

Scythe



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF NEAL SHUSTERMAN

Shusterman was born in Brooklyn, New York, and spent much of his childhood reading. His parents moved the family to Mexico City when he was sixteen, something that today, he credits for giving him a new perspective on life and confidence he couldn't have gotten anywhere else. He graduated from the American School Foundation in Mexico City and then earned bachelor's degrees in psychology and theater. Shusterman worked briefly for a Los Angeles-based talent agency after college, and within a year of his hire, he landed his first book deal and began writing screenplays. Many of his books, most notably his 2015 novel, *Challenger Deep*, have received honors and awards, and several—including *Scythe*—are being adapted for film. Shusterman currently lives in Southern California with his children.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Scythes in the novel overwhelmingly take their names from historical scientists, leaders, and philosophers, though for the most part, the personalities or beliefs of the scythes in the novel don't draw from their Patron Historics' personalities. The real Noam Chomsky, for example, has been vocally anti-war, unlike his scythe counterpart, while the Greek philosopher Xenocrates studied—alongside math and physics—ethics and virtue, areas where the scythe Xenocrates is severely lacking. Robert Goddard created the first liquid-fueled rocket (though he was considered a joke until after his death); Marie Curie conducted the first research on radioactivity and won two Nobel prizes; and Michael Faraday, a scientist active in the first half of the nineteenth century, studied electromagnetism and electrochemistry.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Scythe is one of a number of contemporary young adult novels that tackles immortality and inducting teens into powerful systems like the Scythedom. Cassandra Clare's series *The Mortal Instruments* follows young characters entering into a secret society that protects the world from demons, while Michael Scott's *The Alchemist* (part of the *Immortal Nicholas Flamel* series) deals more with immortality. The question of immortality has been taken up by a number of authors writing for a variety of age groups, from Natalie Babbitt's children's novel *Tuck Everlasting* to Ann Rice's *Interview with the Vampire*—both of which also consider similar questions of power, ethics, and compassion that crop up in *Scythe*. *Scythe*

also bears resemblance to Erin Morgenstern's *The Night Circus*: both novels follow two teenage protagonists, a boy and a girl, as they learn from their mentors, nurse a crush on one another, and compete in a dangerous competition against one another that is supposed to leave one dead and one victorious.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Scythe*
- **When Written:** 2015
- **Where Written:** California
- **When Published:** 2016
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Bildungsroman, science fiction, dystopian fiction
- **Setting:** MidMerica, several hundred years in the future
- **Climax:** Citra receives the scythehood and "accidentally" gives Rowan immunity.
- **Antagonist:** Scythe Goddard
- **Point of View:** Third Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Varied Work. In addition to his own novels, Shusterman has written several games in the "How to Host a Murder" series of murder mystery dinner party games. He was also approached by Orson Scott Card to write novels following several characters from Card's novel *Ender's Game*, though Shusterman wasn't able to accept the offer.



PLOT SUMMARY

In entries in her "gleaning journal," Scythe Curie gives the reader the history of her world. In 2042, humans became immortal and created the Scythedom, an organization of scythes—people trained to "glean," or kill others permanently—to control the population growth. This job is the only one not overseen by the **Thunderhead**, an advanced version of "the cloud" that has replaced government and oversees every aspect of the population. With immortality has come the sense that there's no longer a point to life, and people in Curie's age don't understand what it was like to live knowing that death was inevitable.

Seventeen-year-old Citra is horrified when Scythe Faraday shows up on her family's doorstep and invites himself for dinner. She and her parents are terrified that he's going to glean them, and Citra angrily snaps at him. He admits he's here to glean their neighbor. Not long after, Faraday shows up at Rowan's school to glean the quarterback, Kohl Whitlock.

Rowan stubbornly insists on holding Kohl's hand when Faraday electrocutes him, and for this, Rowan's classmates, including his best friend Tyger, shun him. When Faraday invites both Citra and Rowan to become his apprentices, they both accept; however, only one of them will become a scythe.

Faraday believes in using accidental death statistics from the Age of Mortality to choose his victims. For instance, he chooses to glean a heroic dog lover because many people used to die saving their pets from raging rivers. One of Faraday's other quirks is that he insists on attending every funeral for the people they glean. And although Faraday takes his vows as a scythe very seriously, he doesn't always follow the rules: once, when a man fights back—which, by law, means that Faraday must kill his whole family—Faraday instead grants the man's wife and children immunity, aweing Citra. Under Faraday's direction, Citra and Rowan grow strong as they study "killcraft," as well as science and the humanities. They learn Black Widow Bokator, a martial art, and as time goes on, Rowan and Citra develop crushes on one another but do their best to ignore those feelings, as scythes are not allowed to fall in love or have families.

Elsewhere, Scythe Goddard and his followers, Scythes Rand, Volta, and Chomsky, conduct a mass gleaning on an airplane and then in the food court of a mall. They're both bloody and fiery affairs, as Chomsky loves using a flamethrower. At the mall gleaning, the bloodthirsty Goddard uncharacteristically spares a ten-year-old girl, Esme, and takes her home with him. He lives in a mansion that he took over from a terrified business executive, Maxim Easley, who is now forced to work as Goddard's pool boy.

