

# Cover 1

Relevant results in this cover: 8

Content pages range: [2, 18]

Groups range: [1, 7]

Deep intent (search) query

Interested in example of human technology  
being presented as equal or superior to magic

Ranking query (reranker)

Interested in example of human technology  
being presented as equal or superior to magic

- 000001.txt — ranks: #1
- 000002.txt — ranks: #2
- 000003.txt — ranks: #3
- 000004.txt — ranks: #4 · #19
- 000005.txt — ranks: #5
- 000006.txt — ranks: #6
- 000007.txt — ranks: #7

## Group 1/23

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```
[
  {
    "relevance_score": "1/24",
    "evidence_text": "\"It cannot be traced or tracked\" shows a key advantage of the human
    technology. \"It worked like a videophone\" identifies it as human technology. \"This way
    we have means to contact each other\" implies it's more reliable. \"The object itself is
    not the danger. It's what the cache contains\" emphasizes information's power.
    \"Information holds unimaginable power\" reinforces the value of the technology.",
    "chunk_filename": "001006.txt",
    "chunk_info": "[Chunk 15/415 | Source:
    keeper_of_the_lost_cities/txt/book_04_neverseen.txt | chars:25398-28329 | tokens:659]"
  }
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Title and stature meant everything to Keefe's father, often at the expense of kindness and love toward his son. So Sophie could understand Keefe's rejoicing—but she was surprised to feel a sliver of sympathy for Lord Cassius. In one night he'd lost his wife and his beloved title. And in the morning he'd discover his only son had run away. What about me Sophie asked What did they decide for my punishment That is still the subject of much debate Oralie said quietly but most likely they will banish you to Exillium. Sophie couldn't decide which part of that sentence was more terrifying. She knew nothing about the mysterious school called Exillium but she'd been told many times that she did not want to go there. And to be banished Sure she was running away—but banishment sounded so permanent. Exillium is relegated to the Neutral Territories Oralie whispered a part of our world far too dangerous for you to visit. Especially now Why especially now Alden asked The ogres are stirring—at least that is what I fear. Which is why I came to give you this. Oralie snapped her fingers and a small glass sphere appeared in her palm. Sophie hadn't realized Oralie was a Conjuror. Your cache Alden said taking a step back Actually this is Kenric's Oralie corrected. He gave it to me before he. She didn't say the final word but it cut deep all the same. Councillor Kenric had been one of the first Councillors Sophie had met and he'd quickly become one of her favorites. He'd been warm and kind and quick to smile and had always taken her side. But he'd been murdered a few weeks ago during Fintan's disastrous healing. Fintan was the Pyrokinetic who'd trained Brant for the Neverseen. He'd suffered a memory break for his treason but had managed to protect his secrets. When Sophie discovered she could heal minds the Council ordered her to heal Fintan and during the healing Fintan had found the strength to spark an inferno of Everblaze. Sophie had managed to grab Fitz and Oralie and teleport to safety—but Kenric had been lost to the flames. Sophie's only consolation was that Fintan died in his own blaze. Oralie took Sophie's hand placing the cache carefully in her palm. Seven glittering stones were set inside each a different color. Kenric made me promise to give this to you if anything happened to him she whispered to make sure you'd be protected. Does that mean he suspected his life was in danger Alden asked We both did. Though I should've done more to help. Tears slipped down Oralie's cheeks. I should've done so many things. Councillors weren't allowed to marry or have children in order to remain impartial in their decisions. But Sophie had seen a connection between Kenric and Oralie and suspected they'd been in love. They could've resigned from the Council and chosen to be together but for some reason they'd kept their lives separate. He believed in you Oralie said tracing a soft finger down Sophie's cheek. He told me you were the spark of change our world needed. So keep his gift close and if the Council catches you use his cache to buy your freedom. Do not let them send you to Exillium. You must also take this. She handed Sophie an Imparter a small silver square that worked like a videophone. It cannot be traced or tracked—and I'm the only one you'll be able to contact with it. This way we have means to contact each other. What if the Council discovers your involvement Alden asked They will surely see this as treason. Sometimes rebellion is the only course of wisdom. As all of you well know. Oralie turned back to Sophie and her mouth curved with a word. But by the time it slipped from her lips it had changed to I must go. She raised her pathfinder to the moonlight and glittered away before Sophie could blink. Now that's what I call mysterious Keefe said. Foster you should be taking notes. And who else wants to play with this cache thingy and see what it does. You will do nothing of the sort Alden told him. And you must not let anyone know you have it—I wouldn't even tell the Black Swan. Our world could crumble if that cache fell into the wrong hands. Really Sophie asked. It looked like one of the cheap marbles she used to play with as a kid. The object itself is not the danger. It's what the cache contains. What do you think the biggest threat to our world is Alden asked. The ogres Sophie guessed. Actually it is knowledge Alden corrected. Information holds unimaginable power and some things are too dangerous to be known—even by the Councillors. So they lock the most disturbing secrets away before having them erased from their minds. They're called the Forgotten Secrets and they are stored in what you hold

there. Each Councillor vows to guard their cache with their lives. Oralie has taken an enormous risk by giving this to you. She's also given you our world's most valuable bargaining chip. Sophie rolled the glinting marble around her shaking palm tempted to give such a huge responsibility back. But she owed it to Kenric to protect his gift. Plus Oralie's vague warnings had made it sound like she was going to need it. Come on she told her friends shoving the cache into her deepest pocket. We should get to the Black Swan. She reached for Fitz's hand and Keefe took her other hand. Biana clung tightly to her brother leaving Dex to choose between Keefe and Biana. I won't bite Keefe told Dex. Ow—but no need to get squeezy! None of them looked back as they sprinted into the trees. They wove around fallen branches and gnarled roots making so many turns Sophie feared they were lost until her ears picked up the telltale whoosh of waves. The forest parted a few steps farther revealing a steep ocean bluff. I'm going to open my mind to yours so you can finally show me where we're going she told Fitz. I don't have anything to show you Fitz said. I just know we're supposed to start at the Path of the Privileged.

## Group 2/23

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```
[
  {
    "relevance_score": "2/24",
    "evidence_text": "Watchward Heath... gives him access to thousands and thousands of camera feeds. This is exactly what we need. Dex do his Technopath thing. The CCTV cameras. Technology is presented as superior to magic for this specific purpose.",
    "chunk_filename": "003369.txt",
    "chunk_info": "[Chunk 419/643 | Source: keeper_of_the_lost_cities/txt/book_08.0_legacy.txt | chars:748873-750195 | tokens:311]"
  }
]
```

Wait Sophie said wincing as she straightened up Is Mr Forkle still here

He might be Keefe said Why

Go check Sophie told him wishing she'd thought of this sooner If he is tell him I need to talk to him right now

About what Mr Forkle asked from the doorway and Sophie jumped then winced

Whatever it is it can wait Livvy cut in shoving Mr Forkle aside to make her way over to Sophie with Elwin right at her heels

Edaline was with them too and she held Sophie's hand the whole time that Elwin and Livvy did their exam which was mostly Livvy asking Does this hurt before poking Sophie somewhere while Elwin flashed various orbs of colored light around Sophie's body and studied her through his funny spectacles

The answer unfortunately was always Ow yes

And the final verdict seemed to be that everything was on the right track but Sophie still had a long way to go They also didn't think she'd be up for taking any elixirs for at least another day

Including pain medicine

Why is it so much worse this time Sophie asked sucking air through her teeth as Livvy made her lie back flat again and her muscles punished her for the movement I mean I know you messed with my heart a little but last time you gave me double the amount of limbium so

The heart is much more sensitive than people realize and so much more vulnerable It can't defend itself the way the mind can and I don't mean physically she added when she noticed Sophie's frown From a physical standpoint they're both vital organs and any sort of serious strike or blow would be Game Over But from an emotional standpoint the brain can think through feelings and talk us into or out of them

Tell me about it Ro muttered from Sophie's closet

See Livvy said The ogre princess knows what I'm talking about It's a defense mechanism that the heart simply doesn't have The heart feels what it feels whether we want it to or not So messing with it the way I did takes a much bigger toll even on a physical level This isn't a perfect metaphor but try to think of it as I poked a hornet's nest And you got stung And I'm really sorry

Me too Elwin said

Edaline squeezed Sophie's hand

The good news Mr Forkle told her is you made the right decision with the pill you selected I can already feel your heart and mind communicating in ways they never have before

Sophie's eyes widened Are you reading my thoughts right now

Not in the way you're assuming Mr Forkle assured her I realize you haven't given me permission So you're going to have to tell me what it is you needed to discuss unless you want me to find the answer myself

No it's fine Sophie said glancing at Livvy and Elwin and deciding it wouldn't matter if they heard I need you to do me a favor

Mr Forkle sighed If this has to do with

It doesn't Sophie interrupted I'm not focusing on that right now though the fact that I trusted you with my life again when you still won't trust me with that information

What information Livvy interrupted

It doesn't matter Mr Forkle insisted

Sophie decided it did So she told Livvy and Elwin He won't tell me who my biological parents are Even though I deserve to know

You definitely deserve to know that Elwin agreed narrowing his eyes at Mr Forkle

Some secrets must be kept even from those deserving Mr Forkle countered

Livvy groaned

I'm not saying that to pressure anyone into telling me right now Sophie emphasized turning back to Mr Forkle But I need something else—and since I just took a huge risk for you and you still won't give me the other information I really need I don't think you should be allowed to say no to this Especially since it's a very reasonable request

Mr Forkle pursed his lips looking both wary and amused by her assertiveness That's quite the sales pitch Miss Foster But you realize you're going to have to actually tell me what you want before I can decide if I'll be able to help you right

Sophie glanced at Keefe and said Show him the drawing

Keefe's eyebrows shot up but he didn't argue or question her And as he flipped to the right page in the silver notebook Sophie explained about Keefe's shattered memory and their plan to find the guy using the CCTV cameras

So this is why you and Mr Dizznee went to London Mr Forkle asked taking the notebook from Keefe to study the man's face more closely When she nodded he asked Why do you need my help

Well so far none of the London cameras have found the guy And I'm starting to worry that it might be because he doesn't live in London anymore It's been a few years and humans move around

They do indeed Mr Forkle agreed turning to study the drawing from a different angle

She waited to speak again until he met her eyes hoping her stare made it clear that what she was about to demand wasn't optional That's why I want you to take Dex to Watchward Heath

What's Watchward Heath Keefe asked

Forkle's secret office Sophie told him Or one of them at least He brought me there a few days ago and showed me how it gives him access to thousands and thousands of camera feeds—and that's exactly what we need So now Mr Forkle's going to take Dex there and let Dex do his Technopath thing And if our guy is anywhere on this planet we'll find him

TWENTY-NINE

IF I AGREE TO WHAT you're asking Mr Forkle said glancing slowly between Sophie and Keefe and let's be clear that what I mean by that is if I allow Mr Dizznee to do his Technopath thing as you put it to the cameras feeding into my private office I expect to be fully kept in the loop on this project's progress from this point forward—and I don't mean simply with this particular memory I mean with all of the memories you decide to investigate in the future

He held Keefe's stare as he slowly flipped to the next page of the silver notebook as if he was testing to see if Keefe would try to stop him

Flip all you want I have nothing to hide Keefe said leaning back in his chair But I should warn you that also means there's nothing else interesting in there Mommy Dearest did a good job of making sure I wouldn't recover these memories Why do you think Foster's pushing you so hard for this one

What about the memories in those Mr Forkle asked pointing to the green and brown notebooks still sitting on Sophie's desk

Keefe scooped them up and held them out I mean if you're looking for a particularly inspired visual re-creation of the Great Gulon Incident then you're about to be super excited Otherwise not so much Oh and if you flip the pages at just the right speed you can watch the moment the gas erupts

Mr Forkle's lips twitched with a smile as he took the notebooks And here I thought you had nothing to do with that event

Keefe smirked Not saying I did

Sophie didn't bother asking She'd been trying to get someone to tell her what happened during the Great Gulon Incident for years and had never gotten a straight answer

## Group 3/23

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```
[
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    "chunk_filename": "004280.txt",
    "chunk_info": "[Chunk 181/505 | Source: keeper_of_the_lost_cities/txt/book_09.0_stellarlune.txt | chars:346832-351162 | tokens:982]"
  }
]
```

So if she was understanding the markings correctly—and she was pretty sure she was—all she had to do was find where those five rivers connected, and she’d find Elysian.

### EIGHTEEN

UGH, SCROLLS ARE SERIOUSLY THE worst,” Sophie grumbled, wrestling with a particularly stubborn piece of paper that kept rolling back up the second she tried to smooth it out on the kitchen table. “Why do we still use them? Even humans moved on a few centuries ago. Now they have this handy thing called Google Maps—you should really check it out.”

Grady laughed and set his bottle of lushberry juice on the scroll to help weigh one end down. “Scrolls make it easier to control who’s able to view the information. Remember: our world is designed to be found only by those allowed to have access.”

“Yeah, well, there has to be a way to be mysterious and efficient,” Sophie argued.

“I’m with Blondie,” Ro jumped in, waving one of the scrolls like it was a sword and she was challenging Sandor to a scroll duel. “In the Armorgate we have these grids that... Actually, I’m not sure if I’m allowed to tell you about those—especially with a goblin around.” She poked Sandor’s side with her scroll-sword—and he did not look amused. “But they’re way cooler than these dusty things.”

“Pretty much anything is,” Sophie muttered.

Ro groaned as Edaline strode into the kitchen carrying another armload of paper—and Sophie was right there with her. She was tempted to run back upstairs, grab Iggy, and let the destructive little imp do some serious shredding.

When she’d asked Grady and Edaline if she could check all their maps, she’d had no idea what she was getting herself into.

The entire kitchen table was now buried under scrolls.

So were the empty chairs.

And most of the floor.

Now she understood why Grady and Edaline had insisted she get some sleep before she started her search for the mysterious rivers.

"This shouldn't be so hard," she'd said, letting her eyes go out of focus so she could see the lines of the rivers without as many distractions. So far, she hadn't found even one match.

Some maps didn't have any rivers—and most of the ones that did only showed a small portion. It would've been really nice if she could've clicked a "zoom out" button—but nope!

She lifted Grady's lushberry juice and moved the current scroll to her "not it" pile, which looked depressingly small compared to the mountain of scrolls she still needed to search—and that was just the maps that Grady and Edaline had in their offices. There had to be thousands of others sitting in dusty libraries throughout the Lost Cities, and she'd have to start tracking them all down if she couldn't find what she needed.

"I'd be happy to help," Edaline offered, planting a kiss on the top of Sophie's head as she dumped the new batch of maps onto the table. "We have a Spinosaurus arriving in the next minute or two, and I'll need to get it settled into a pasture—but I should be free in a few hours."

"Thanks," Sophie said, trying not to think about how numb her butt was going to be by that point. The kitchen chairs were not as comfortable as she would've liked.

