficult for Ares, who struggles to navigate on foot. The absence of rats suggests they believe Gregor's group is no longer a threat, but Twitchtip warns that their scent will eventually attract attention. As they press forward, Twitchtip's condition deteriorates, her bandages soaked in blood, yet she remains determined to help them reach the Bane.

Twitchtip reveals her past, explaining how she was banished and hid in the Labyrinth before fleeing to the Dead Land. She describes her uneasy alliance with Ripred, who allows her to stay only if she aids Gregor. This arrangement highlights the transactional nature of their relationship, leaving Gregor to ponder Ripred's true motives. He questions whether Ripred's actions are driven by kindness or manipulation, reflecting on the complexities of alliances in their perilous world. Twitchtip's desperation for belonging underscores the harsh realities of their journey.

Exhausted and bleeding, Twitchtip collapses, admitting she can no longer continue. She urges Gregor and Ares to press on, as they are close to the Bane. In a poignant moment, Gregor bids her farewell with the phrase "Run like the river," a rat's expression of resilience. Leaving her behind, Gregor and Ares face a fork in the tunnel, struggling to choose the correct path. Their attempts lead them in circles, emphasizing the labyrinth's disorienting nature. They eventually reach a cavern with multiple exits, further complicating their quest.

As they pause to eat, Ares voices his guilt over surviving while others, like Luxa and Henry, perished. Gregor reassures him, attributing their misfortunes to the prophecy that ensnared them. The chapter ends with Ares questioning whether killing the Bane

will bring them solace, to which Gregor admits uncertainty. Their conversation underscores the emotional toll of their mission, blending determination with existential doubt as they prepare to face the Bane.



Chapter 21

In Chapter 21, Gregor and Ares encounter a chaotic battle between rats, including a gold-furred female named Goldshard and a gray rat named Snare. Goldshard initially kills one of the attacking rats before turning on Snare, leading to a brutal fight. The confrontation is vicious, with both rats sustaining severe injuries. Goldshard ultimately kills Snare but is mortally wounded herself. As she dies, she locks eyes with Gregor, whispering an unfinished plea, "Don’t…," leaving him confused about her intentions and the rats' motives.

Gregor and Ares discuss the political dynamics among the rats, particularly the Bane’s delayed rise to power despite his strength. Ares explains that the Bane must consolidate support and faces enemies like Ripred, who seeks his death. Goldshard’s actions suggest internal divisions, as she preferred Gregor killing the Bane over allowing Snare to influence it. Gregor reflects on her final look, sensing urgency but unable to decipher her message. The chapter highlights the rats' factional conflicts and Gregor’s growing awareness of their complex politics.

The tension escalates as Gregor and Ares detect movement in a nearby tunnel, suspecting the Bane is lurking. Gregor recalls the prophecy foretelling his role as the warrior destined to kill the white-furred rat. Determined to fulfill his mission, he prepares to enter the tunnel alone, despite Ares’s hesitation. The Bane’s choice of a narrow, spiraling path forces Gregor to confront it without Ares’s aid, heightening the stakes. The scene underscores Gregor’s resolve and the inevitability of his confrontation with the Bane.

In the climax, Gregor enters the tunnel, slipping into a hyper-focused "rager mode" as he tracks the Bane. He corners the creature in a chamber, driven by memories of loved ones harmed by the rats. As he strikes, the Bane emits a startling cry—"Ma-maa!"—momentarily halting Gregor. The chapter ends on a cliffhanger, leaving

Gregor’s reaction and the Bane’s fate unresolved, while emphasizing the emotional and moral complexity of his mission.



Chapter 22

In Chapter 22, Gregor confronts the Bane, only to discover it is not the monstrous rat he expected but a small, terrified white baby rat. The creature's cries remind him of his sister Boots, making it impossible for him to carry out his mission to kill it. Despite knowing the Bane's future threat, Gregor cannot bring himself to harm the helpless animal. He comforts the rat, realizing it is alone and vulnerable, and decides to protect it, even as his companion Ares expresses disbelief and warns of the consequences.

Gregor and Ares debate the identity and significance of the baby rat, with Ares suspecting a trap or deception by the gnawers. Gregor, however, is convinced it is the Bane, noting its unique white fur. The emotional weight of the situation grows as the rat seeks comfort from its dead mother, Goldshard, revealing the tragic backstory of its isolation. Gregor's empathy deepens, and he resolves to take the Bane with them, refusing to abandon it to the ruthless rat kingdom or kill it outright.