In May, Vernal Conclave arrives. Conclaves take place three times per year, and it's the only time that the Scythedom performs oversight functions on itself. Apprentices also undergo testing at these events, and new scythes receive their rings. Citra is concerned when she learns that the High Blade of MidMerica, Xenocrates, didn't know that Faraday took two apprentices, which is an unusual practice. At conclave, Citra and Rowan recognize Goddard—decked in diamond-encrusted robes—and make note of Faraday's clear distaste for him. The morning's proceedings are ceremonial and bore Citra. In the evening, Scythe Curie tests the apprentices with questions designed to gauge their morality and their knowledge. Citra fails her test by lying about the worst thing she's ever done, while Rowan fails on purpose to make her feel better. At the very end of conclave, Scythe Rand puts forward the motion that at the end of Citra and Rowan's training, whichever apprentice becomes a scythe should glean the other. Xenocrates lets it pass.

The morning after conclave, still reeling from this news, Faraday tells Rowan and Citra that nothing will change and goes out alone. Rowan and Citra kiss while he's gone, hoping to get it out of their systems. That night, they wake up to two

BladeGuard officers and Xenocrates on Faraday's doorstep—Faraday self-gleaned (killed himself), which frees them from their apprenticeships and means they won't have to glean each other. However, Scythe Goddard has offered to take over Rowan's training, while Scythe Curie will train Citra, so Faraday's sacrifice was futile. Citra is suspicious of Curie, as Curie lives in a grand house and cooks food for her (apprentices are supposed to cook for their mentors). The next morning, Curie takes Citra gleaning and stabs a man, suddenly and without warning, whom she insists was "stagnant." Later, Curie invites the man's family to her home for dinner to grant them immunity and to share in their grief. Citra begins to trust Curie and confides in her the actual worst thing she's ever done: as a child, she pushed a classmate in front of a truck. Curie makes Citra find the classmate, Rhonda Flowers, apologize, and allow Rhonda to push her in front of a truck. Rhonda refuses, which makes Citra feel silly. When Curie points out that the Thunderhead certainly saw Citra push Rhonda because it sees everything, Citra starts to wonder if someone murdered Faraday and if the Thunderhead saw it happen.

Rowan decides to let Citra win the scythehood. He arrives at Goddard's mansion in the middle of a fantastic party in his honor. Goddard insists that the home and the party supplies were donated—scythes aren't allowed to own much—and says that he believes scythes should enjoy life. Rowan notices Esme and comments on her, but Goddard says that Esme is the most important person at the party. The party continues for another day. When it finally ends, Volta takes Rowan to a wine cellar. Goddard and his crew turn off Rowan's pain and healing nanites, which allow him to heal quickly and not feel pain, and beat him to a pulp. Volta, Esme, and then Goddard visit Rowan. Goddard insists that in order to have a clear mind, Rowan must feel pain. Rowan begins training daily on dummies and feels himself turning into a soulless "killing machine." Goddard encourages Rowan to enjoy killing. The only person that Rowan thinks doesn't truly believe in Goddard is Volta, though Volta stands by the first time that Goddard forces Rowan to practice gleaning on live subjects. Rowan feels disgusted with himself.

One afternoon, as Citra tries to track down the family of one of Curie's gleaning victims, she finds herself in a Tonist cloister in pursuit of a Tonist named Brother Ferguson. He refuses to attend to his sister's body or funeral, and explains that the Tonists don't believe that death by a scythe is a real death. Citra is especially incensed when, after she hits the "bident," a massive tuning fork that makes "the sound of the universe," Brother Ferguson argues that Tonism keeps people from getting "stagnant." Citra begins spending time searching for evidence of Faraday in the Thunderhead's "backbrain." She finds compelling information only after using some of her own photographs from the area where Faraday died to piece together evidence to support her suspicions.

Goddard announces that it's time to take Rowan to one of his

mass gleanings, this time at Magnetic Propulsion Laboratories. Goddard and his crew take a helicopter to the building, land on top, and systematically kill everyone they can in the building. Rowan does his best to point people to unguarded exits. When Goddard announces they're finished, he points out to Rowan that the firefighters cannot put out the fire from Chomsky's flamethrower since it's scythe activity. He allows Rowan to wear his ring to grant survivors immunity. He throws a feast that night, but Rowan excuses himself to play cards with Esme. Rowan later discovers Volta crying in his bedroom. Though Volta knows that Goddard is evil, he doesn't believe it's possible to escape him now.

At Harvest Conclave, Citra is angry to see Rowan surrounded by adoring apprentices. When they finally have a moment to speak, she quietly fills him in on her research and her suspicion that Goddard killed Faraday. The test for the apprentices is a Bokator match. Both Rowan and Citra fight in such a way as to try to let the other win, but Rowan realizes that in order to allow Citra to win the scythehood, he needs to do something drastic. He snaps her neck, rendering her deadish for several days.