"I'm ready to jump in anytime too," Grady said as he helped Sophie weigh down the next scroll. "But I'll be way more useful if you tell me what this is all about."

Sophie became very interested in examining the newest rivers.

She wasn't sure how much she was allowed to share about Elysian, so she was keeping everything extremely vague. They knew she was looking for rivers that matched the pattern of her projections, and that it had something to do with the letter E—but nothing else.



"You can trust me," Grady promised. "I won't—"

Sophie was saved by a ground-shaking ROAR!

"That's my cue," Edaline said, rumpling Sophie's hair before she rolled up her sleeves and headed out to the pastures.

"Holler if you need me!" Grady called after her.

"Eh, it's one Spinosaurus," Edaline shouted back. "It'll be easy."

The next ROOOAAAR seemed to suggest otherwise.

"Don't worry," Grady told Sophie. "Edaline's the dinosaur whisperer."

Sophie watched through the windows—and the Spinosaurus did seem to calm when Edaline approached with slow, careful steps and outstretched arms.

The scene reminded her a little of the first time she'd sat in Havenfield's kitchen staring at the creature-filled pastures through the wide windows—back when taming feathery dinosaurs seemed as impossible as feeling at home in this glittering house with these beautiful strangers.

So much had changed since then.

Now this was her family—her world.

And she had to make sure the Neverseen couldn't destroy it—even if it meant checking every map in existence.

She reached for the next scroll, coughing when it unleashed a giant plume of dust. "Maybe I should hail Dex and see if he can think of any gadgets that might speed up this process."

"What about that 3-D map thing you said the Forklenator has in his office?" Ro asked. "Would that be useful?"

“It depends on what you’re looking for,” a familiar wheezy voice said behind them.

## Group 4/23

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keeper_of_the_lost_cities/txt/book_03_everblaze.txt | chars:608546-611044 | tokens:596]"
  },
  {
    "relevance_score": "4/24",
    "evidence_text": "Sophie uses a human mirror (compact) to reflect the journal's runes.
The reflection inverts the runes, making them readable. The mirror is a human artifact that
solves a problem magic couldn't. This demonstrates human technology being superior to
magic in this context. She explicitly states it's a 'human mirror'.",
    "chunk_filename": "000928.txt",
    "chunk_info": "[Chunk 317/380 | Source:
keeper_of_the_lost_cities/txt/book_03_everblaze.txt | chars:611044-615361 | tokens:974]"
  }
]
```

She knew only that the Council was capable of cold, unkind things, and now she was powerless to do anything about it. Or was she? She wasn't ready to face Foxfire yet, and when she checked Grady's office she found a runic dictionary thicker than her head. Her arms ached as she pulled it down and carried the heavy volume to her room, but it was worth the strain. Whatever code Jolie used in her journal had to have a pattern or a key. If she could figure out how it worked, she would be able to translate the pages. Her circlet slowed her progress. Every few lines her concentration started to stray—and she was fairly certain her photographic memory wasn't working with the precision she was used to. But it felt good to do something productive. Even if it didn't seem to be helping. Whenever she compared Jolie's markings against the runic alphabets in the dictionary, she couldn't find a match. In fact, the more she studied them, the more the writing looked unnatural—like Jolie had tried to copy something she'd been looking at, and sometimes her hand had failed her. Marks were scribbled on top of themselves, and many of the lines were bunched so close together that Sophie couldn't tell which rune they were connected to. And yet, the whole mess still felt familiar. Her eyes were starting to blur when Sandor announced that she had a visitor, and Dex shuffled nervously into her room. "I wasn't sure if you'd see me," he mumbled. "I thought you were Fitz." She knew she was being cruel, but she couldn't stop herself. Dex didn't rise to her bait. He just stared at the carpet, looking so sad and lost she had to tell him, "Sorry." When he looked up there were tears in his eyes. "I'll take it off right now, Sophie. I don't care if they exile me." "Yes you do. And you know it won't be just you. I can't let that happen." "Then what should I do? Want me to wear one too? I will. I already started building it." He reached into his Foxfire satchel and pulled out a dull metal circlet with a spikey pattern instead of swirls. Sophie grabbed it from him and ran over to Sandor, who crushed it into a ball of mangled metal with his giant goblin hands. "I know what you can do," Sophie said as she took the ruined circlet and handed it back to Dex. "You can never build another one—and stop making weapons for the Council!" "I already did. I told them I wouldn't build them another thing." "What did they say?" He stared at the crushed ball, tracing his fingers over the individual bits of metal, like they were itching to repair it. "That they need my help to track down the Black Swan. And that even though things have calmed down with King Dimitar, that we still should be prepared from now on. They told me I could have some time to reconsider. But I won't. I don't trust them anymore. I never really did. I just . . ." He sighed, shoving the ball of scrap into his satchel. "I just liked that I mattered, you know? All my life I've been treated like a waste of a birth fund. And then suddenly I had Councillors visiting my house to talk to me, telling me how amazingly talented I was. And I wanted to impress them. I know that's no excuse. But I was just trying to make the Dizznee name something people respected. So the triplets wouldn't have to go through what I went through." Sophie sighed. "I know, Dex. I do understand. And I don't want to be mad at you. But I am. And I probably will be for a while. Can you give me some time?" He nodded sadly. "But can I have one favor?" he asked. "No, favor isn't the right word. I know I don't deserve a favor." He stepped closer, pointing to her bare finger. "I totally get why you took your panic switch off—and I know the last thing you want to do is call for me. But . . . what if the rebels come after you again? You can't inflict or call anyone telepathically or teleport away, and I couldn't live with myself if anything happened." "She has me," Sandor reminded him. "I know. But please, Sophie. Let me do something to keep you safe." His eyes glistened with tears, and Sophie felt her eyes burn too. Dex was the boy who'd tackled the kidnappers so she could try to get away. He'd suffered in silence as they burned him over and over because he didn't want them to do it to her. He was her first friend—her best friend—and he just wanted to keep her safe. So even though she was still angry with

him, she dug out his ring and slipped it on her finger—and she stuffed her iPod back into her pocket, too. she dug out his ring and slipped it on her finger—and she stuffed her iPod back into her pocket, too. “Thanks,” he mumbled, turning away and wiping his eyes. “And remember, if you need anything, all you have to do is press the center stone and it will call for me.” if you need anything, all you have to do is press the center stone and it will call for me. Sophie nodded. She had no intention of ever using the button. But it was nice to have Dex back on her side. He left her then, and she went back to the mind-numbing task of studying runes. She’d only made it through a few more pages when Edaline peeked her head through the doorway, letting her know she had another visitor waiting for her in the living room. She expected to find Fitz, Keefe, or Biana with news of the Black Swan. Instead, she found Magnate Leto standing under the crystal chandelier. He looked strange in his orange cape and tunic. Less intimidating than the silver clothes he used to wear as Beacon. Or maybe she just trusted him now. “I can’t stay long, I’m afraid,” he told her as she offered him a seat on the couch. “I have a number of things still to arrange. But I wanted to stop by when I saw you were absent again today—and not to pressure you. I understand you might need further time to adjust. However, your sessions are waiting for you whenever you’re ready to return. All of them.” “Even my ability sessions” Sophie asked. “Of course.” “But . . . doesn’t this” she pointed to her circlet “make them kind of impossible” “Ah, I was under the impression that nothing was impossible.” He tapped his lips, making it clear her secret was safe. “But even if I’m mistaken in that regard,” he added, “all of your Mentors still see value in your sessions. I know Tiergan is very much looking forward to ensuring your thorough understanding of the rules of telepathy.” “What about Bronte and Lady Cadence” Sophie had to ask. “Lady Cadence assures me that there are tricks for successful mimicking that go beyond simply being a Polyglot. And Councillor Bronte actually came to me, insisting your session not be cancelled. I almost didn’t allow it, given his role in your current predicament. But I told him I would leave the decision up to you. So he asked me to give you a message. Repeated it four times to ensure I remembered it.” Magnate Leto’s eye roll told her how he felt about that. “He said, ‘It takes a special person to see darkness inside of someone and not condemn them.’ Any idea what he means” “Not really,” Sophie admitted. Unless Bronte was referring to their rather dramatic last session. But she had condemned him. She’d been ready to have Keefe go lie detector on him to find out if he was the leak in the Council. Good thing they hadn’t done that. Now Bronte was one of the only Councillors still on her side—even if she did still think he was hiding something. “Was that his whole message” she asked. “No, there was one other part. He said, ‘Inflicting comes from the heart, not the head.’” “Wait. Does that mean he thinks I can still—” Magnate Leto smiled. “So should I assume you’ll leave your schedule as is” “I guess,” Sophie mumbled, hardly believing that she was voluntarily keeping her session with Bronte. But the thought of taking the ability back sent prickles of hope flaring in the back of her mind, clearing some of the clouds choking her concentration. Especially when Magnate Leto squeezed her shoulder and told her, “Take the time you need to adjust to your new situation. But know that Foxfire is waiting for you. We need our star prodigy back.” “I’m not a star,” she told him as he pulled a slender pathfinder from his sleeve. “That’s not what I’ve seen. I have it on good authority that nothing can stop you from being who we need you to be.” Then he was gone, leaving her with renewed energy as she returned to her room and focused on Jolie’s journal. Her thoughts were still slower, and her headache couldn’t dull completely. But this time she felt confidence—and the confidence made her realize she was on the wrong track completely. Jolie had wanted the Black Swan to have this journal, otherwise “swan song” wouldn’t have been part of the key. So she had to have left a clue to tell them how to read it. And the clue had to be hidden in the only runes written in the Black Swan’s cipher. “Reflections,” Sophie whispered, tracing her fingers over the careful lines and squiggles. What was Jolie trying to tell her To reflect on something inside the journal But how could she do that if she couldn’t even read it What would she use to . . . Sophie dropped the journal, not sure if she wanted to kick herself or jump up and down. She decided to see if she was right before she made her decision. She’d been reading the title like it meant “musings” or “observations.” But what if Jolie meant it much more literally “Please please please,” Sophie whispered, holding the human mirror in Jolie’s blue compact up to the first page. If Sophie was right, the letters should inverse in the reflection and . . . She had one second to celebrate as the squiggly lines morphed into words she could finally understand. Then she read the first sentence. If you found this journal, it’s too late to stop him. SIXTY-TWO WHO” SOPHIE SHOUTED AS SHE squinted at the page. Jolie didn’t seem ready to tell her. In fact, the first sentence must have been added later, because after that it switched to an account of why Jolie had joined the Black Swan in the first place. Translating the runes was tedious, and forced Sophie to work at a glacial pace. Jolie must’ve been copying down a reflection of an original entry, and her writing was sloppy and nearly impossible to read. Still, when Sophie took it one letter at a time, she was able to piece together the words to Jolie’s story.

## Group 5/23

---

```
[
  {
    "relevance_score": "5/24",
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    "chunk_filename": "001080.txt",
    "chunk_info": "[Chunk 89/415 | Source: keeper_of_the_lost_cities/txt/book_04_neverseen.txt | chars:157604-158938 | tokens:335]"
  }
]
```

FOURTEEN

IT TOOK SOPHIE several seconds to realize Dex’s voice wasn’t part of a dream. A few more after that, she caught the silhouette of him sitting on the edge of her bed.

She gasped and pulled her covers around her neck, then remembered she was wearing her crazy pajamas. Dex looked just as furry, though his onesie was lime green.

“What are you doing here?” she whispered, turning toward her wall of windows. A triangle of gray-orange light leaked in where the curtains parted slightly, so she assumed that meant it was dawn.

“I had to show you this.” Dex held up a gadget that looked like a guttled obscurer. The sphere had been sliced in half, and all kinds of springy coiled wires stuck out of the center. “I know it’s ugly, but now it’s a really powerful Evader. It let me break into the Council’s archives and find records on Exillium—and I know what you’re going to say,” he added quickly. “I know the Black Swan told us to drop it. But I think Exillium’s worth looking into. If we could find the Boy Who Disappeared, we might be able to find the Neverseen. Plus, I knew I could sneak in without getting caught. I’m sorry I didn’t tell you first—I wasn’t sure if we were being watched.”

“You are.”

They both yelped as Della blinked into sight near the curtains. “Don’t tell me you thought I’d let you sneak into Sophie’s room while she’s sleeping and not see what you’re up to.”

“Good to know,” Keefe said, striding into the room in a red furry onesie. “And don’t think I was going to allow a Sophex meeting to happen. Hmm, maybe we should call it Deeephie. Sophex sounds weird. Anyway, my point is, no secret meetings without me!”

“And me!” Fitz said, trailing behind in furry gray pj’s.

"I'm here too!" Biana appeared in the corner wearing shaggy pink. "I followed my mom when she followed Dex."

"Wow, it's really crowded in here," Sophie mumbled. "And really... furry."

Even Della had a blue onesie that made her look like Cookie Monster.

"Cool, your window is right across from mine!" Keefe said, opening Sophie's curtains.

## Group 6/23

---