As they attempt to flee, a dozen rats attack, forcing Ares into a frantic escape through the tunnels. The baby rat's distress cries amplify the danger, attracting more rats. Gregor struggles to calm the creature, eventually offering it candy to silence its screams. The chaotic chase highlights the moral dilemma Gregor faces: protecting the Bane now could lead to catastrophic consequences later, yet he cannot reconcile killing an innocent, frightened animal.

The chapter ends with Gregor and Ares still in peril, racing through the Underland with the Bane in tow. Gregor's decision to spare the baby rat defies logic and prophecy, setting the stage for future conflicts. His compassion contrasts sharply with the ruthless expectations of the Underland's inhabitants, leaving readers to ponder the consequences of his choice and the true nature of destiny.

Chapter 23

Gregor and Ares embark on a grueling journey through narrow, sulfur-filled tunnels, carrying the Bane, a baby rat. Gregor recalls a past stop in the same cavern where Henry once tried to kill Ripred, a memory that unsettles Ares. The Bane, confused and distressed, clings to Gregor, who feeds it chocolate to calm it. The oppressive environment and physical strain weigh heavily on both Gregor and Ares as they press forward, soaked and exhausted, with the Bane whimpering miserably.

Upon exiting the tunnel, Gregor and Ares collapse, surrounded by approaching rats. Ripred, the scar-faced rat, appears and exchanges tense words with Gregor, who reveals the Bane as a "gift." Ripred is furious, questioning why Gregor didn’t kill the pup as intended. Gregor argues that Ripred wouldn’t harm the Bane, as doing so would undermine his leadership among the rats. The confrontation escalates until Gregor claims he, too, is a "rager," prompting laughter from Ripred and the other rats, diffusing the tension momentarily.

Gregor recounts their harrowing journey to Ripred, detailing their encounters with fireflies, squid tentacles, and the loss of companions like Pandora. Ares steps in when Gregor struggles to continue, explaining how Twitchtip led them until her collapse and how Gregor ultimately took responsibility for the Bane. Ripred, though initially hostile, shows unexpected empathy, acknowledging their losses and the gravity of their situation.

Gregor proposes that Ripred raise the Bane, hoping the rat’s influence could prevent it from becoming a monster. Ripred is incredulous, explaining that rats mature much faster than humans, with the Bane reaching adulthood within a year. The chapter ends with Gregor realizing how little he understands about the Underland’s creatures, leaving the fate of the Bane—and his own role in its future—uncertain.

Chapter 24

After a tiring journey, Gregor and Ares take turns resting and flying through the Underland. Gregor struggles with exhaustion and the harsh conditions, eating raw fish and reminiscing about comforting foods from home. He reflects on his dependence on Ares, feeling guilty for not contributing equally to their bond. To stay alert during his watch shifts, he occupies his mind with multiplication tables and other mental exercises, though his thoughts inevitably drift to his family's worry and the impending Christmas without Boots.

Their journey ends as they arrive at the High Hall, where they witness Nerissa's coronation as queen. The scene is somber, with Nerissa appearing frail and overwhelmed by the crown's weight. Gregor observes the Underlanders' mixed reactions, noting how ill-suited Nerissa seems for leadership compared to Luxa or Vikus. When Nerissa faints upon seeing Gregor, chaos ensues, and the crowd's attention shifts to him and Ares, who had been unnoticed until then.

Vikus publicly questions Gregor about their mission, and Gregor reveals they found the Bane but took it to Ripred instead of killing it. This announcement sparks outrage among the Underlanders, who erupt in fury. The chapter ends abruptly as the crowd turns hostile, with Gregor being struck by an unseen object, leaving the situation tense and unresolved.

The chapter highlights Gregor's physical and emotional struggles, his growing bond with Ares, and the political turmoil in the Underland. Nerissa's coronation underscores the instability of the kingdom, while Gregor's revelation about the Bane sets the stage for further conflict. The tension between survival, loyalty, and leadership drives the narrative forward, leaving readers anticipating the consequences of Gregor's choices.

Chapter 25

In Chapter 25, Gregor and Ares face the grim reality of being tried for treason after refusing to kill the Bane. Ares reveals that their fate rests in the hands of a tribunal and Queen Nerissa, whose current state of mind is uncertain. Overwhelmed by the prospect of execution, Gregor grapples with guilt and despair, while Ares blames himself for bringing Gregor back to Regalia. The bat devises a desperate plan to take full responsibility, hoping to save Gregor, but Gregor refuses to let Ares sacrifice himself, insisting on sharing the consequences of their actions.

The tension escalates as Ares describes their potential execution: being thrown off a cliff, a method that horrifies Gregor due to his recurring nightmares of falling. Despite their dire situation, they attempt to eat the meager food provided, clinging to hope for an escape or a fair hearing. Gregor questions Ares about Nerissa’s ability to spare them, learning of her troubled gift of foresight and her struggles with sanity. Their conversation is cut short when guards arrive to escort them to the tribunal, binding their hands and wings as if preparing for execution.