Goddard throws another lavish party. Volta overhears Xenocrates and Goddard talking about getting rid of "the girl," and perplexingly, Goddard forces Xenocrates to jump in the pool by putting a knife to Esme's neck. After the party, Rowan confronts Goddard about this and about Citra's suspicion that he killed Faraday. Goddard denies it, and later Volta lets Rowan in on what he discovered: Esme is Xenocrates's illegitimate and illegal daughter, so Xenocrates will do whatever Goddard wants to keep her existence a secret.

Citra finally admits to Curie that she believes Faraday was murdered and that she told Rowan of her suspicions. Curie encourages Citra to stop researching and dedicate herself to winning the scythehood so she can fight the corruption from the inside. That afternoon, while Citra is home alone, two BladeGuard officers arrest Citra and take her to Xenocrates. He and Scythe Mandela accuse her of killing Faraday and to prove it, he shows her one of Faraday's journal entries saying that he's afraid his female apprentice is going to kill him. Citra pushes past Faraday and throws herself off of Xenocrates's building, rendering herself "deadish." While she's dead, the Thunderhead speaks to her, says it's concerned for the fate of the Scythedom, and gives her a clue: the name Gerald Van Der Gans. Four days later, Citra wakes up in the Chile-Argentine region with Curie. Curie explains that someone tried to frame Citra, and the journal entry was actually about Curie herself more than a century ago: Faraday was Curie's mentor, and, later, her lover. She gives Citra Tonist robes and sends her north to Amazonia. Citra believes she's after Faraday's killer, Gerald Van Der Gans, but when she arrives at her destination, she discovers Faraday himself—Gerald was his childhood name, and Curie is the only one who knows he's hiding in retirement.

He reassumes Citra's training.

A few days before Winter Conclave, Citra flies home, cleared of all charges, and Goddard takes his crew on a gleaning rampage at a Tonist cloister. It's a bloody and awful affair, and after gleaning a room full of children and experiencing a moral crisis, Volta weeps and self-gleans. Rowan kills Goddard, Chomsky, and Rand, burns the building down, and pretends to be a scythe to get the firefighters to leave it alone. Two days later, Xenocrates meets with Rowan and attempts to blame the tragedy on Rowan until Rowan lets on that he knows about Esme. The next day, both Rowan and Citra take their final test. Citra is distraught to realize that she must render her little brother Ben deadish in front of a panel, but she does it compassionately. The next day at conclave, the Scythedom bans gleaning using fire, and then Citra earns her scythe's ring instead of Rowan. She insists on taking the name **Anastasia Romanov**, which she says represents the potential for a better future. Just as she turns to glean Rowan, she punches him in the face with her ring, giving him immunity. She sends him out to a car waiting outside, and Rowan is shocked to find Faraday driving. In an entry to her gleaning journal, Citra writes that she's heard rumors of a rogue, unordained scythe called Scythe Lucifer taking out corrupt scythes with fire.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Citra Terranova – One of the two teenage protagonists of the novel, the other being Rowan. Seventeen-year-old Citra is quick to anger and, when the reader first meets her, both fears and loathes scythes. She does, however, understand some of the less enticing concepts that Scythe Faraday proposes, such as that everything humans do is pointless now that humans are immortal. Citra is initially angry and distraught when Faraday asks her to be an apprentice, but she accepts the position in the hope that by becoming a scythe, she'll be able to insure her brother Ben's immunity. Though Citra behaves rudely and derisively to Rowan most of the time, she secretly nurses a crush on him. This is complicated by the fact that only one of them can win and become a scythe, and Citra loves to win—though she's not sure she wants to win this competition, as if she does, she'll have to glean Rowan. An extremely loyal person, Citra is distraught and unmoored when Faraday self-gleans and she's taken on by Scythe Curie. Her first few months training with Faraday taught her that not all scythes are good and honorable, so she suspects that Faraday was murdered by the corrupt Scythe Goddard and secretly tries to collect information to prove this hunch. After being accused of murdering Faraday herself, Citra eventually discovers Faraday in hiding and retirement in Amazonia, and he resumes her training. Both Faraday and Curie teach Citra that the most important thing she can do is be compassionate and kind as she

gleans. Citra is ultimately the one to receive her scythe's ring and become ordained, and she takes **Anastasia Romanov** as her Patron Historic. She suggests that by doing this, she can act as a symbol for the future. Citra's persistent crush on Rowan means that she finds a loophole—punching him with her ring—to give him immunity and get out of gleaning him, and she orchestrates his escape from Winter Conclave.