```
[
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The crowd at Foxfire was even larger than Sophie had been expecting. It leaked out the ornate golden doors to the main amphitheater where the inauguration was being held and spilled into the grassy courtyard crushing the bushes shaped like the different mascots and blocking the path. A tiny less than nice part of Sophie wished one of the glaring people would accidentally find one of the effluxers and trigger an epic stink blast especially when she spotted Marella standing with Stina. There was a pocket of space between them like neither girl truly wanted to be with the other. But when Marella noticed Sophie watching her she tossed her hair and turned away. Sandor kept a loose grip on Sophie's wrist leading her straight to a security checkpoint outside the main entrance. A dozen elves in bright orange capes were scanning everyone's registry pendants and dividing them into two lines one leading up to the arena's seats and one to the floor level. Only noble families were given access to the floor—but not all of them. And as far as Sophie could tell there seemed to be no reason for the division. Her family was sent to the floor. The crowd was thinner there filled mostly with stern looking elves dressed in very fancy capes. So Sophie was surprised to recognize a familiar face. Dex she called rushing over to his seat in the second row near the center. He was sitting right behind the seats marked for her and his whole family was with him—even the triplets. Sophie had never seen Kesler and Juline dressed so fancy though their capes were still far simpler than the finery that surrounded them. I didn't know you'd be here she said. Thought I'd be up in the common area didn't you he asked his wide grin making it clear that he didn't mind if she had. Not anymore they stopped us on our way in and told us that because one of my inventions would be featured prominently in the assembly they wanted me nearby in case they needed any assistance. That's awesome Sophie told him knowing it was the reaction he was expecting. But why would the Council want to demonstrate a weapon Kesler patted Dex on the back his pride obvious though he still looked like he'd rather be back in his lab coat whipping together some sort of crazy concoction. Oh before I forget Dex said glancing over his shoulder as he dug into the pocket of his jeweled blue cape. I finally had a chance to fix this. He handed over her iPod which now had a small silver triangle sticking out of the base. I still don't get why you need this but that receiver will pick up pretty much any kind of signal you want. And I made a few tweaks to the way it works because well man that thing was slow. He touched the screen tapped one icon and instantly the Internet loaded. That's what you needed right Yeah it's perfect Sophie shoved it into her pocket before anyone could notice though Sandor had already seen and was giving her his Do you really think this is the time or place to have human technology out in plain sight look. You're the best You're the best I know. She elbowed him and he laughed. But he turned serious as he studied the packed audience above them. I heard the Councillors saying something about an announcement regarding you. Everything okay I hope so she said it with a smile but what little she'd choked down of her dinner turned to prickles in her stomach. Despite Grady's assurances she couldn't help worrying that the Council was going to expel her. That wasn't something they would need a unanimous vote for. Only a majority—and she wasn't sure she had seven supporters. She wasn't sure she even knew seven of the Councillor's names. Still it had to help that Dame Alina was the newest member to the Council. She'd seen firsthand how well Sophie did at school—surely she'd be able to come to her defense. It's time to take your seats a snooty sounding elf told them shuffling past in a silver and black cape. The inauguration will begin in a moment. Sophie had barely settled into her chair next to Edaline—which was also conveniently in front of the steps for the stage—when the bells chimed a slow tinkling peal and the Councillors and their bodyguards appeared. They weren't wearing their usual gowns and capes. Instead they wore identical silver suitlike garments with simple fitted jackets and tailored pants. Their long silver cloaks had hoods which they all tossed back in unison revealing matching silver circlets. The female Councillors even had their hair pulled back making it hard to tell which Councillor was which. The only one easy to recognize was Councillor Emery whose dark skin gave him an air of importance as he welcomed everyone to the assembly. He explained that

the inauguration would happen first followed by a brief speech from the Councillors which would conclude with an announcement—and Sophie was pretty sure he glanced at her when he said the last part. Sophie reached for Edaline's hand as the Councillors stepped back leaving room for Magnate Leto to move to the center of the stage. His orange robes were a vivid flame among the muted silver of the Council and when the floor beneath him lifted to create a pedestal he looked like a torch—a torch that suddenly had an unearthly green glow as the lights dimmed in the auditorium. Foxfire Sophie whispered realizing the glow was the same shade as the luminous mushrooms the academy was named after. No matter how many times the elves explained the illumination in a darkened world analogy she would never stop thinking it was weird to have a school named after glowing fungus. Councillor Emery's booming voice snapped her out of her spore related musings and he unrolled a golden scroll reading a long boring oath for Magnate Leto to repeat—most of which Sophie tuned out. All she really caught was the final stanza—and only because Councillor Emery raised his voice to make it echo around the auditorium. Do you swear to put the safety and success of your prodigies above all else—even your own life Yes Magnate Leto called lowering into a deep bow as polite applause filled the arena. One by one the Councillors dipped their heads paying their respects to the new principal of Foxfire. And when they reached the last of the twelve Dame Alina she stepped forward holding a narrow scepter with a glowing orange F on the end. For a horrible second Sophie thought they were going to brand the F onto Magnate Leto's skin like farmers did to cattle. Instead Dame Alina pressed the glowing end against the center of the pedestal and turned it like a key making the room rain with glittering orange sparks. The sight should've been breathtaking but it reminded Sophie too much of the Everblaze. And from the squeamish looks on the Council's faces she clearly wasn't the only one fighting flashbacks. That's the key to Foxfire Edaline whispered as the pedestal lowered and Dame Alina handed the scepter to Magnate Leto. He dropped to his knees and vowed that the light would never go dark on his watch. Then he pressed the key into the floor and the room flooded with light so bright Sophie had to rub her stinging eyes. By the time her vision cleared the pedestal was gone and Magnate Leto had stepped back to the shadows. Under normal circumstances our festivities would end here Councillor Emery said as the Councillors moved to center stage. But we all know our circumstances are hardly normal at the moment. We thank you for your patience and trust and we're happy to announce that the gnomes have reported to us just this morning that the cleanup in Eternalia is now complete. Every speck of ash and refuse has been washed away—a truly incredible gift these remarkable creatures have given us and we all owe them a debt of gratitude. In the months ahead we will owe a similar debt to the dwarves for their help rebuilding what we've lost. And we always owe a debt to the goblins for standing at our side ready to serve and protect. All of these creatures support us—not just because they are generous compassionate beings—but because they rely on us for something as well. Something that recently we've been failing to deliver. He paused for a second letting the audience lean forward in their seats before he told them Peace. The word triggered a murmur in the crowd and Councillor Emery waited for them to fall silent before he continued. We did not ask for the role of peacekeepers on this complicated ever changing planet. And yet it is the role we were born to take. Our unique gifts and abilities have enabled us to secure stability amongst our world as well as the five protected kingdoms for millennia. And despite recent turmoil our role has not changed. Our rule will not fall to threats or rebellion. Nor will we stand back and let insubordination go unpunished. Sophie was pretty sure every eye in the room was on her at that point but she didn't scoot down in her chair. Her legs didn't even tremble as she stood at Councillor Emery's command—but her heart pounded so hard it hurt as she climbed the stairs and took center stage.



```
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| chars:312129-315846 | tokens:878]"
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It was a relief to reach the safety of the Level Two wing, which was packed with prodigies running around, popping the prize-filled bubbles. She poked a bubble floating by her locker and a box of Prattles dropped into her hands. Good catch, Dex said, running up beside her. He jumped for a bubble but didn't quite reach it. Before he could try again, Stina shoved by, raised a bony arm, and popped it. She waved the bottle of lushberry juice in Dex's face. Must get frustrating being shorter than the average dwarf. Sophie snorted. This coming from someone who looks like a giant lollipop. If your head gets any bigger, you'll topple over. Dex cracked up. Awfully brave words coming from a girl who's going to flunk out of here today, Stina growled. Sophie opened her mouth but couldn't find a snappy comeback. Stina could be right, and Sophie was trying very hard not to think about that. Especially after Tiergan's comment. Stina giggled. Enjoy your last day at Foxfire, loser. She bumped Sophie into the wall and stalked away. Don't let her get to you—and if Lady Galvin fails you, I'll organize a protest. Dex pointed to her thinking cap, which was overflowing with presents. Look at how many people care about you here. He frowned at his own, half-empty cap. Sophie nudged his arm, pulled a package from her satchel—the Disneyland watch she'd been wearing when she moved to the Lost Cities. She figured he'd get a kick out of that—and dropped it in. He grinned, flashing his dimples. I slipped your present in before you got here. His eyes dropped to his feet. I hope you like it. I'll love it. Just let me drop off Biana's gift and we'll go to the cafeteria. Ugh—why did you buy Biana a present? She's my friend. Yeah, and like a month ago you guys hated each other. That was a misunderstanding. Yeah, well. I don't trust her. I don't think you should either. Why would she reach out to you for— Sophie shushed him as Biana entered the atrium, followed by Maruca. They looked like they were talking, but when Sophie got closer she realized they were arguing. Biana bit her lip. Oh, hey, Sophie. Maruca glared at Biana. Sophie cleared her throat. Sorry. I just wanted to drop this off. She handed Biana a pink box—the charm bracelet she'd bought her—and turned to leave. Wait. Biana pulled out a slim purple parcel and handed it to Sophie. You're coming over for dinner tonight, right? Of course. I can't wait! Well. I'll see you later, Sophie said, wondering why Maruca was glaring at her. Then again, so was Dex. What? she asked as soon as they were out of earshot. You're going over there for dinner? He said something else too, but the chiming bells drowned him out. Sophie froze. The bells signaled the start of parent-Mentor conferences. Which meant Grady and Edaline were finding out right now if she was going to stay at Foxfire. DEX DRAGGED HER TO THE celebration feast in the cafeteria, but Sophie couldn't relax—even surrounded by friends. The bells chimed every twenty minutes. Four had already passed, which meant in twenty minutes Grady and Edaline would know if she'd failed alchemy. Her palms were so damp she struggled to unwrap her presents. What do we have here? Keefe asked, snatching a red box from her thinking cap. He was definitely back to his old self without his father around. He glanced at the card and cracked up. Dear Sophie. I really enjoyed our dance, and I hope we can do it again sometime. Love, Valin. Her face burned as everyone at the table laughed—even Fitz. Who's Valin? Dex asked. Vice president of the Sophie Foster Fan Club. Don't worry, I'm president, so I'll take care of her. He winked as he tossed the present back to her. Go on. Open it. There didn't seem to be a way to avoid it, so she tore off the paper, wishing she could disappear when she unwrapped a bracelet of little heart charms. Keefe cracked up again. Aw, Foster has a boyfriend. She does not! Dex snapped. You don't, right? She shook her head so hard her brain rattled. I'm just teasing—sheesh. Keefe nudged Dex's arm, then grinned at Sophie. Interesting. What? Dex asked. Which one's your gift, Dex? Sophie interrupted. She didn't have to be a mind reader to know what Keefe was going to tease Dex about. Dex glared at Keefe as he grabbed a small package wrapped in plain white paper and handed it to Sophie. Sorry, we didn't have any ribbon. Please, I still can't believe you made me something. She tore through the paper and gasped. My iPod. She tapped the screen and the gadget sprang to life. Yeah. He pointed to a green rectangle about the size of his fingernail set into the back. It's solar powered now, and it has a speaker in case you don't want to use those ear thingies. She stared at Dex for a minute, so amazed she wanted to hug him. She knew Keefe would have a field day, though, so she fought the urge. This is amazing, Dex. How did you do it? He shrugged, pink coloring his cheeks. Well, thank you. Best. Gift. Ever. I dunno, Keefe interrupted. You haven't opened mine yet.

She bit her lip, a little afraid of what Keefe might give her. Which one's yours? Your hat was overflowing, so it's waiting in your locker. How did you get in my locker? I have my methods. She shook her head in disbelief as Marella shoved a box wrapped with crooked green paper into her hands. Open mine next. Marella gave her a variety pack of flavored air, plus she got a ton of candy from prodigies she barely knew. Biana gave her a set of edible lip glosses, and Jensi gave her a speckled spider snapper—a plant that fed off spiders. Clearly, he didn't know how to shop for girls. The only real disappointment was Fitz's gift. He gave her a riddler—a pen that only writes the words of a riddle until someone writes the correct answer. It was kind of cool, except he also gave one to everyone else. She'd spent forever trying to find him something personal, settling on a miniature Albertosaurus covered in deep violet feathers. She knew it was silly, but it reminded her of the day they met, and in the card she thanked him for showing her what dinosaurs really looked like. Fitz giving her a fancy pen—especially the same fancy pen he gave everyone else—made it seem like he hadn't thought about her at all. But maybe he hadn't. He'd hardly looked at her gift when he opened it, too distracted by the tunic Keefe gave him, which had i know what you're thinking—and you should be ashamed of yourself embroidered across the front. She tried not to let that bother her. The doors burst open and parents streamed in. Sophie couldn't breathe as she scanned the faces, desperate to find Grady and Edaline. Dex squeezed her shoulder and told her it would be okay no matter what, but she barely heard him. She'd found Grady and Edaline, and their faces were unreadable as they searched the room, not seeing her as she shoved toward them. She was halfway there before she locked eyes with Grady. A huge grin lit up his face. You passed, he shouted over the crowd. A hysterical laugh erupted from her lips as she ran the rest of the way and threw her arms around them. When her brain caught up, she wondered if she'd crossed a line, but their arms wrapped around her, and when they let her go their eyes were misty. I really passed? she asked, needing to hear it again. Even alchemy? You got a seventy-nine on your purification. Still room for improvement, but within passing range. She squealed, hugging them again. Grady grinned. I'm sensing you're happy about this. She laughed so hard tears streamed down her face, but she didn't care. She passed! She could stay at Foxfire. Sure, she still had to face Bronte and the Council in five months about permanent enrollment, but right now she was going to celebrate. She raced back to the table and threw her arms around Dex. I couldn't have done this without you. His face was tomato red when she let go, and she couldn't help giggling. Everyone congratulated her—except Keefe, who leaned in and whispered, Told you so, when his dad wasn't looking. All her friends had passed their exams. In fact, it looked like most of the school had. A few parents had to comfort sobbing prodigies, but everyone else was tossing confetti and partying. Unfortunately, that included Stina. Her face twisted into a sneer when she noticed Sophie celebrating. Then she rolled her eyes and stomped away. Sophie giggled. She wanted to stay for the party, but she could tell Grady and Edaline were a little overwhelmed. She ran back to the atrium to pick up Keefe's gift, so she would be ready to go home. Inside her locker she found a giant box of mood candy, a small black cube, and a note: For the Mysterious Miss F— If you don't relax, this candy will always taste bitter—so snap out of it! And try to stay out of detention! —K The candy tasted like sugarplums, and inside the black cube she found a round silver pendant with a cobalt blue crystal in the center. The candy turned sour. Since when did Keefe give her jewelry? He didn't like her— She wouldn't finish the thought. There was no way a guy like Keefe would ever, could ever—why was she thinking about this? Marella's boy-craziness must be rubbing off on her. It was just a necklace. He probably gave them to all the girls. She didn't know what to do with it, so she shoved the pendant to the back of her locker, and was glad she didn't see Keefe before she left. She needed to figure out how to thank him for such a strange present.

# Cover 2

Relevant results in this cover: 11

Content pages range: [20, 39]

Groups range: [8, 18]

Deep intent (search) query

Interested in example of human technology  
being presented as equal or superior to magic

Ranking query (reranker)

Interested in example of human technology  
being presented as equal or superior to magic

- 000008.txt — ranks: #8
- 000009.txt — ranks: #9
- 000010.txt — ranks: #10
- 000011.txt — ranks: #11
- 000012.txt — ranks: #12
- 000013.txt — ranks: #13
- 000014.txt — ranks: #14
- 000015.txt — ranks: #15
- 000016.txt — ranks: #16
- 000017.txt — ranks: #17
- 000018.txt — ranks: #18

## Group 8/23

---

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I've been. The word they tried to black out is 'drakostomes.' The Council's attempt to
obscure information is overcome by Dex's technological solution.",
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]
```

He pressed the base of the gadget, making the pyramid glow green. He had to wave it around a few times, like when humans try to search for a stronger cell phone signal, but eventually a crackly hum filled the room and a fuzzy hologram appeared.

Sophie squinted at the image. Is that a scroll?

A super old one. The database is filled with them. I've just started going through. I was looking for stuff about the Wildwood Colony, but this one caught my eye because of all the smudges. He pointed to black smears covering whole paragraphs. These runes have been blacked out, which means someone is trying to keep something secret. But they must've run low on ink because at the end it's thin enough for a few words to peek through—and if I'm reading them right, it proves the ogres have something that gives them leverage with the Council.

It took a moment for the gravity of the revelation to hit.

So . . . you're saying the ogres have a way to control the Councillors? Sophie asked.

It kinda makes sense, Fitz said quietly. Alvar's always talking about the crazy restrictions the ogres put on him when he visits Ravagog, and how none of the other creatures would get away with them.