Upon entering the tribunal room, Gregor is shocked to see Howard and Andromeda also bound and accused of treason for abandoning their mission. Gregor feels responsible for their plight, but Howard insists he acted of his own free will. The formal setting, filled with hostile spectators, underscores the severity of their trial. Three judges take their seats, and the head judge inquires about Queen Nerissa’s presence, hinting at her potential role in determining their fate.

The chapter ends on a cliffhanger as the tribunal awaits Nerissa’s arrival, leaving Gregor and his allies in suspense. The stakes are unbearably high, with Gregor torn between his loyalty to Ares and his fear for his family. The Underlanders’ harsh justice system and the uncertainty of Nerissa’s decision create a palpable sense of dread, setting the stage for a pivotal moment in the story.

Chapter 26

In Chapter 26, Gregor witnesses Nerissa’s seemingly mad laughter as she reveals a pivotal misinterpretation of the prophecy. Vikus joins her, and they realize the "baby" referenced in the prophecy was not Gregor’s sister but the Bane, a young gnawer. Gregor’s decision to spare the Bane’s life—driven by his moral compass—fulfills the prophecy, as killing it would have destroyed his humanity. Nerissa and Vikus clarify that the Bane’s survival prevents the gnawers from rallying for war, turning Gregor’s act of mercy into a strategic victory for the Underland.

The chapter shifts as Nerissa, now composed, dismisses Gregor’s trial, declaring him a savior of the Underland. She invites Gregor, Ares, Howard, and Andromeda to a private dinner, where they eat in solemn silence, united by shared grief. The meal is lavish, a contrast to their recent hardships, but their appetites are subdued by emotional exhaustion. Nerissa’s acknowledgment of their collective loss creates a moment of quiet solidarity, emphasizing the toll of their journey.

After dinner, the group is sent to the hospital for much-needed medical care and baths. Gregor reflects on his physical injuries, a testament to the ordeal he endured. Howard arranges for them to stay together in his family’s chambers, offering safety amid lingering uncertainty about their status in Regalia. The bats and Howard quickly fall asleep, but Gregor remains awake, haunted by thoughts of returning home to face life without Boots.

The chapter closes with Gregor’s unresolved anxiety about the future. His mind races with the impending reality of his sister’s absence and the emotional weight awaiting him in the Overland. The quiet camaraderie of his companions provides temporary solace, but the chapter underscores the lingering trauma and unanswered questions that follow their hard-won victory.

Chapter 27

In Chapter 27, Gregor is reunited with his younger sister, Boots, who arrives in the Underland accompanied by cockroaches but without their friend Temp or Queen Luxa and her bat, Aurora. Boots recounts fragments of her adventure, mentioning a "flutterfly" ride and swimming, but her scattered descriptions leave Gregor confused. The cockroach Pend explains that Temp, weakened and unable to travel, had urged a moth to take Boots to safety while he remained behind. Vikus, desperate for news of Luxa, questions Pend but learns little beyond that Luxa and Aurora faced a rat attack. Gregor clings to hope, but the uncertainty weighs heavily on them both.

Gregor pieces together clues from Boots’s vague recollections, theorizing that Luxa and Temp might have escaped the Tankard through a submerged tunnel. Boots mentions a "baby pool" and bumping her head, hinting at a narrow, water-filled passage. She also references Twitchtip, the rat with a bandaged nose, suggesting the group encountered her before being separated. Gregor speculates that Luxa may have stayed behind to fight the rats or was captured, though the latter possibility is grim. Vikus, though visibly distressed, acknowledges the lack of certainty but clings to Gregor’s reminder of hope.

Vikus insists Gregor and Boots return home, recognizing the dangers of staying in the Underland. He provides Gregor with medicine for his father, a gesture of gratitude and goodwill. As they prepare to leave, Gregor exchanges farewells with Howard, Andromeda, and Nerissa, who gives him a scroll of the prophecy. Vikus’s gifts—a flashlight, a package, and the medicine—underscore the bond between them. Despite his worries for Luxa and the others, Gregor accepts the necessity of departing, though he promises to return if needed.

The chapter ends with Gregor and Boots boarding Ares for their journey home, leaving the fate of Luxa, Aurora, and Temp unresolved. Gregor’s internal conflict mirrors

Vikus’s grief, but both choose to hold onto hope. Boots’s innocence contrasts with the gravity of their situation, as her cheerful excitement about returning home provides a bittersweet counterpoint. The chapter underscores themes of loyalty, loss, and the resilience of hope amid uncertainty.