Rowan Damisch – One of the novel's teenage protagonists, the other being Citra. When the reader meets Rowan, he's a self-professed "lettuce kid"—a forgotten middle child who believes his life is pointless. He does, however, demonstrate early on in the novel that he's compassionate and caring by insisting on holding his classmate Kohl Whitlock's hand when Scythe Faraday comes to school to glean Kohl. This act of kindness causes Faraday to ask Rowan to train, along with Citra, to become a scythe. Rowan sees becoming a scythe as a way to infuse his life with purpose. Though he continues to question the righteousness of gleaning, he believes fully in Faraday's ideas when the two are together. Faraday makes a point to develop Rowan's compassion even more, and it often impresses Citra. Rowan harbors a crush on Citra, and throughout the novel, he throws competitions with the hope of letting her win. This becomes even more important to him after Faraday self-gleans, and the maniacal Scythe Goddard takes over Rowan's training. Rowan does his best to cling to his humanity, but he quickly watches himself transform into what Faraday called a "killing machine": someone who is desensitized to the act of gleaning and, horrifically, actually enjoys it. While he becomes increasingly skilled at killcraft, Rowan also does what he can to maintain a sense of decency. He helps people escape during Goddard's mass gleanings, tries to comfort Scythe Volta, one of Goddard's followers who is less convinced that Goddard is good, and writes several journal entries that he later burns about how he's becoming a monster. Despite all of this, Rowan begins to hear Goddard in his head and even sees the point of several of Goddard's beliefs, such as that people who cannot feel pain—that is, most people in the novel's present—cannot properly feel joy. After Goddard takes his cronies and Rowan on a gleaning rampage at a Tonist cloister, Rowan takes matters into his own hand, kills Goddard, Chomsky, and Rand, and burns the building. Though he's not chosen to receive his ring, Citra cleverly grants him immunity and helps him escape. He goes on to become an unordained scythe called Scythe Lucifer and takes out corrupt scythes.

Scythe Curie – An old and famous scythe known as the Grande Dame of Death, as she gleaned the last president and his cabinet more than 150 years before the novel begins. She wears lavender robes, has long gray hair, and has an intense and uncomfortable stare. She also adores old cars from the mortal age. Though Citra suspects that Curie doesn't like her, Curie steps forward to assume the role of Citra's mentor when Scythe Faraday self-gleans. Citra mostly feels okay about this,

as Faraday respected Curie, and Citra knows that Curie is an old guard, compassionate scythe. Curie teaches Citra about how to be truly compassionate, especially to the families of those she gleanes. While she gleanes people suddenly and without warning, she always invites the bereaved to her home for dinner. While the families are there, Curie listens to them talk about their deceased loved ones, thereby sharing in their grief and giving the families a sense of closure. Citra finds this very meaningful and grows to respect Curie for the way she handles gleaning. The two form a trusting bond that means Curie has no qualms about helping Citra escape the MidMerican Scythedom after Xenocrates accuses Citra of killing Faraday. Curie admits to Citra that the evidence Xenocrates used (Faraday's journal entry saying he fears his female apprentice might kill him) is actually about her: she was once his apprentice but was in love with him, not murderous. Citra discovers not long after that their relationship still runs deep, as Curie is the only scythe who knows that Faraday is alive and in retirement in Amazonia. Curie's gleaning journal entries, which begin most of the novel's chapters, offer insight into the history of the immortal world as well as insight into how she conceptualizes her job. She makes it clear that being a scythe is grueling, though she tries her best to hold onto her humanity and make it known that she cares deeply for her victims.

Scythe Goddard – The antagonist of the novel, Scythe Goddard is a charismatic scythe who wears lavish blue robes encrusted with diamonds. Goddard believes that gleaning should be public and iconic, as this is the only way for non-scythes to remember what it's like to be mortal. He's a cruel man who enjoys killing and is known for conducting mass gleanings with his crew of young scythes: Rand, Chomsky, and Volta. Goddard technically follows the scythes' code of conduct to live simply and own nothing but their rings, robes, and gleaning journals, but gets around these technicalities by accepting "donations" and granting wealthy homeowners immunity in exchange for letting him live in their mansions—though the homeowners have no choice in the matter. Goddard throws lavish parties regularly and hopes to bring scythes around to his way of thinking. After Scythe Faraday self-gleans, Goddard offers to take on both Rowan and Citra's training, but he's only allowed to take Rowan. Volta confides in Rowan that Goddard sees Rowan as a challenge—Faraday was one of Goddard's biggest adversaries and his moral and ethical opposite, so being able to turn Rowan into a soulless killer would be a major victory for him. Goddard is fundamentally corrupt, and after kidnapping Esme, Xenocrates's illegitimate and illegal daughter, he blackmails Xenocrates into trying to get rid of Citra and make sure that Rowan will be the one to become a scythe. Rowan's training with Goddard consists mostly of practicing gleaning on live, paid volunteers, which effectively desensitizes Rowan to the act of killing. This all backfires, however, when Goddard leads

his crew and Rowan in a mass gleaning at a Tonist cloister. Though Goddard attempts to make Rowan perform his first gleaning, Rowan brutally kills Goddard instead, insisting that Goddard turned him into the coldhearted, calculating killer capable of doing such a thing.