Right, Dex agreed. And the really weird part is, you can see it right in the treaty—I checked. The treaties for the other species basically say, We will allow you to remain free because you will do whatever we tell you. But the ogre treaty is like, We promise we won't use our abilities on you, or visit your cities, or ask too many questions about anything you're doing, and you're allowed to continue building weapons as long as you promise not to use them, and you can do all kinds of other dangerous things too and we won't stop you, and if we do, you have the right to declare war. Why would the Council agree to any of that? It doesn't make sense. Until you look at this.

He twisted the gadget again, and the hologram zoomed in to part of the scroll where the ink had run thin.

Sophie squinted at the runes peeking through the faded ink. What does it say?

You can't read it? Biana asked her?

Only if it's written in the Black Swan's code.

Mr. Forkle had taught her mind to translate their special cipher runes, which came in handy—until she needed to read anything in normal runes. Great plan, guys!

It's hard to tell without most of the context, Dex said, but this sentence is talking about how the ogres will retain possession of something that's clearly super important, and the word they tried to black out is drakostomes.

Sophie frowned. That sounds like some sort of fungus.

So it doesn't trigger any memories? Dex asked.

His shoulders slumped when she shook her head. I was hoping I'd say the word and the memory would click and you'd have all the answers.

Sophie sighed. Welcome to working with the Black Swan. It's full of disappointments!

Or maybe the Black Swan doesn't know either, Fitz reminded them.

Well, whatever they are, they seem to be something the Council really wants, Dex said. And I'm guessing the Neverseen allied with the ogres because of them, probably after they realized they'd never get their hands on Silveny and Greyfell. Wouldn't that explain why the Council's gotten so weird lately? Haven't their craziest decisions happened since the ogres got involved? Then suddenly Sophie was the number one enemy and they were vowing to hunt down the Black Swan instead of the Neverseen?

It does explain a lot, Della agreed. Alden and I have had many conversations about how the ogres have slaughtered hundreds of goblins without punishment. They also stole the gnomes' homeland—dammed up the river and starved the gnomes out. And even after the gnomes came to us for aid, the ancient Council let the ogres keep Serenvale as part of the treaty.

I thought that was because the ogres refused to leave, Fitz said. So the only way to force them out

would've been war.

That's true, Della agreed. And they offered the gnomes protection in the Lost Cities—and and not because they suspected how useful the gnomes would become. I've heard stories from the ancient Vackers about how stunned they were the first time the gnomes shared their harvest, and it was the gnomes who volunteered to help with other tasks. Still, the Council made the trolls return the dwarven mines they'd stolen—but in that case, the trolls needed our medicine.

Exactly, Dex said. And these drakostomes seem to work the opposite way. Something the Council wants—or maybe something they're afraid of—that gives the ogres the upper hand.

But what are they? Biana asked. What would make the Council grant the ogres' demands?

A question formed in Sophie's mind—one she didn't want to ask, even after all the times the Council had sided against her.

Do you think they have something to do with the plague? she whispered.

I thought of that, Dex said, but . . . this scroll is olllllllold. So if the ogres have had the drakostomes all this time, why would they suddenly be like, Let's use it on Wildwood!

Sophie didn't have an answer.

Could trying to read King Dimitar's mind have been that big of a deal?

And that's all you've found about the drakostomes? she asked.

So far. But there's a lot to sort through. Dex tapped his gadget, shutting down the hologram. I'll search as fast as I can. But right now I have to check each scroll one by one. I'm hoping I can make some tweaks to search by keyword or something.

Please be careful, Della said. It's amazing that you've been able to gain access this quickly, but doesn't that worry you? I don't mean this as an insult—you're clearly a brilliant Technopath—but doesn't it almost seem too easy?

Dex flipped over the gadget to show her a tightly coiled wire. Don't worry. This emits a signal that erases any trace of where I've been. No one will have any idea I was there.

Assuming you haven't missed a security protocol, Della reminded him. Let's all try not to underestimate the Council. If these drakostomes are a crucial secret, they'll have gone to great lengths to protect it.

She's right, Sophie said. And we should be really careful who we tell about this—especially Calla.

If the drakostomes were related to the plague, they wouldn't just have proof that the ogres were behind it. They'd have proof the Council knew this could happen and never warned the gnomes.

## Group 9/23

---

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]
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The real work begins tomorrow but we wanted to end this first night with something we hope you'll find heartening As many of you know the complex problems of our modern world have led to the rise of certain groups within the Lost Cities And while the Black Swan have proven themselves to be both resourceful and reasonable which is why they're represented here at this Summit the Neverseen have unfortunately caused incredible chaos Halting their efforts has proven a challenge but we finally have proof of our inevitable victory Three holograms flashed to the center of the U shape Brant Ruy and Gethen live projections of each of the prisoners in their blindingly bright cells They sat in nearly identical poses backs straight legs crossed eyes closed looking more like meditating monks than warmongering villains And yet as Sophie watched the faintest whiff of a smile curled Gethen's lips reminding her how desperate he'd seemed for information about the summit They're up to something she thought right as a pair of goblins burst into the room and whispered a breathless message to Councillor Emery Is something wrong King Dimitar asked Wrong is not the word I would use Councillor Emery glanced at the other Councillors waiting for each to nod I've just received word that the current leader of the Neverseen an elf named Fintan Pyren is outside the gates of this castle demanding to be admitted to the proceedings SEVENTY-SIX



## Group 10/23

---

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]
```

He started almost every sentence with 'you kids.' The man who rescued us said it too. That could be a coincidence. It was him. She scooted back, like she needed room to fit her huge epiphany. Mr. Forkle is an elf. Alden sank down beside her. You're sure? She wanted to say yes, but . . . She grabbed the memory log and projected Mr. Forkle the way she remembered him. Wrinkled. Overweight. There had to be a mistake. Alden gasped as he looked over her shoulder. He is an elf. But he's old. That's exactly what someone looks like when they've eaten ruckleberries. See the way the skin looks stretched? The body swells and wrinkles as the berries digest. He did smell like feet, Sophie remembered. That could've been from the berries. Alden swept his hair back and stared into space. That explains why the kidnapper backed down. He could tell your neighbor was more powerful than him. I'm sure the Black Swan had their most skilled operative guarding you. He shook his head. I should've guessed they wouldn't leave you alone. They'd want someone nearby in case anything went wrong. He was right. Mr. Forkle had always looked out for her. He'd called 911 when she hit her head. And he was always asking about her headaches. He must have known she was a Telepath. But . . . why could I hear his thoughts? Shouldn't his mind have been silent? Another part of his disguise. A highly skilled Telepath can broadcast thoughts the way humans do. He gave you what you needed to hear to not suspect him. I bet that's how they planted some of the memories in your brain. He certainly had enough access to you to broadcast subliminal messages when he needed to. Mr. Forkle? A Telepath? She sucked in a breath. He was there when I fell and hit my head—the accident that started my telepathy when I was five. Do you think he did something to me? It's possible. I'm not sure why they'd want to trigger an ability in you at that age. But he might have decided to take advantage of you being unconscious. Telepathy can be easier to activate that way—not that I've ever tried it. In fact, I wonder . . . What? she asked, when he didn't finish. I wonder if he's the reason you've developed more abilities. He might have triggered some after he rescued you. They were exactly the skills you needed to survive. She didn't remember that much of what happened, but she did remember feeling five years old again. Was that because he'd done the same thing he'd done back then? She shook her head. It was too much. Her whole life she'd been controlled and manipulated—and they were still doing it. Why? she asked, wishing she had something to throw. Why put me with humans? Why all the secrets? What was the point? I don't know, Alden whispered as he rose to pace. I'd always assumed it was to hide you from us. But maybe there was more to it than that. Tell me this—why did you risk everything to bottle the Everblaze? She was surprised he had to ask. People were dying. Humans were dying, he corrected. And no one cared enough to stop it. Except you. I think you can hardly deny your upbringing played a big role in that decision. Maybe that's what the Black Swan wanted all along. If you're right—and they're working against these other rebels, who seem to want to destroy the human race—then perhaps they thought it would be wise to have someone who cared about humans on their side. I'm not on their side. That doesn't mean they don't want you to be. He paused to stare out the window. The only ones who'll know for sure are the Black Swan. It's time we find them and ask them. He made it sound so simple, like he could just look up their address in the phone book. They've been hiding from you for years. What makes you think you can find them now? He held up the memory log. We'll run these images through the registry database. Your neighbor might be hard to match, but we'll check every Telepath until we find him and force him to lead us to the Black Swan. In the meantime, we'll use the other picture to find the identity of the kidnapper. Once we catch him, we'll be able to probe his mind to find the others. She curled her knees into her chest, shaking her head. I told him I recognized him. I'm sure he's in hiding now. It's not that easy to hide from us. No offense, but it doesn't seem like it's that hard. The Black Swan hid me for twelve years—and you only found me when they led you to me. The kidnappers hid us somewhere in Paris and you had no idea. They have secret leaping crystals hidden among humans that no one knows about—except the other rebels. "I

think it's easier to hide here than in human cities. At least they have security cameras and detectives and police." Alden sighed. I see why you might feel that way, but you have to understand, Sophie. "Humans have those measures in place because conspiracies and arson and kidnapping are common. Those are unheard of here." Or they used to be. He shook his head. For thousands of years the Council reigned supreme. They were the wisest, most talented members of our society, working together for the greater good. No one questioned their authority. But the past few decades have changed everything. Why? Humans. They've developed weapons powerful enough to destroy the planet. So about sixty years ago a measure was brought before the Council to create a new Sanctuary specifically for humans, to relocate them for the good of the earth—and their own safety. It had a lot of support. Some very influential people have grown tired of hiding in the shadows while humans run amok throughout the globe. But the Council rejected it, refusing to imprison an intelligent species. For the record, I agree with their decision. Sophie nodded. Humans would be devastated if their lives were uprooted that way. The supporters of the initiative were angry with the Council. Some called for members to resign—especially Bronte, since he was the most outspoken against the idea—and there were threats to go ahead with the plan anyway. The Council didn't take the threats seriously, but they forbade human contact of any kind and recruited Telepaths like myself to keep our minds open for suspicious activity. All talk of rebellion vanished, and the Council was satisfied. Crisis solved. He sighed. I'd always suspected the rebels moved underground—though I never would have guessed there was more than one group. I'm afraid I've been almost as blind as the Council. His shoulders sagged as he stared at the ground. Even when I found your DNA, none of the Councillors would believe you really existed, or that if you did, that it had anything to do with rebellion. That's why things have been handled so poorly. But they can't ignore it anymore. An elf tried to burn the Forbidden Cities to the ground with Everblaze. A team of alchemists had to spend days making Frissyn to put out fires all over the globe. Two children were kidnapped by an unregistered Pyrokinetic and held prisoner while we held funerals for them. His voice cracked, and he paused for a second, clearing his throat. The Council has been forced to admit the rebellion exists, and you can rest assured that this threat will be resolved. We have tremendous power at our disposal. We just haven't been using it. Sophie reached for Ella, hugging her to her chest to hide her shaking. She wanted to believe him, but it was hard. The rebels were smart, and very well organized. If they wanted to get to her, she had no doubt that they could. But she had a bodyguard now. He would keep her safe—though she wasn't in love with the idea of a giant gray goblin following her around all the time. I can tell you're still worrying, Sophie, and I don't blame you. But trust me on this. The rebellion will be stamped out very quickly now that the Council is willing to acknowledge it. Anyone involved will be brought to justice. I hope so, she whispered, trying not to think about the ghostly voiced elf who was out there somewhere, plotting revenge. I'll see if I can trigger any memories that might help. No, Alden sat beside her. I don't want you involved. You've been a big help, and you have incredible powers at your disposal, but you're twelve years old. Thirteen, she corrected, realizing her birthday had passed a few months ago. Elves didn't pay attention to birthdays—given their indefinite life spans—so she'd forgotten. Fine. Thirteen. That's still too young to be wrapped up in a conspiracy. I want you to make me a new promise. He waited until she met his eyes. I want you to promise you will just be a normal, happy, thirteen-year-old girl. Go to school. Make friends. Get crushes on boys. Have fun. No more worrying about secret messages or plots or rebellions. Leave that to boring grown-ups like me. But I'm not a normal thirteen-year-old girl. I have abilities no one understands—and secrets stored in my brain that people are willing to kill me for. That may be true, but being special doesn't mean you can't have a normal life. You only get seven years to be a teenager. Enjoy them. Promise me you'll try. A normal life. It sounded too good to be true.

## Group 11/23

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[
  {
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    "evidence_text": "The iPod is a human technology that Dex enhanced. It can access the
internet, which elvin technology cannot. Dex made 'a few tweaks' to improve its
functionality. The device is described as 'the Internet loaded' instantly. This represents
human technology being superior to elvin magic/technology.",
    "chunk_filename": "000919.txt",
    "chunk_info": "[Chunk 308/380 | Source:
keeper_of_the_lost_cities/txt/book_03_everblaze.txt | chars:592330-594168 | tokens:447]"
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]
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The Black Swan must've thought the same thing. Apparently they'd given Keefe a note within hours of Sophie's sentencing, instructing him to tell Fitz and Biana about his dad and to wait for a new plan. Replacing one Telepath for another—with a Vanisher as a bonus. It was hard not to be bitter. Her friends sat on the couch opposite her, looking anywhere except her forehead. You can all stop pretending not to notice it, Sophie mumbled. She'd managed to cover part of the circlet with her hair, but the bands that crossed her forehead, and the flat beige stone that rested between her brows, were impossible to hide—unless she put a bag over her head. Which she was actually considering. Honestly, I think it's pretty, Biana said, earning herself an elbow from Fitz. What? I know it's a terrible thing. But at least it's not ugly on top of it. Wouldn't that be worse? Sophie almost wanted to smile. Leave it to Biana to consider the fashion sense of an ability-restricting accessory. Does it hurt, Fitz asked after a second. Yeah, Keefe told him, before Sophie could lie. I can feel it from here. And I gotta say, Sophie. I like Dex. But I kinda want to kick him in his special place. Me too, Fitz agreed. Me three, Sandor added from his post near the front door. Sophie sighed. She didn't want to hate Dex. But it was hard when just concentrating on the conversation felt like it was wringing all the energy out of her brain. She'd already shoved the ring he'd made her deep into the bottom of her drawer—along with her iPod, and anything else he'd given her. And as soon as she had a chance, she was dyeing Iggy back to gray. Still, Dex wasn't the only one to blame. It's my fault too. If I hadn't tried to read King Dimitar's mind. She couldn't finish the sentence. And she definitely couldn't look at Fitz, remembering the way he'd tried to warn her. It's not your fault, Fitz promised, leaning closer to her. The Councillors are being idiots. And if it helps there are lots of people who agree. Sophie snorted. I'm sure most of the crowd was cheering. There were some, Biana admitted. But mostly everyone was stunned silent. Dude—even my dad thought it was messed up, Keefe jumped in. If that doesn't say something. His words felt like a slap to the cheek and Sophie hung her head, realizing she was pouting about a circlet when Keefe's whole world was crumbling. How's everything going, she asked quietly. Keefe shrugged. My dad doesn't know I know. My mom's asked a couple of times if I'm okay, but I'm sure she just thinks I'm worried about you. I still don't think you should be staying there, Fitz said, squeezing the edge of the couch. What if Lord Cassius figures out that you're on to him? Then he'll see that I'm ready for him. Keefe pulled back his sleeve to reveal a row of goblin throwing stars. The steel in his eyes said he wouldn't hesitate to use them. But there was a quaver in his voice as he added, I'm keeping close track of his emotions. If I sense anything weird, I'll head to Everglen. But until then, we have to stick to the plan. I still don't like it, Fitz mumbled. Me neither, Biana agreed. The anger in their tone made Sophie wonder how they'd reacted when Keefe first told them about his dad. After all, they'd known Lord Cassius for years. She was almost glad she hadn't been there. Besides, Keefe said, clearing his throat and pulling down his sleeve, it'll all be over soon anyway. That's why we're here—not that we didn't want to check on you, he told Sophie. Right, Biana quickly agreed. We've actually come by every day. Could you hear us? We couldn't tell. Sophie's face burned, imagining how ridiculous she probably looked, sulking under her covers. Sorry. I guess I'm not handling this as well as I should be. Uh, there is no should be, Keefe told her. I'd be freaking out just as much if it happened to me. Probably more. Me too, Biana agreed. I never could've done what you did. What I did, Sophie repeated. I hid in Dame Alina's office—or, I guess it's Magnate Leto's office now—when you were with the Councillors, Biana admitted. I heard the awful things they said. And I saw how you stopped resisting once they threatened to exile Dex. I don't think I could've ever been that brave. Me either, Fitz agreed. But Sophie's the bravest person I know. What's wrong, he asked as she turned away to blink back tears. Is the circlet hurting? No. Well, yeah—it always hurts, Sophie admitted, drying her eyes with her sleeve. But I'm not brave. I've been feeling sorry for myself for—how many days has it been? Three, Keefe admitted. Three days, she mumbled miserably. So much time wasted. I just I thought no one would want anything to do with me now. Why, they all asked in unison. She waved her hands around her head, like that explained everything. You worry about the craziest things, Foster,

Keefe laughed. But I'm basically the Council's number one enemy, she argued. So, Biana asked. Yeah, that actually ups your Cool Points, Keefe added. And you know what the Council's doing, right, Fitz asked. People were judging them for not having frissyn ready to stop the Everblaze, and for not making the healing safe enough in the first place, and for not catching even one rebel in all these weeks. So they made you the scapegoat to take the attention off themselves. Besides, Foster, Keefe said, waiting for her to look at him, when are you going to realize that you could wrap yourself in neon green feathers and start walking around roaring like a dinosaur, and we'd still hang out with you? Shoot—I'd join in. I would too, Fitz agreed. Me too—though I'd want pink feathers, Biana decided. This time Sophie couldn't help smiling, and somehow it made her head hurt a little less. Enough that she finally felt ready to ask, So, how much longer are we going to pretend you're not holding scrolls from the Black Swan? We're not pretending, Fitz said after a second. We just didn't want to upset you. Because the Black Swan's plan doesn't include me.

## Group 12/23

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    "chunk_filename": "004495.txt",
    "chunk_info": "[Chunk 396/505 | Source: keeper_of_the_lost_cities/txt/book_09.0_stellarlune.txt | chars:707215-708752 | tokens:377]"
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]
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Sophie could tell he was changing the subject to avoid answering her question, but she let it go—for the moment. Most places aren't decorated like this, she told him. Which reminds me—uh... how can you afford to stay here? Keefe smirked. Technically, Mommy Dearest is paying for it. I raided her jewelry box at Candleshade before I left, and the stuff I took turned out to be worth a lot of human money. That was actually a brilliant plan—and something Sophie never would've thought of. She obviously needed to give Keefe's human survival skills more credit. But... How did you know where to sell everything, she asked, imagining Keefe trying to negotiate with the owner of a dingy pawnshop—and then leaving with a huge stack of cash in his pocket, practically begging to be robbed. And don't hotels require some sort of ID before they'll check you into a room—especially a room like this? It's been a lot of trial and error, Keefe admitted. Took me a few days of pretty much nonstop light leaping to find the facet on the pathfinder that got me to London. And then I just kinda wandered around, trying to figure out how everything worked—and I realized it's all about who you know. Ask the right questions, make the right friends— Friends, Sophie interrupted. You have friends here? She wasn't surprised, given how smart and funny Keefe was—and part of her was glad he hadn't had to spend all these weeks alone. But the idea of him settling in and finding a group of humans to hang out with definitely stung. Let's just say I've had a little help and leave it at that, okay, Keefe asked, and there was something almost pleading in his expression. I promise, someday I'll tell you all about my adventures in Humanland, including a particularly awesome anecdote involving a giant spider and a horrible paste called Vegemite. But right now, I think I've been very patient, waiting for you to tell me why you're all here—soaking wet, in the middle of the night—and how you found me when I've done a really good job of staying hidden. I'd also love to know how you managed to ditch Gigantor for this little adventure, since I'm guessing that was a pretty epic struggle. That's a really long story, Sophie told him. Well then, I guess it's a good thing my room has all these chairs, he pointed toward the sitting area, which looked like somewhere a group of princesses would gather for high tea. Warning: They're not as comfortable as they should be. Nothing is, honestly. What I wouldn't give for a gnomish-made bed. And maybe a slice of mallowmelt. Oh, and some bottles of Youth! Human water is terrible. I can't decide if it tastes like feet or dirty rocks. Should we do a taste test at some point and take a vote? I have a bunch of bottles. Actually, what we should be doing is getting rid of your tracker, Tam said as he made his way closer. Keefe stumbled back like he'd been punched. Um... I have a tracker? How? And more importantly, from who? Also: Please tell me getting rid of it isn't going to require melting off my skin! No skin-melting, Sophie promised. But Tam's right—we should've started working on that immediately. Any idea what you're going to need, Tam? Should he lie down or sit or— Whoa—Bangs Boy is doing what, now, Keefe cut in. Because the last time he used one of his little Shade tricks on me, I kinda ended up almost dead and woke up with a bunch of freaky new abilities—and I'm not blaming you for that, he told Tam. I told you to do it, remember? But that doesn't mean I'm ready to repeat the process. I get it, Tam said. But this will be different. I'm not sending any shadowflux into you—I'm just drawing some out. Yeaaaah, see... that doesn't actually sound any better, Keefe noted. Explaining the whole "ripple" thing didn't help a whole lot either. Even when Dex showed Keefe the special Spyball-Imparter contraption he'd made—and then went off on a tangent about how next time he needed to make sure it would warn them about the weather so they wouldn't get drenched. So... you're telling me that Fintan had Umber lace my food with creepy shadows and move them to my heart—and then my mom stole his special Spyball, so now she can find me anytime she wants and show up at my door just like you all did, Keefe verified when they'd finished. Well, she'd have to wait for the eleventh hour, but... yeah, Dex admitted. Keefe's laugh had very sharp edges. You know, sometimes I think, 'Surely I've found all the messed-up ways my mom and her creepy little minions have been manipulating my life.' But NOPE! There's always another fun surprise just waiting to be discovered! Anyone want to guess what it'll be next time? Maybe there are

light beams hidden in my eyeballs that let her see everything I'm seeing! Or maybe the Neverseen's Technopath made some sort of tiny listening device that's hidden in one of my teeth! Think they can hear us talking right now? I doubt it, Dex said. The teeth would be a terrible place to hide a listening device—you'd have to hear every time someone chews or... His voice trailed off. Sorry, you meant that hypothetically, didn't you? The sad thing, Keefe said, is that we probably should treat those ideas like possibilities. I mean, there's a shadow-ripple-tracker thing hidden in my heart!

## Group 13/23

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]
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He flipped the silver notebook over and held out a photo-realistic drawing of a really nerdy-looking guy. Between the tweed blazer and the bow tie and the ruddy cheeks and the wild hair he looked like some sort of professor stereotype. All he was missing was a pair of thick spectacles and. He's human Sophie realized focusing on the man's deep brown eyes. She'd gotten so used to being surrounded by blue-eyed elves that it was almost jarring to see someone with the same eye color as her—and someone with deep smile lines and strands of gray peppered through his messy red hair. The elves remained ageless after they became adults. Only their ears changed with time growing points along the tops after a few thousand years. Look at what he's holding Keefe told her pointing to the man's left hand which held an envelope sealed with a symbol they'd only seen one other time two crescents forming a loose circle around a glowing star. That's the letter your mom gave you Sophie murmured. Yep Looks like I didn't follow Mommy's delivery instructions as strictly as she wanted me to. Which surprises no one Ro jumped in. Of course not Keefe agreed a hint of his smirk returning. But now we know for sure that I did deliver the letter. And I saw the guy she was contacting. And now that I know what he looks like I can track him down again and find out what Mommy Dearest wanted from him. FOUR But you know how many humans there are in London right Sophie had to ask even though she hated being the hope crusher. It's a huge city like millions and millions of people. And the man that Keefe had drawn was a pretty generic-looking British guy—from his bright ginger hair down to the elbow patches on his blazer. There were probably ten men on every block who looked similar to him—not that wandering the zillions of London streets trying to find someone more unique would honestly be much easier. That's where Dex comes in Keefe said snapping the silver notebook shut with a smug grin. I did some research—which uh don't tell the Forklenator about by the way. I'll never hear the end of it if he finds out—and it turns out London has lots of surveillance cameras. So Dex is going to hack into their system and set it up to search for anyone who looks like my drawing. He says the art is detailed enough that he should be able to find an exact match—and it'll tell him which camera caught the image so we'll know right where the guy is. All Dex needs is a few minutes with one of their computers so he can do his thing and then we just sit back and wait for the alerts to go off. Sophie wanted to point out that they were assuming the guy was still living in London and he could've easily moved away in the years that had passed. But her brain was too busy getting stuck on something that was probably way less important. You've been working on this with Dex She managed to leave off the without me. But the unspoken words still felt like they were staring them down demanding to be acknowledged. Keefe tapped his fingers against the spine of the silver notebook. Well I needed a Technopath. And Dex is the best. He is Sophie agreed. He was also her best friend. And she knew it wasn't fair to feel left out after all the times she'd chosen to hide what she was working on from everybody. But that didn't stop a piece of her heart from turning very prickly. I was going to tell you Keefe assured her. When Soon. That didn't feel like a good enough answer—and Keefe must've known it because he reminded her again You've been super busy. I haven't seen you in over a week. Well I would've been here if you'd told me what you were doing And if Dex has to go to London you're going to need me to teleport him there. Sandor cleared his throat. We'll figure out how to bring you along if we have to she promised. You will Sandor agreed. There is no if. And that's what we were already planning on Keefe told her which didn't make Sophie feel any better. If anything it kinda proved that they'd been waiting until they had to clue her in. It also would've been way faster if you'd let me project your memories for you she pointed out feeling more tempted than ever to grab the gold notebook and steal a good long look at everything he was hiding. She snatched the brown one instead. Keefe cringed as she flipped to the first carefully sketched memory—but didn't try to stop her. He also didn't offer to let her start helping him now that she knew what he was working on she noticed—but then she didn't care anymore because his art was even more amazing than she'd expected. He'd used a medium she didn't recognize—not paint but the colors were too vibrant for

pencil and the details seemed to shift with the way the light hit the paper. It felt like she was actually watching Keefe sneak through the grounds of Foxfire at night carrying a wiggling green creature and playing tackle bramble with Fitz while Biana cheered them on and sitting with all of the Vackers gazing at the colorful flames of an aurenflare. The drawing after that showed Lord Cassius covered in some sort of thick sticky slime. And the rest of the pages seemed to be blank save for a barely started pencil sketch toward the middle of the notebook where the bodies had only been vaguely blocked out. It was impossible to tell who the figures were but the memory looked like it might have taken place in Keefe's favorite ditching spot at Foxfire. I haven't spent as much time on my happy memories Keefe explained quietly since they never have my mom in them so they're not as important you know. The raw truth in those words softened some of the prickles in Sophie's chest. And she was about to hand back the notebook when a sketch hidden near the end caught her attention—a drawing she was surprised to recognize herself in. She sat with Keefe on the staircase at Havenfield the light from the chandelier forming a soft halo around her as she leaned toward him clinging to his hand while he turned away his eyes slightly watery. It didn't look like a happy scene and it took her a second to realize she was seeing the moment she'd told him what little she'd learned from Fintan about Keefe's shattered London memory. But underneath the sketch in neat bold letters he'd written the words she remembered telling him that day Lots of people care about you Keefe. We do she said quietly. And we can help if you let us. I can help. Keefe cleared his throat. I know. Then why are you keeping me away He took the brown notebook from her and added it back to the pile with the green and gold. I'm not. It's just. That's not an answer she pointed out when he didn't continue. And that's the second time you've stopped yourself from telling me something. Is it Yep—and don't even try the whole answering-questions-with-questions thing on me. It's not a big deal. Seems like it is if it's making you not trust me. I never said I don't trust you. You didn't have to. It's pretty obvious. Hmm this sounds a lot like something I warned you would happen doesn't it Hunkyhair Ro clicked her tongue. Keefe shot her a withering glare before turning back to Sophie. I do trust you. I'm just. His voice trailed off and the prickliness in Sophie's heart came back with a vengeance. Please tell me what's wrong Did I do something or say something or She took the brown notebook from her and added it back to the pile with the green and gold. I'm not. It's just. That's not an answer she pointed out when he didn't continue. And that's the second time you've stopped yourself from telling me something. Is it Yep—and don't even try the whole answering-questions-with-questions thing on me. It's not a big deal. Seems like it is if it's making you not trust me. I never said I don't trust you. You didn't have to. It's pretty obvious. Hmm this sounds a lot like something I warned you would happen doesn't it Hunkyhair Ro clicked her tongue. Keefe shot her a withering glare before turning back to Sophie. I do trust you. I'm just. His voice trailed off and the prickliness in Sophie's heart came back with a vengeance. Please tell me what's wrong Did I do something or say something or. Keefe dragged a hand through his hair. It's not you. I'm just trying to do the right thing. What does that mean She glanced at Ro for translation when Keefe stayed silent. Don't look at me Ro told her. I've never understood it. Keefe sank onto the bed making more ferret noises. It means it's different now you know. Not really Sophie admitted. Unless he meant Fitz. Or her and Fitz. That was the only thing that was different. But it also wasn't. He sighed. You're going to make me say it aren't you. I think you have to she admitted because I don't really get what would be wrong. The adorable obliviousness strikes again Ro giggled. Keefe rolled his eyes and tugged on the hem of his tunic—which was still inside out Sophie realized.



## Group 14/23

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[
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They hide people from view, a magical capability. This shows human technology equal to
magic.",
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keeper_of_the_lost_cities/txt/book_03_everblaze.txt | chars:12535-12767 | tokens:57]"
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They hit the ground hard, tumbling across sloshy grass before landing in a heap. Sophie sat up first, untangling herself from Keefe's arms as she stared at the gray, overcast sky. Uh . . . this isn't Havenfield, Keefe said, squinting at the narrow street lined with plain, square houses. I know, Sophie rallied her concentration, imagining an invisible barrier wrapping around her head to shield herself from the voices pummeling her brain. She'd forgotten how loud human thoughts could be. This is San Diego. Keefe scrambled to his feet. You teleported us to a Forbidden City Okay. That. Is. Awesome! Don't get me wrong—I could do without the whole almost-getting-trapped-in-the-endless-black-nothingness thing. But this is epic! I mean, that's a human! He pointed across the street, to a mom in a bright blue tracksuit, jogging with her baby in a stroller. Yeah, and she can probably hear us, Sophie whispered. Surely everyone must've noticed the teenagers in strange clothes who fell out of the sky. But the few people outside weren't even glancing their way, too busy walking their dogs or checking their mail. I don't think they know we're here, Keefe said, pointing to a small black orb nestled in an overgrown daisy bush. There was another next to the trunk of the giant sycamore in the center of the yard. And three more along the path. Obscurers. Sophie had only seen light-and-sound-bending gadgets once before, in the hands of her kidnappers when they ambushed her and Dex on a bridge in Paris. One of them was the same blond elf who'd tried to snatch her months earlier, posing as a human jogger on the very street she was standing on. She walked to the spot where she'd faced him, hoping it might help her remember something new. But all she could see was his face—and Alden had already entered his image in the Council's database, which was supposed to have a record of every elf ever born. No match had been found.

## Group 15/23

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    "chunk_info": "[Chunk 315/324 | Source: keeper_of_the_lost_cities/txt/book_02_exile.txt | chars:650036-653970 | tokens:914]"
  }
]
```