Scythe Faraday / Gerald Van Der Gans – Scythe Faraday, born Gerald Van Der Gans, is an older scythe who, after gleaning Citra's neighbor and a student at Rowan's school, decides to take both teens on as his apprentices. Though Citra and Rowan detest Faraday at first, they soon discover that he's extremely fair, logical, and compassionate. He makes sure that, in addition to learning "killcraft," his apprentices develop their moral compasses, understand the importance of the scythes' job, and never enjoy killing—something that he suggests will rob them of their humanity. Faraday believes that his gleaning victims should be chosen using statistics from accidental deaths from the Age of Mortality, and he also believes that each person he gleans should die in a unique way because all people are unique. This, he suggests, is the best way to honor his victims, though he also makes a point to go to every funeral as a show of respect. An extremely loyal and caring mentor, Faraday self-gleans—or so he leads people to believe—after the Scythedom decides to pass a motion dictating that whichever of Faraday's apprentices doesn't become a scythe, he or she will have to glean the other. This, in theory, frees Citra and Rowan from their apprenticeship, though they're quickly snatched up by new mentors, thus keeping them in competition with one another. Faraday is distraught when, after Citra discovers him in hiding and retirement in Amazonia, he learns that his plan failed. He resumes Citra's training while she's also in hiding and focuses most on developing her compassion and morality. Citra also learns during this time that Scythe Curie was Faraday's apprentice and, 50 years after she was ordained, the two became lovers and are now good friends. Faraday later comes to the rescue and whisks Rowan away after Citra earns the scythe's ring and refuses to glean him.

High Blade Xenocrates – The High Blade of MidMerica. He's a huge and imposing scythe who wears heavy gold robes. Citra notes that Xenocrates is full of contradictions: while his robes and his home—a simple cabin set atop the tallest building in Fulcrum City—seem ostentatious for a scythe, he also wears threadbare slippers and doesn't keep servants at home. She also can't decide if Xenocrates is sincere or calculating, as he appears to be both at once. Rowan learns later that Xenocrates isn't truly sympathetic to Scythe Goddard's cause, while Volta is surprised to learn that Xenocrates took Goddard on as an apprentice many years ago. In the novel's present, Xenocrates is being blackmailed by Goddard, as Goddard keeps Esme, Xenocrates's illegitimate and illegal daughter, as collateral. To keep her existence from getting out—and to keep her safe—Xenocrates doesn't challenge any of Goddard's questionable behavior and accuses Citra of murdering Scythe

Faraday, though he later revokes the charges. While he initially seems to discount both Citra and Rowan, his dealings with them after Goddard's death and at Winter Conclave show him that he should take them seriously, and that he should specifically look out for Rowan, foreshadowing Rowan's later role as an unordained scythe who gleans corrupt scythes.

Scythe Volta – The youngest of Scythe Goddard's followers. He has vaguely Afric leanings and wears yellow robes with embedded citrines. Though Rowan hates Volta at first, he soon begins to see that Volta isn't as heartless as Goddard, Chomsky, or Rand. Volta was trained by an old guard scythe, but believes that Goddard's way of gleaning and thinking is the way of the future, and he wants to be involved. Because of his early training, Volta is more compassionate than the rest of Goddard's bunch and even admits to Rowan that he thinks what Goddard does is repulsive. Rowan also recognizes, however, that Volta is weak and will likely never leave Goddard. Volta reaches his breaking point during the gleaning rampage at the Tonist cloister. After gleaning a room full of small Tonist children, Volta is so disturbed and disgusted with himself that he self-gleans. As he dies, weeping, he asks Rowan to call him by his old name, Shawn Dobson.

Esme – Esme is an overweight fourth grader whom Scythe Goddard uncharacteristically spares in a mass gleaning at a mall. He then takes her to live with him in Maxim Easley's mansion, where Rowan understands that Esme is a prisoner. Esme doesn't question why Goddard spared her, and she believes that there's something special about her relationship with Goddard since she doesn't have immunity and yet Goddard chooses to not glean her. Rowan learns later that Esme is High Blade Xenocrates's illegitimate daughter and that Goddard is using her to blackmail Xenocrates into giving him his way. Rowan finds Esme annoying, especially since he's required to be nice to her. Despite this, she seems like a kind and insightful child. She likes to play cards, especially with Rowan and Volta, and she tries to make friends with Maxim's children.

Tyger Salazar – Rowan's best friend and fellow "lettuce kid," or forgotten middle child. Not long before the start of the novel, Tyger starts "splatting" so that he can force his parents to spend money on him by sending him to revival centers. He loves attention, is a thrill seeker, and shallowly wants to be a professional party guest. Several months after Scythe Goddard takes over Rowan's training, Tyger accomplishes this goal: his parents turned him over to the **Thunderhead**, which allows him to do whatever he wants. He idolizes Rowan and also wants to work as one of Rowan's training subjects.