The Sanctuary was hidden inside the Himalayas. The dwarves had secretly hollowed out the enormous mountains centuries before, and the gnomes and elves had converted the space to a lush paradise with every possible climate, comfort, and care. Access was restricted and regulated, and the Council had amped up security even more for Silveny's arrival to make sure that no one would be able to hurt her there. And Silveny would finally be able to meet the other alicorn, and hopefully with time they would breed. Ensure the existence of their species. I'll come visit, Sophie promised, which perked Silveny up enough to fill Sophie's head with Visit! Visit! Visit! mixed with the occasional Keefe! Yes, I'm sure Keefe will come too. She reached up and ran her fingers through Silveny's icy mane, meeting her deep brown eyes. But I'll miss you. Miss, Silveny repeated, transmitting the ancient ache she'd sent Sophie before. Friend. Tears slipped down Sophie's cheeks, and she wrapped her arms around Silveny's neck. What matters is keeping you safe, she told her, repeating the words until Silveny finally accepted them. Sophie tried to accept them too as Silveny lowered her shimmering head and let Sophie climb on her back. "You don't have to do this, Sophie," Grady said, startling them both. Sophie turned around and found Grady and Edaline watching her. It was strange to see them in their long silver capes embroidered with the Council's seal. But they were both officially part of the nobility again, assigned to assist with the search for the kidnappers and the Black Swan. Assuming Sophie pulled this off without a hitch. "I thought you guys were at the festival already," she said as she adjusted her heavy cape. The Celestial Festival was being held at the base of Mount Everest, so everyone had to wear thick clothes and clunky boots to stay warm. "We were," Edaline said, stepping close enough to inspect Silveny's wing. "But I wanted to check Silveny's wound." She frowned at the dark red scar. "And I wanted to tell you one more time that you don't have to do this," Grady added. They'd both insisted on knowing what Sophie was planning, and she'd finally caved and told them everything: how Mr. Forkle modeled her DNA on alicorns, how she'd figured out how to teleport—in theory, at least—and how she was planning to test that theory for her spectacle. They'd been trying to talk her out of it ever since. Once she did this, the Council would know she could teleport, and they didn't want Sophie to feel forced to expose her secrets. Especially since they kept saying they were sure the Council would only give Grady a minor punishment. Sophie gave them the same answer she'd given them every time. "I know I don't have to. I want to." Edaline gave Sophie a hug. Grady sighed. "Letting you go never gets any easier, does it? Though it might help if you weren't always doing such dangerous things." Sophie smiled. "It's going to be okay. And hey, we've fixed everything else. We just need to solve this last thing." Grady nodded. "I trust you." "Me too," Edaline agreed. "I suppose that means I should as well," Sandor grumbled as he stepped from the shadows. "But I still prefer when you stay by my side, Miss Foster." Sophie smiled. "I know. And I promise I will try to be better about that." The kidnappers were still out there—and there were even more of them than she'd realized—so she was going to have to keep her burly bodyguard around for a while. "But I have to do this first." Sandor reluctantly nodded. "I'll be waiting for you when you arrive." Edaline wiped her eyes and took Grady's hand as he raised his pathfinder. "I guess we'll see you soon," Edaline whispered. "I'll be there in a minute." Sophie watched the three of them glitter away and tightened her grip on Silveny's neck. Silveny raised her glittering wings. No. We're not going to fly, remember? She was glad Silveny could move without any pain. But she had no idea if the wing could really support any weight, and she wasn't going to let Silveny hinder her recovery by trying to fly too soon. Silveny tensed as they trotted toward the edge of the cliffs, and Sophie was nervous too. But if the last few weeks had taught her anything, it was that sometimes there was no guarantee. Sometimes she just had to trust herself and believe that if she put her mind to it, she was strong enough to pull through. It always came down to trust. No flying. Sophie repeated the command until Silveny tucked her wings. Trust? Trust. Sophie closed her eyes, taking a deep breath and rallying her concentration before she transmitted, Run! Silveny whinnied and galloped forward, bounding across the last stretch of grass

before she leaped off the edge of the cliff. Calm! Sophie transmitted as they fell down down down, and she filled Silveny's mind with warmth as she repeated, Don't you dare try to fly. Miraculously, Silveny obeyed, and Sophie forced her eyes open and focused on the dark rocks and shallow waves they were hurtling toward. They hadn't been able to practice this part—it was too dangerous to try more than once—but she knew she could do it. She embraced the fear and adrenaline pumping through her veins, gathered it all together until it was a giant ball of force, and shoved it out of her mind. A thunderous crack split the space in front of them, and they slipped into the void. Sophie concentrated on a mental image of the Sanctuary, and as she did, her instincts told her how to weave through the gray mist. More thunder crashed as the space parted and they raced through the split, onto the icy ground at the base of the towering mountain, amid a shower of sparkle and hundreds of twisting beams of colored light. A flash of blue light painted across the sky, illuminating the thousands of wide-eyed spectators gaping at them in stunned silence as Silveny slowed to a stop. Good girl, Sophie told her as Silveny dipped her head in the bow they'd rehearsed. The crowd went wild. Silveny whinnied, her silvery body quivering with excitement. Sophie tried to calm her, but Silveny was too caught up in the frenzy, and before Sophie could stop her, Silveny raised her shimmering wings and... Launched them into the sky. "You can fly!" Sophie screamed, even though they only made it a few feet off the ground before Silveny set them back down. Fly! the giddy alicorn transmitted as Sophie strangled her with a hug. Safe! Yes, Sophie told her, blinking back tears. You're safe.

```
[
  {
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    "chunk_filename": "001203.txt",
    "chunk_info": "[Chunk 212/415 | Source: keeper_of_the_lost_cities/txt/book_04_neverseen.txt | chars:377868-378689 | tokens:210]"
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Sophie leaned back, trying to read the shadows on Edaline's face. Rings under her eyes hinted that she wasn't sleeping, and a crease between her brows gave away her stress. But otherwise she looked pretty normal. A sniffle from the doorway made them turn to where Dex stood. "Sorry," he mumbled, wiping his eyes. "Just . . . you know." Dex's mom and Edaline were sisters, and they looked a lot alike—same wide turquoise eyes and soft, amber-colored hair. "Come here, Dex," Edaline said, stepping aside to include him in the hug. "Your family is going to be so jealous when I tell them I got to see you." "They don't know you're here?" Sophie asked. "No, even Grady doesn't. He's off with Alden. I was out working in the sasquatch pasture when Mr. Forkle appeared." "Sorry to catch you by surprise," Mr. Forkle said. "The Council is monitoring Havenfield extremely closely." "Are they doing the same to my family?" Dex asked. "Of course," Edaline said. "But your dad's enjoying it. He's been rigging traps all over Slurps and Burps to catch anyone snooping. Several Emissaries have left covered in pink slime." Dex grinned. "Wish I could be there." "He wishes you could too. But he's so proud of you. Your whole family is—Oh! I can't believe I forgot!" She reached into her pocket and pulled out a wriggling bundle of orange fur. "IGGY!" Sophie and Dex shouted at the same time. The tiny imp squeaked and flapped his batlike wings, fluttering over to Sophie's waiting hands. She kissed his furry cheeks, gagging from the Iggy breath. Dex coughed. "Whoa, I think he's gotten stinkier." "He has," Edaline agreed. "He's been refusing to clean himself. And if I leave him in his cage, he flings his poop. So I've been carrying him in my pocket and bribing him with treats." Sophie poked Iggy's belly, which felt chubbier—though it was hard to tell under the orange dreadlocks. His natural fur was gray, but Dex had a habit of slipping Iggy elixirs. "Next time you're getting shorter fur," Dex told Iggy. "So it won't hold the stink in." "You should make him blue," Biana said. "With sparkles!" Iggy responded with an extraordinarily loud fart. "Fine, no sparkles," Sophie said, rubbing his fuzzy chin and filling the room with his squeaky purr. "I didn't realize how much I missed him. I wish Grady . . ." "I know," Edaline said. "What is he doing with Alden?" Della asked. "Does it have to do with the scrolls I saw you reading through my Spyball," Sophie asked. Edaline smiled. "I've wondered if you were watching." "What's in the scrolls?" Mr. Forkle asked. "We're honestly not sure. The Council had ordered them destroyed, so Alden snuck them home to figure out why. So far they've all been about testing trees for something called drakostomes." Sophie, Dex, and Biana shared a look. "Why do I feel like there's something you haven't told me?" Mr. Forkle asked them. Dex explained what he'd found in the archive, and how the drakostomes seemed like something the ogres held as leverage against the Council. Mr. Forkle rubbed his temples. "That's the kind of information I expect you to tell me." "We meant to," Dex said. "But things have been crazy." "Yes, I suppose they have," Mr. Forkle agreed. "But if the Council wants those scrolls destroyed, they're clearly trying to cover their tracks." "So you think the ogres are behind the plague?" Sophie asked. "And that the Council knew it could happen?" Mr. Forkle sighed. "It's looking more and more possible." "Then why hasn't the Council sent the goblins into Ravagog to shut the ogres down?" Dex asked. "Because war with the ogres will kill thousands," Mr. Forkle reminded him. "And presently the plague hasn't killed a single gnome." "It could," Sophie pressed. "Any day we might get the bad news. How could the Council not warn the gnomes that this could happen?" Mr. Forkle glanced over his shoulder, lowering his voice before he said, "You must be very careful with these accusations, Miss Foster. That is the kind of revelation that would shake the very foundation of our world. Let's also not forget that the only gnomes currently affected are those who chose to live beyond the protection of the Lost Cities—and that we don't even know what these drakostomes are."

## Group 17/23

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```
[
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    "chunk_info": "[Chunk 410/610 | Source: keeper_of_the_lost_cities/txt/book_07_flashback.txt | chars:699120-700478 | tokens:333]"
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]
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Sophie barely slept that night, even with the sedative. And by sunrise, she was done tossing and turning. She told herself she was just trying to stay busy when she spent much longer than normal getting ready, even taking time to line her eyes with gold-flecked eyeliner. Just like she claimed the reason she chose the silky purple tunic that flared at the waist was because it was part of Flori's new fighting wardrobe and not because it also happened to look really good on her. She even slipped some goblin throwing stars into the top of her knee-high boots and stuffed a few others into the zipped pockets lining her pants to take full advantage of her battle-ready clothes. See? She was just trying to be prepared. It had absolutely nothing to do with seeing a certain teal-eyed boy who'd claimed she was the only person he trusted. Nope. And she definitely wasn't thinking about the last time they'd seen each other, when he'd hugged her before leaving the Healing Center. She was just nervous about searching Alvar's mind. And really, she should be. After all, if they couldn't find anything, Fitz would be devastated. And if they did find something, it would mean they'd been overlooking the Neverseen's plans for months and months and have some major catching up to do. That's why her knees were shaking as she made her way up to the fourth floor cupola to use the Leapmaster. It had zero to do with crushes. And when she got there, she found a whole new reason to feel anxious. "You're not all coming with me, are you?" she asked Sandor, Bo, Flori, and Tarina, who stood together under the sphere of dangling crystals with their arms crossed. "That's how this works," Sandor told her. "We go where you go." "But I'm going to one of the most secure places on the planet—and don't even try to say it isn't! Grizel designed the security. If you all tag along with me, you're basically saying you don't trust her." Sandor shook his head. "Nice try. Grizel knows that when it comes to your safety, I'm not taking even the slightest risk. So you're bringing all of us with you today." He held out his hand, expecting her to take it. "I wouldn't fight them on this one, kiddo," Grady said from behind her, and she glanced over her shoulder to find him and Edaline at the top of the stairs. "Be glad your mom and I aren't insisting on joining you too. The last time you went off to meet Fitz, it didn't exactly go well." "That's because we were in the middle of the desert, not in a super-well-guarded gated estate! Plus, I have this." She pointed to the pin Tinker had made her, which was securing her gold-rimmed cape around her shoulders. No one looked impressed. "Fine," Sophie grumbled, trudging over to Sandor and taking his hand. Flori reached for Sophie's other hand, and as their fingers twined together, Sophie realized. . . This was the first time since the attack that her right hand had some actual strength. Not as much as it usually had—and she'd still have to be careful about how much she used it. But. . . things really were getting back to normal. "You sure your concentration's up for a leap like this?" Grady asked as Bo and Tarina linked hands with the others. "You're going to have to hold everyone together." Sophie nodded, feeling a fresh burst of confidence. "Yeah. Don't worry—I've got this." She called for the Leapmaster to lower the crystal for Everglen, and after one quick breath, she imagined her concentration wrapping around her overprotective group like thick, heavy cloth. When everyone was fully covered—completely in her hold—she smiled at both of her parents. Then she stepped into the Leapmaster's path and let the light carry them away.