Scythe Chomsky – One of Scythe Goddard's followers. Chomsky is a hulking man who wears orange robes dotted with rubies. His weapon of choice is a flamethrower, and like Goddard, he takes pleasure in gleaning as spectacularly and as violently as possible. Rowan infers that Chomsky is just as

heartless as Goddard is. Rowan kills Chomsky during the gleaning rampage at a Tonist cloister and uses Chomsky's flamethrower to burn the building, as well as the bodies of Goddard's other followers.

Ben – Citra's younger brother. Though he idolizes scythes, especially Scythe Curie, he's also afraid of them. Citra finds that Ben is the only person in her family able to converse normally with her after she becomes an apprentice. He's the loved one that Citra is tasked with gleaning as her final test before being ordained as a scythe. Though he's terrified to become deadish, he trusts Citra completely.

Rhonda Flowers – A girl whom Citra went to school with and, when they were children, pushed in front of a truck, rendering her deadish. Since humans in the immortal age can't actually die naturally and are revived mere days after being deadish, Rhonda simply found the experience annoying, as she's a dedicated dancer and she missed her recital while she was in the revival center. Though she's thrilled and feels vindicated when Citra appears and confesses to her crime, Rhonda forgives her old classmate and declines when Citra offers for Rhonda to push her in front of a truck.

Scythe Mandela – An old, revered scythe on the bejeweling committee. He's a member of the old guard and is friends with Scythes Curie and Faraday, and he thinks poorly of Scythe Goddard. Though he initially goes along with Xenocrates's accusation that Citra murdered Faraday, he later apologizes to her when he learns it was untrue.

Maxim Easley – The owner of an ornate mansion and an executive at one of the turncorner companies working on the technology to reset people to ages lower than 21. He's an exceptionally wealthy man but is still powerless to resist when Scythe Goddard seizes his home and forces Maxim and his family to act as servants.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Scythe Rand – Scythe Goddard's only female follower. She has Pan-Asian leanings and wears green robes with emeralds. She's just as cruel as Goddard and Chomsky, loves their mass gleanings, and plays games with some of her victims. Rowan kills her using Bokator moves during their gleaning on a Tonist cloister.

The Engineer – An engineer who works at Magnetic Propulsion Laboratories. He hopes that the **Thunderhead** is quietly contemplating making a second attempt to colonize Mars and the moon, and he hopes to be involved in the technological advancements necessary to do so.

Rowan's Grandma – Rowan's grandma seems intent on pestering Rowan's mom by resetting herself to an age younger than her daughter. She's married to a bot and is pregnant when Rowan accepts his apprenticeship.

Kohl Whitlock – The star quarterback at Rowan's school, whom Faraday decides to glean. Rowan and other students imply that Kohl was popular and somewhat cruel. He doesn't know Rowan's name, but instinctively grabs Rowan's hand when Faraday gleanes him.

The Businessman – A businessman on an airplane selected by Scythe Goddard for gleaning. He tries to escape, but when Goddard asks him to choose the order in which people will be gleaned, the businessman throws himself on Goddard's knife.

Brother Ferguson – A Tonist whose sister Scythe Curie gleanes. He explains some basic tenets of the Tonist faith to Citra, specifically that Tonists don't believe death by scythe is real—therefore, he refuses to arrange his sister's funeral.

Citra's Mom – A food synthesis engineer. Citra's mom encourages Citra to accept the apprenticeship with Faraday for her son Ben's sake.

Rowan's Mom – Rowan's mom is often annoyed and stretched thin; she has many children and is often at odds with her mother, Rowan's grandma.

Marah Paulik – Kohl's girlfriend. She's furious with Rowan and makes Kohl's gleaning out to be Rowan's fault.

Scythe Yingxing – A silent scythe who gleanes using Black Widow Bokator moves exclusively. He trains young scythes and scythes' apprentices in Bokator.

Scythe Cervantes – The scythe who administers the apprentices' test at Vernal Conclave. He's a fan of Bokator, and so holds a Bokator match.

Scythe San Martín – A humorless Chileargentine scythe tasked with capturing Citra.

Scythe Possuelo – An Amazonian scythe who aids Citra on the train between Chileargentina and Amazonia.

Citra's Dad – A historian who is married to Citra's mom.

Curate Beauregard – A Tonist curate.

Scythe Prometheus – The first Supreme High Blade.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



COMING OF AGE

Scythe introduces the reader to a world several hundred years in the future, in which humanity has conquered death, illness, and poverty. When a person decides they've become too old, they can have their

bodies "reset" down to a younger age and go through the physical aging process again. Because nobody dies a natural death and the population growth is spinning out of control, society has come up with a worldwide system of "scythes," people whose job it is to "glean" (permanently kill) several hundred people per year. The story of *Scythe* focuses on two teenagers, Citra and Rowan, who are selected by Scythe Faraday to train as his apprentices. This entails a year of training, at the end of which one will be chosen and licensed as a scythe, while the other will be allowed to return to their previous life. As Citra and Rowan train and begin to come of age, the novel suggests that for them as future scythes, coming of age differs significantly from what their friends go through on their way to adulthood. For Citra and Rowan, coming of age entails becoming a part of a community, rather than just achieving "adult" status in the world.

It's important to note that though people in the world that *Scythe* presents can reset down to as young as age 21 (and the research to reset people to even younger ages is in progress), people only truly come of age once, as "turning the corner" doesn't mean that one's maturity or memories also revert to what they'd normally be at 21. This reminds the reader that while age has mostly been rendered useless by scientific advancements, coming of age as a teenager has become one of the few once-in-a-lifetime experiences that remain (a person's gleaning being the other one). However, even as Rowan and Citra continue to grow, develop, and move closer to becoming real scythes, the way that they speak about what their lives would've been like had they not been selected as apprentices is illuminating. Specifically, though they talk about how they wanted eventually to reach typical milestones—getting a college degree, getting married, and having a family—they talk about doing those things in a way that's distinctly lacking in any emotional investment. Essentially, as Citra and Rowan move closer to coming of age as scythes, they begin to see coming of age in the conventional sense as increasingly less meaningful.

This becomes especially pronounced when Rowan runs into his childhood friend Tyger at one of Scythe Goddard's lavish parties, Tyger having fulfilled his childhood dream of becoming a "professional partier." Though Rowan understands at this point that Tyger has always been somewhat shallow, seeing Tyger actually live this kind of life impresses upon Rowan that society offers young people little incentive to actually grow up in the first place, while also offering jobs like this that rely entirely on a sustained existence as a young person in both mind and body. In other words, there is little purpose in growing up, becoming mature, or coming of age, as there's little purpose to life itself in this society.

Entering into their apprenticeships, however, gives Citra and Rowan purpose, goals, and a roadmap for coming of age that the novel suggests is only available to scythes—and, possibly, the Tonists, a fringe religious group that's thought of as a joke

by the general populace, but whose followers are able to dedicate their lives to learning about and promoting Tonist beliefs in a way that's unheard of in the world of the novel. Through excerpts from their apprentice journals, the reader sees both Citra and Rowan transform from beings with little purpose into young adults with goals, ambitions, and a keen understanding of their place in the world. Notably, the Scythedom (the organization governing scythes) is arranged in such a way as to deny scythes the classic markers of adulthood and maturity: marriage, children, and even romantic partnerships. Instead, it focuses on bringing young scythes to maturity on an emotional level and instilling in them a sense of their own purpose in the world—after all, within the logic of the world the characters inhabit, scythes are the only people who actually have a purpose, as an out-of-control population is the world's only real issue. In a broader sense, *Scythe* offers readers the suggestion that considering coming of age in terms of meeting traditional milestones just for the sake of doing so is effectively meaningless. Instead, young readers should endeavor to come of age by finding a purpose or a calling, dedicating oneself to it, and developing emotional maturity in the process.



MORTALITY AND LIFE

By making a number of comparisons between the novel's present day and the past "Age of Mortality," *Scythe* closely considers what it means to be alive,

and how that changes when the chances of dying are statistically slim. Through this, *Scythe* paints a picture of a society that has made major advancements, but it also suggests that humanity loses a number of important things when it attains immortality, including passion, purpose, and in some cases, even the desire to live.

One of the things that the scientific advancements of *Scythe* have done extremely well is to remove all difficulties from people's lives. Nobody in the world of *Scythe*—save for the Tonists, who essentially worship the Age of Mortality lifestyle and so adopt habits that mimic mortality—wants for anything. There's no poverty, illness, or inequality, and if anything does go wrong, medical care is readily available. Specifically and most importantly, people are infused with "nanites," which effectively control a person's body chemistry and even release opiates into the bloodstream if someone experiences injury or pain. This, according to Scythe Faraday, means that there's actually little reason to live—though there's little reason to die, either. As far as Faraday is concerned, an idea which the novel supports, in order to truly live, one must experience some degree of struggle or purpose.

Rowan echoes this sentiment at several points in the novel and even takes it a step further. He first picks up on it when Scythe Faraday takes him and Citra to the galleries in an art museum from the Age of Mortality, as he notices that he simply doesn't

understand what it's like to live life knowing that, at the very least, a person has to work to stay alive—the emotional tenor of the paintings is something he cannot grasp. Later, Goddard turns off Rowan's pain nanites, explaining that one cannot feel joy if they cannot feel pain. After this, Rowan realizes that he was only marginally satisfied with his life prior to becoming Scythe Goddard's apprentice and having his pain nanites turned off.

Despite both the implied general lack of verve for life and the fact that being gleaned is statistically rare, it's telling that the general populace is still terrified of scythes. Citra and Rowan notice, especially after becoming apprentices to Faraday, that people in grocery stores don't seem to think of them as regular people. Instead, they're treated either with reverence as god-like figures, or with fear as though they carry a dangerous infectious disease. With this, the novel demonstrates how even in a world where death isn't a real concern for most, the natural human inclination to fear death persists. By doing this, *Scythe* implies that its world isn't actually so different from the Age of Mortality in that while nobody knows exactly when or where they'll die, the fact that it *could* happen anywhere, at any time, and in any number of mysterious ways is still a unifying human experience and an inescapable part of being alive. Citra also notices that people she assists Faraday in gleaning become instantly more compassionate, concerned for their loved ones, and attached to the mortal world as a whole—something that teaches her that the prospect of one's imminent death is one of the only things that impresses upon people that life is truly worth living.