```
[
  {
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search and dozens of pictures of the disturbing scene scrolled across her screen. I know
you probably don't want any more of my gadgets. Dex made modifications to the iPod to make
it work better. The iPod is described as human technology that Sophie uses to find location
information. The device is presented as a practical solution when magic fails.",
    "chunk_filename": "000951.txt",
    "chunk_info": "[Chunk 340/380 | Source:
keeper_of_the_lost_cities/txt/book_03_everblaze.txt | chars:651771-656121 | tokens:1010]"
  }
]
```

So the last thing Sophie expected him to say was, “Will one of you hand me the leaping crystal from my inner pocket? My arms are a bit immobilized at the moment.” Dex snorted. “Like we’re going to do that.” Brant laughed, the same breathy, haunting laugh that had filled Sophie’s nightmares for weeks. “I think you will. I have information you need—and there’s only one way I’ll share it.” “There’s nothing we need to know that badly,” Sophie promised. She was dying to find out if he knew about the ogres or the missing dwarves—but that information could wait. “Even if it’s about your friends?” Brant asked. “The ones who think they’re setting up an ambush for us today—if you’re wondering who I mean.” “How do you know about that?” Sophie shouted, pressing him harder into the ground. Brant coughed and wheezed in her face as he told her, “First, give me the crystal.” “He’s just saying that so you’ll let him go,” Dex argued as Sophie bit her lip. “Yes, but it’s also the truth,” Brant promised. “And if you hurry, you might still have time to save them. But only if you let. Me. Go.” “You can’t trust him,” Dex warned her, and Sophie knew he was right. But the fact that Brant even knew about the ambush proved he knew something—and she couldn’t waste any more time thinking about it. The ambush was happening now, and the Everblaze was closing in around them. “Pin his wrists,” she ordered Dex, making sure Brant couldn’t grab her or toss her into the flames as she peeled back the scorched fabric over his chest, revealing a tattered pocket with a slim wand crowned with a green crystal. “You could’ve used this the second we got here,” she realized, studying the strange pathfinder, wondering where the crystal led. “But you stayed to face us.” “I wanted revenge,” he growled, triggering another round of coughs and hacking. “And it cost you your hand.” She leaned closer, so her face was directly over his. “I will find you again—and next time you won’t get away.” He coughed a wheezy laugh. “Where I’m going you’ll never be able to follow. Now. My crystal?” Dex tightened his hold on Brant’s wrists as Sophie placed the pathfinder in his blistered palm. Before she let go, she ordered, “Tell me what you know about the ambush.” Brant coughed again, and a thin stream of blood trickled from the corner of his mouth. “We’re on to your friends’ little plan. They’re going to cower in their secret cave while the dwarves attack, right?” “How do you know that?” Sophie demanded. “We have many ways. Just like we have many dwarves hiding in the mountain—far more than the Black Swan will be bringing. And they have orders to kill everyone waiting for them.” The words were still on his lips when he bucked his body, throwing Sophie and Dex backward. He groaned in agony as he raised the crystal to create a faint path. But his lips were smiling as he rolled into the light, vanishing in a vivid green flash. “Come on,” Dex said as he offered Sophie a helping hand. “We have to get Grady out of here.” “No—I have to go warn the others.” “Then I’m going with you. We’ll drop Grady at home and then—” “There’s no time. You heard him—we might already be too late.” “Okay . . . then . . . tell me where to find them and I’ll go while you—” “I’ll have to teleport there—if I can even remember what the cave looks like. I don’t know if I ever saw a picture of it and I—wait.” She patted her pockets, never so happy to feel her iPod. And when she touched the screen it sprang instantly to life. “Green Boots Cave,” she whispered as she punched the letters into a search and dozens of pictures of the disturbing scene scrolled across her screen. “This is all I need. I’ll teleport there while you take Grady home—actually, no, go to Everglen and tell Alden . . . what?” she asked when she caught the look on Dex’s face. She realized what she was forgetting before he even said it. “Right. I can’t teleport.” Dex reached for her forehead, but Sophie backed away. “You can’t Dex—they’ll know.” “You have to go, right?” She gave herself five seconds to accept that it was the only way. Then she nodded. Dex nodded too, closing his eyes and whispering something she couldn’t understand as he reached up and pulled the circlet off her head. Instantly her headache vanished and the world clicked into focus. Her mind raced through a dozen different thoughts and sensations, like her brain was stretching its weary muscles after being closed in. “You okay?” Dex asked as she rubbed her temples. “It’s like I can think again.” “I’m so sorry.” She smiled sadly. “I have to go.” “Wait!” he said, pulling a wide black cuff off his wrist. “I know you probably don’t want any more of my gadgets, but did you see how far Brant flew

when I punched him?" He flipped the cuff over to show her three silver rimmed slits. "These release an extra burst of air to thrust your arm forward a lot faster. I think you should wear it. Just in case." She didn't know what to say as he gently clasped it around her right wrist, just above her nexus. So she threw her arms around him, holding on with all the strength she had. "Thank you, Dex. Take Grady to Everglen, and make sure Edaline's safe too. I'll be back as soon as I can." She gave herself one quick breath before she let him go. Then she ran to the end of the cliff, turning back to wave goodbye. She caught a quick glimpse of Dex tossing her circlet into the glowing flames of the Everblaze. Then she closed her eyes and jumped off the edge. SIXTY-FIVE A SHEARING WIND NEARLY KNOCKED Sophie over as she landed in a snowdrift on the narrow ledge of a vertical incline. She had about a second to celebrate that her teleporting had worked and she'd made it to Everest. Then reality kicked in. She hadn't considered the toll it would take on her body to drop into such an extreme environment with no oxygen, or coat, or boots, or anything she needed to survive. Within seconds, her blood started to freeze in her veins, making her brain throb and her whole body shake as she lost feeling in her fingers and toes. She could vaguely see the rigid shape of a corpse in green boots amid the blinding white surrounding her, but her head was spinning and her chest was heaving and she was fairly certain she was dying—if she wasn't dead already.

# Cover 3

Relevant results in this cover: 5

Content pages range: [41, 53]

Groups range: [19, 23]

Deep intent (search) query

Interested in example of human technology  
being presented as equal or superior to magic

Ranking query (reranker)

Interested in example of human technology  
being presented as equal or superior to magic

- 000019.txt — ranks: #20
- 000020.txt — ranks: #21
- 000021.txt — ranks: #22
- 000022.txt — ranks: #23
- 000023.txt — ranks: #24



## Group 19/23

---

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keeper_of_the_lost_cities/txt/book_04_neverseen.txt | chars:159210-163554 | tokens:1014]"
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]
```

We could throw things at each other!”

“Or not.” Della herded everyone to the bed. “Sit. We need to discuss the incredibly dangerous thing Dex has done.”

“It wasn’t dangerous,” Dex argued. “I designed this Evader perfectly. It’s a totally different approach than anything I’ve felt. It’s rather inspired.”

Did you find anything good?” Biana asked.

“Hopefully. I got all their prodigy records,” Dex said. “Well, Exillium calls them Waywards, but it’s the same thing. Every kid who’s ever gone there has a file telling what year they started attending, who their family is, how old they are, what their talents are, what they did to get banished—all kinds of stuff. So now we just go through and search for anyone who looks suspicious.”

“What counts as suspicious?” Della asked.

“Well, we sorta know his age, right?” Dex said. “At least a pretty good guess? And we know he was probably at Exillium about eight years ago. So we start with that.”

“That’s still going to leave you with hundreds of different boys,” Della reminded him. “And even if you do find a good candidate, what then?”

“Then I break into the registry—”

“No you do not,” Della interrupted.

“Don’t worry, the registry is super easy to access, and I know how to make sure they don’t catch me. Then I can cross check any suspicious names against pendant locations to find out where they are.”

“You’re assuming they’ll be back in the Lost Cities,” Della said. “I don’t think you understand that Exillium is for the Unworthy. It removes those that do not belong in our world. Anyone sent in error can earn their way back. But very few do. Very few should.”

Sophie wasn’t sure she liked how casually Della talked about banishing, as if it were the perfect solution.

Then again, was locking them in Exile better?

“Well, I still think it’s worth going through the records and seeing what we can learn,” Dex said. “Even if we can’t find the Boy Who Disappeared, we might find a Neverseen member hiding there now.”

“Or it could be a waste of time,” Della countered.

“But its our time to waste,” Keefe said. “And it’s better than reading boring books. Do you know what I learned yesterday? That when our minds break from extreme guilt, they can shatter different ways. Most people shut down and can’t function anymore. But some turn erratic and reckless. Sometimes people even get violent.”

"That's important!" Della told him.

Sophie had to agree. That explained why Alden went catatonic over his involvement with Prentice's memory break, while Brant turned into a deadly pyromaniac after he killed Jolie.

"Right, but how long did that take me to explain?" Keefe asked. "Ten seconds? Five? But it took me three hundred and twenty-nine pages to read! So yeah, I'll take searching through Exillium files any day."

Della started pacing. "What are the odds of you listening if I tell you not to pursue this?"

"Slim to none," Keefe said.

"That's what I thought. So fine—you already have the records. If you want to go through them, I won't stop you. But no breaking into the registry without consulting with me—clear?"

"Fine," Dex agreed. "I'll build something so you guys can see the files I copied. Maybe if I rewire an Imparter—I'd probably need gold instead of copper wire and—"

"Yeah, yeah, Technopath stuff we don't understand," Keefe jumped in. "What do we do while you do all of that?"

"How about we change out of these crazy outfits?" Biana said. "I mean really, what was the Black Swan thinking?"

"That if your pajamas were embarrassing enough, you kids would be discouraged from after-curfew meetings."

Everyone scrambled as Mr. Forkle stalked into the room, followed by Granite and Blur.

"Clearly our plan was not as successful as we'd hoped," Mr. Forkle said. "Dare we ask what made you willing to suffer the furry disgrace?"

"I think the better question is, what are you guys doing here so early?" Keefe countered.

"We promised we'd report to Calla as soon as we'd learned anything about Wildwood," Granite said.

"And?" Sophie asked.

"So far there's been no change—but that's good news in some ways," Blur said. "The gnomes' symptoms seem to be holding steady."

"But they still don't have a cure," Sophie clarified.

"No," Mr. Forkle admitted. "But they're working on it."

"They should have my dad try," Dex said. "He's the best alchemist out there."

"I'm sure he'll be their next call. Right now Lady Galvin is trying her hand," Granite said.

Even months later, Sophie still flinched at the name. Her old alchemy instructor had made her first year at Foxfire equal parts humiliating and stressful.

```
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]
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The air felt thick in her throat, and it had a bizarre caramel smell. Not at all what she'd expected for the land of pasta and garlic. "So, are we invisible?" Dex asked, watching the crowds milling around them. "Or are they just more interested in that big domed thing." He pointed to the famous Duomo across the courtyard. "Probably both." Fitz removed a small black orb from his satchel. "My dad gave me an obscurer to help us stay hidden." The gadget bent light and sound in a limited radius, camouflaging anything inside. "Are you serious?" Biana asked. "Then what was the point of these ugly costumes?" "It's called being careful," Fitz told her. "Plus, I get to be Batman!" Keefe added. "But I'm done with the jacket. Why is it so hot here?" "Too many people, not enough trees," Fitz said as he took off his scarf and coat, leaving him in a rather tight blue T-shirt. Biana ditched her sweatshirt, revealing a yellow screen-printed tee. "I liked that this one had a few girls," she told Sophie, pointing to the group shot of the X-Men. "Even if they have super weird hair." "Uh, there's a guy who has blue fur all over his body, and you're focusing on the girls' hair?" Keefe asked. "And hey, that clawed dude's yellow shirt might be as tight as Fitz's!" "Jealous?" Fitz asked, flexing rather impressive muscles. "Shouldn't we try to figure out where we're going?" Dex asked, shoving his sweatshirt into his satchel and hugging his skinny arms against his chest. "Probably," Keefe agreed. "But first—what is that?" He pointed to the drippy ice cream a family was devouring. "Whatever it is, I want some!"

## Group 21/23

---

```
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technology enhancing magic. Maybe no one's cared enough to try - Dex's argument for
technology's potential. You really think a gadget can affect someone's ability? - Dame
Alina's dismissal. It's never been done in all our years of history - Dame Alina's
counterargument. I'm not about to bring an untested piece of technology into an already
dangerous situation - Sophie's decision.",
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  }
]
```

He nodded, and she opened her thoughts to his mind, cringing when she saw his mental turmoil. Has your day been as weird as mine he asked. People are taping notes to my locker saying Keep the criminals where they belong and Whose side are you on. It's not too late to change your Will you stop worrying Keefe asked, waving Sophie's stress vibes away from his face. Trust me my boy can handle himself. Or you could let me help Dex said, marching up behind them. He pulled a slightly-less-than-round silver circlet out of his satchel and set it proudly on the table. What is that Fitz asked. Something I whipped up last night after Sophie and I talked. He picked up the circlet and slipped it over Sophie's head. It slid down to her ears, covering her eyes and matting her hair against her face. Huh, your head must be smaller than mine Dex said as he spun the circlet so the clear trillion-cut crystals on each side rested over her temples, and tilted it so it wouldn't cover her eyes. I can tighten it when I get home. The healing's not till this evening, right. Right Sophie told him. But I'm not wearing this whatever it is. She reached up to remove it, but Dex blocked her. It'll help enhance all your telepathic abilities. Seriously Fitz asked as Keefe snatched the circlet off Sophie's head and said Cool will it tell me what Foster's thinking. No, I only made it enhance existing abilities so far Dex told him, taking his creation back. What do you mean so far Dame Alina asked, stalking up to their table. She checked her reflection in one of the windows as she asked, You really think a gadget can affect someone's ability. Why not Dex asked. I can think of several reasons but the fact that it's never been done in all our years of history seems to be the strongest argument Dame Alina replied. Maybe no one's cared enough to try Dex argued. Or maybe you're just trying to fix your Talentless dad someone called, triggering a wave of snickers. That's enough of that Dame Alina shouted, reeling around to face the rest of her prodigies. I will not warn you again. She turned back to Dex. Mr. Dizznee put that contraption away and take a seat. And the rest of you'd best spend the rest of this session perfecting the art of silence, or you will give me an opportunity to put some of my newest—and, I daresay, most ingenious—punishments into effect. Understood. Shuffling paper was the only reply. Good, she said, waiting until the circlet was safely out of sight before returning to her desk. So you're not going to use my invention Dex whispered while pretending to write in his notebook. Sophie shook her head. Dex was incredibly talented with gadgets. But she wasn't about to bring an untested piece of technology into an already dangerous situation. Dex sighed, but didn't say anything, using the rest of study hall to sketch a diagram of the circlet, covered in lines and numbers and all kinds of crazy things Sophie couldn't translate. Sophie on the other hand spent the rest of the time transmitting anything she could remember about Fintan's memory break to Fitz, trying to prepare him for what they would be facing. She'd figured Fitz would want to keep working after school, but when the bells chimed the end of the day he told her he had to go home. My dad thinks a big part of his problem last time was how exhausted he was that day, he explained as they made their way to the Leapmaster. He made me promise I'd take a nap before tonight. I hope that's okay. Of course Sophie said, realizing this had to be just as stressful for Alden as it was for her. Maybe worse, since he probably had even scarier memories of the last Break than she did. There's not much to practice anyway. Then maybe you should rest too Fitz suggested. But they both knew that was so not going to happen. Sophie decided to stay busy and search more of Edaline's office instead. She had Sandor dig her a trail through the trunks and boxes so she could get to the chests in the back, hoping Edaline would've shoved Jolie's school things as far away as she could. But when she opened the first trunk books. Thick, heavy-bound journals filled with Edaline's intricate writing. A quick flip through the pages told Sophie there were probably some interesting stories in there the words monitoring the mermaid migration particularly caught her attention. But she'd have to come back to them later. At the moment, she was a girl on a mission. The next trunk was filled with what had to be bramble jerseys, and Sophie couldn't resist stopping to count how many different games they represented. Keefe had told her that the elves only

had a bramble championship once every three years, and that was when they printed the jerseys. So if all the jerseys belonged to Grady, he was way older than she'd realized—by at least a couple of hundred years. She couldn't quite wrap her head around that. The trunks got increasingly boring from then on, some filled with curtains, others with shoes, and there was a particularly stinky one that was currently empty but must've once held some sort of cheese. Sophie had gotten so used to finding useless things that she'd already closed the next chest before she realized what she'd just seen. She pulled the lid open again, feeling her heart pick up speed.

## Group 22/23

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```
[
  {
    "relevance_score": "23/24",
    "evidence_text": "Grady insisted I take it, but he didn't want me to tell you in case
it freaked you out. Keefe raised the silver weapon and fired another shot. The four
remaining figures closed off their circle and one of them reached for a melder of his own.
Don't hit the alicorn! one of the others shouted at him. Isn't this the point where you
develop some new, impossible ability and get us out of here?",
    "chunk_filename": "000573.txt",
    "chunk_info": "[Chunk 286/324 | Source: keeper_of_the_lost_cities/txt/book_02_exile.txt
| chars:602048-604872 | tokens:648]"
  }
]
```

FIFTY-EIGHT

NOT AGAIN.

It was Sophie's only thought as the black-cloaked figures grabbed the net, pulling it tighter around them. Keefe shouted something she didn't hear as she closed her eyes, waiting to feel the fear and rage swell inside her head. But all she could muster was a shudder.

She must be too weak to inflict.

A flash of light shot past her, hitting one of the figures and making him collapse in a trembling heap.

"They have a melder!" another figure shouted as Silveny reared in the loosened net.

"Where did you get that?" Sophie yelled as Keefe raised the silver weapon and fired another shot.

Grady insisted I take it, but he didn't want me to tell you in case it freaked you out.

Keefe raised the silver weapon and fired another shot.

The four remaining figures closed off their circle and one of them reached for a melder of his own.

Don't hit the alicorn! one of the others shouted at him.

Isn't this the point where you develop some new, impossible ability and get us out of here? Keefe

yelled as they ducked a melder blast aimed at them.

"I wish." Sophie squeezed her eyes shut and tried to rally her concentration. "Nothing's working right now."

Even her arms and legs were too weak and slow. All she could do was cling to Silveny's neck with what little strength she had and hope Keefe could either take out the attackers or that the Black Swan would send help.

Keefe aimed at the figure who was armed, but before he fired, one of the other figures nailed Keefe in the head with a rock. The melder slipped from his hand.

"Oh, so that's how it is?" Keefe shouted, whipping one of Sandor's weird throwing stars at him. The silver blades clipped the figure's shoulder, tearing his cloak and making him drop his end of the net.

"Don't let the alicorn get away!" the attacker shouted, flailing to regrab the ropes.

Keefe flung another pointed star, but he missed. "These things are hard to aim!"

"How many weapons do you have?" Sophie asked him.

"Hopefully enough." Keefe tossed a third throwing star, missing again.

"Try cutting the ropes!" Sophie shouted.

Before Keefe could try, Silveny bucked again, rearing back so hard she pulled partially free of the net—enough to spread her wings.

A powerful flap had them airborne, but they'd only moved a few feet off the ground before a black lasso swung around Silveny's neck and jerked her down so hard her legs collapsed.

Silveny's right wing bent backward as she toppled to her side. The majestic horse screeched in pain, and Sophie and Keefe tumbled off her back, rolling across the rocky ground until they crashed into the side of the cave.

“What have you done?” one of the figures shouted as the remaining four of them rushed for Silveny.

Sophie struggled to pull free from the tangle of rope, surprised that none of them seemed concerned with capturing her. Before she could decide what that meant, there was a blinding flash of light and the ground shook, cracking around their attackers and sending them sprawling. Through the thick dust Sophie caught a glimpse of Mr. Forkle and a cluster of dwarves running toward them.

“Get out of here,” Mr. Forkle screamed as the hooded figures advanced on him and the dwarves.  
“Leap Sophie home, Keefe!”

But Sophie wasn’t leaving Silveny. Keefe must’ve been thinking the same thing because he pulled himself up and jumped over the fissure to where Silveny lay thrashing on her side.

“Come on, Foster!” he shouted, holding out his arms to catch her. Sophie pulled herself upright, summoning as much strength as she could as she ran for the opening, jumping at the last possible second. Only one foot caught the ground on the other side, but Keefe grabbed her arms and dragged her over. He wiped her cheek, and when he pulled his hand away it was smeared with red.

Sophie wasn’t surprised. He had a huge gash over his eyebrow. She was sure she was just as scraped.

Get up, Silveny, she transmitted, and the injured alicorn struggled to her feet.

Keefe lifted Sophie onto Silveny’s back and crawled on behind her. As soon as his hands locked around her waist, Sophie transmitted, Fly!

Silveny ran toward the edge of the cliff and leaped off. She flapped her shimmering wings, but the right one was crooked and bleeding and when the wind hit the feathers, it bent backward, sending them dropping like a stone toward the ocean below.

Fly! Sophie’s mind screamed, but no matter how hard Silveny flapped and flailed, her wing wouldn’t work.

“Now what?” Keefe shouted.

Teleport!

Sophie repeated the command over and over, but Silveny’s mind was too clouded by fear and pain to



respond.

Teleport now or we're going to die!

"Uh . . . Sophie?" Keefe screamed as several precious seconds slipped by.

Silveny, you have to get us out of here!

Help! the terrified horse transmitted.

I don't know how!

But Silveny just kept repeating Help! over and over. And as Sophie imagined them splattering over the rocky shore, something inside her clicked.

She wasn't sure if it was instincts or pure desperation, but it felt like her brain switched into autopilot, feeding off her adrenaline to generate warmth and energy and swirling the two forces together until it felt like an explosion rocketed from her mind. The blast tore an opening in space, and a split second later they crashed through it, into the void.

## Group 23/23

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```
[
  {
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    "evidence_text": "The 'Sucker Punch' cuff releases air for more powerful punches. Dex, a Technopath, created this human technology. Sophie is keeping it because 'she had a feeling she was going to need it'. The cuff enhances physical abilities beyond normal limits. This represents human technology valued as useful in the narrative.",
    "chunk_filename": "000981.txt",
    "chunk_info": "[Chunk 370/380 | Source: keeper_of_the_lost_cities/txt/book_03_everblaze.txt | chars:693938-696665 | tokens:628]"
  }
]
```

But . . . that's better than I'd feared, honestly, he said after a second. And it wasn't all for naught this time.

He stomped his foot and two limping dwarves slowly emerged from the snow, dragging a black-cloaked figure.

You caught one, Sophie asked.

Actually, I believe you three caught this one. We found him paralyzed from a melder blast up above. I only woke him up a few minutes ago, and, well, he's less than pleased to be our guest. But we have lots of getting to know each other to do, don't we?

The figure responded only with a curse, and Sophie watched him thrash against his silver bonds.

Can I see his face, she asked.

Quickly, Mr. Forkle agreed.

She held her breath as she stepped closer, giving herself three seconds to steady her nerves before she swept the hood back.

Her mouth fell open.

This was the jogger who came to my house and tried to grab me!

Yes, I remember, Mr. Forkle murmured. It took all of my mental energy to hold him back from snatching you off the street that day. And if I hadn't known Fitz would be coming for you momentarily, I would've had to take you into hiding.

Whoa, Fitz whispered. I forgot about that.

I didn't. Sophie stalked closer, remembering the way he'd slung Dex over his shoulder on the bridge in Paris, ready to dispose of him like trash. What are you going to do to him?

Whatever we must to find out what he knows.

It won't work, the rebel snarled. I've trained for this.

So have we.

Your name's Gethen, isn't it, Sophie asked, smiling when he flinched. I heard Lady Gisela call him that. But wait—Fitz paralyzed two people, not just one. Where's the other one?

We followed his tracks to the edge of the cliff, so I'm assuming he woke up and force-shifted like Lady Gisela did.

And you're sure she's alive, Keefe interrupted.

Worried about your mommy, Gethen asked, laughing when Keefe spun toward him. Don't worry, we take good care of her. Way better than you or your dad ever has.

Fitz grabbed Keefe before he could lunge for Gethen's throat. He's not worth it.

No—you're not worth it. Gethen snarled. I'll be free by the end of the night. We have an army of ogres on our side. Do you really think—

The sound of crunching bone cut him off and his head snapped back so hard it left him bleeding and unconscious.

Sorry, Sophie mumbled, staring at her fist in wonder. She stretched her sore fingers, testing to make sure none were broken.

Everyone else saw that, right, Keefe asked, turning to Sophie. I'm kinda freaking out here, so . . . I didn't imagine that, did I? Foster just beat the snot out of him with one punch?

Fitz and Biana nodded.

**Sophie pointed to the cuff on her wrist. I had a little help from Dex.**

In more ways than one, I suspect, Mr. Forkle said, pointing to where her circlet used to be.

About that—

Later, Mr. Forkle told her. Right now you need to get Sandor to Everglen, and I need to get Gethen somewhere he'll feel . . . a bit more like talking.

Wait, Sophie called as the dwarves started to tunnel away. When will I see you again?

Mr. Forkle moved closer, taking her by the shoulders and staring deeply into her eyes. That will depend on you.

Me, she repeated.

Yes. You have a choice to make. But first, you must take care of your friends.

ELWIN WAS WAITING FOR THEM at Everglen when they arrived. Dex had called him to help with Grady—who'd thankfully only needed a few elixirs to clear his head before he was back to normal.

Well . . . normal health-wise, at least.

Mentally would be a much longer recovery, but Sophie supposed that was to be expected after the betrayal he'd endured.

She hadn't had a chance to talk to him—or Edaline—since she'd arrived.

There'd been too much chaos getting Sandor's massive body inside and helping Elwin adjust his treatments for goblin physiology. Elwin expected Sandor to make a full recovery—but he'd be off his feet for a month. He'd broken most of his bones in the fall, and would need to stay sedated for the rest of the week. But all things considered, he was incredibly lucky.

Sophie had wanted to stay by his side until he woke up, but Elwin insisted on treating her for frostbite and altitude sickness and smoke inhalation and a dozen other maladies her adventures had given her. And he didn't ask about her missing circlet as he rubbed a healing balm on the abrasions on her forehead, but he gave her a huge hug when he was finished.

Sophie hugged him back, feeling her eyes burn with tears. She was starting to realize what choice Mr. Forkle had meant before she'd left Mount Everest. And she had no idea if she was brave enough to make it.

Alden had insisted everyone stay within Everglen's protective gates—even Dex, who looked extra nervous in the grand, glittering halls, regardless of how many ways Della tried to make him comfortable.

Sophie was given the same bedroom she'd slept in twice before, once on her first night in the elvin world, and the other after she'd first been rescued from the kidnappers. But she knew this night would be her scariest night yet.

She sat awake long after Grady and Edaline brought her Ella to help her sleep, trying not to remember the heartbreak she'd seen etched into their faces. It wasn't her fault they looked so lost and devastated—but it would be soon, if she did what the Black Swan had asked.

But did she really have another option?

Can't sleep either, Keefe asked, peeking through the crack in her doorway. He fidgeted with the sleeves of the blue pajamas he'd borrowed from Fitz as he sat on the edge of her bed. Please don't ask how I'm doing. That's all anyone's said to me since I got here, and they keep tilting their heads and puckering their brows and it makes me want to punch them—and I really don't want to punch you. Especially since I'm pretty sure you could knock me across the room.

Sophie smiled at the cuff still on her wrist. She knew she should give it back to Dex, but she had a feeling she was going to need it.

A lot.

So when do you leave, Keefe asked, like he knew what she'd been thinking.

Ugh—I swear, for an Empath, you act more like a Telepath.

That's because I'd be an awesome Telepath. And I can guarantee, if I snuck into your head and saw secret things, I would tell you what they are. Most of them, at least. Okay, maybe just the part about you being completely lost without me and needing me to come with you when you leave.

Sophie reached for an itchy eyelash, but stopped herself on the way. If she was going to do this, she needed to learn to be brave.

I don't even know if I'm going, she mumbled.

Yes, you do. I mean, you're also scared and stressed and stuff. But I can feel your resolve. Shoot—I could feel it down the hall. Which is why I had to come in and bug you. Because I want in—and before you say anything, you should know I'm not really giving you a choice in this. I'll follow you if I have to, but I'd rather not have to be creepy like that.

Keefe—

He took her hand, waiting for her to meet his eyes. Don't make me beg, Sophie.

Keefe, if I do this, I don't know when I'll be able to come home.

Sounds perfect. Is now too soon to leave?

If you don't want to stay with your father, I'm sure you could stay here.

Probably. But then I'd still have to see him. He picked at a thread on the end of his sleeve, unraveling the perfect seam. Who knew he'd turn out to be the 'good' parent? Didn't see that one coming.

Keefe—

Whatever you're going to say, I'm sure I've already thought it. I've been replaying the last few years of my life—and you know what I keep focusing on? That wound you spotted on my mom's arm. The one you were worried my dad gave her? Turns out I gave it to her. I hit her with a goblin throwing star

during that battle on the cliff, right after she clocked me in the head with a rock and knocked the melder out of my hand. And the thing is . . . I wasn't wearing a disguise like she was. She knew it was me. And she still attacked me.

But she did stop Biana from falling off the edge of that cliff, Sophie reminded him. She didn't have to do that.

She also pressed a melder to Biana's brain and threatened to pull the trigger. She didn't have to do that, either.

I guess that's true, Sophie admitted.

Honestly, Lady Gisela scared her way more than Brant did.

At least Brant had a reason for being broken and crazy.

Nothing would ever excuse the horrible things he'd done, but Sophie could understand why he'd joined the rebels in the first place. She knew better than anyone what it felt like to have her abilities stripped away, and the hard choices that had to be made.

So when do you want to leave, Keefe asked, sensing her mood shift.

Sophie threw up her hands. I don't even know where I'm going!