While fearing eternal death by gleaning is something that scares most people in the world of the novel, *Scythe* also goes to great lengths to show how immortality deeply changes people's thinking surrounding experiences that *might* kill them. Rowan's friend Tyger is, prior to Rowan's apprenticeship, obsessed with "splatting:" throwing himself off of buildings in order to see how much damage he can do to the ground below, as well as to see how long he can stay "deadish" before the revival center can bring him back to full health. For Tyger, death then becomes a form of sport and entertainment. However, at a later point in the novel, Citra points out that the mental and emotional experience of both killing and dying remains the same as it once was. It's still traumatizing, and the brains of humans at this point in time cannot yet differentiate by becoming deadish by splatting and true death by gleaning. With this, the novel indicates that people like Tyger still experience the legitimate fear of dying and are working extremely hard to override a natural human instinct to keep oneself alive, just for the sake of the thrill.

Taken together, all of this paints a picture of a world in which, practically speaking, death has becoming a joke—a transformation that nevertheless doesn't actually translate to a person's experience of dying or becoming deadish.

Death—even if it's not possible or not likely to come—is, even within the immortal world of *Scythe*, a normal and natural part of the human experience and is the only thing truly capable of showing people how meaningful their life actually is.



SURVEILLANCE, CORRUPTION, AND JUSTICE

In the world of *Scythe*, politics as they existed in the Age of Mortality no longer exist. Instead, the world is governed by the **Thunderhead**, a sentient, all-knowing, and reliably fair version of the modern-day "cloud." While the Thunderhead can perform any number of necessary tasks and services, like call for ambudrones, police infractions, and monitor the populace from its many cameras, it does have one blind spot: by design, it cannot watch, record, or catalogue data that has anything to do with scythes, who have a separate cloud-like system to record their goings-on. By setting up a swath of society that's effectively outside the realm of the law, *Scythe* makes the case that even in its ideal, utopian society, the corruption that the Thunderhead was supposed to prevent still runs rampant—and is even more difficult to stop from within.

When humanity came up with the idea to create the Scythedom, several hundred years before the start of the novel, it put rules in place to guide scythe behavior, while also insisting to the rest of humanity that scythes are unusually and incorruptibly just and moral. It also created the scythe organization to perform oversight functions in case of bad behavior. In the novel's present, however, it soon becomes clear that the oversight methods available for corrupt scythes are insufficient at best, and enable bad behavior at worst. While Scythe Goddard's penchant for mass gleanings isn't outside the law in any official sense, the way that he taunts and torments his victims is morally questionable—and yet, Goddard appears to be quickly gaining a following as he advocates for abolishing the quota and instead allowing scythes to glean as many people in a year as they want to. Especially when Rowan discovers the kind of cruel and inhumane person that Goddard is in private, this becomes a clear attempt to infuse the Scythedom with a lack of humanity and send it completely off the rails, bypassing the rules that were set up to check bloodthirsty scythes like Goddard.

Most importantly, Citra's suspicion that Scythe Faraday was murdered, rather than that he self-gleaned, suggests that even though this suspicion turns out to be incorrect, the Scythedom doesn't appear trustworthy or infallible to the young new scythes entering it. Instead, it appears cutthroat and like a battle between the cruel "new guard" scythes like Goddard and the compassionate "old guard" scythes like Faraday and Scythe Curie—and most importantly, not at all about actually overseeing scythe activity and promoting good habits and practices.

This sense that nobody can truly trust the Scythedom isn't an accident. Because the Thunderhead cannot observe scythes at any time, it creates a void in information that makes it impossible for anyone, scythe or otherwise, to monitor what is or isn't happening among scythes. The novel does show that despite its general ineffectiveness in this regard, the Thunderhead does want to do what it can to make the Scythedom more reliable. This is why, when Citra is deadish and therefore, technically not a part of the Scythedom, the Thunderhead wakes up a portion of her brain to give her a clue—Scythe Faraday's given name—so that she can put the pieces together and discover that he wasn't actually murdered, but is in hiding in Amazonia. This suggests to the reader and to Citra that while the Thunderhead and the Scythedom are, at first glance, impossible to use as a tool to police or use for unintended purposes, it's possible to get around the rules by capitalizing on technicalities and drawing on information from multiple sources in order to come to conclusions.

More importantly, however, this suggests that in a situation like the one *Scythe* sets up, carrying out justice and stamping out corruption is something that only individuals can do effectively. By showing how Scythe Goddard manipulates the High Blade as well as the entire Scythedom during the seasonal meetings, the novel makes it clear that the organization itself cannot do anything to check him—instead, the only person who can put a stop to Goddard's bloodlust is Rowan, an individual who feels duty bound to act outside of the system to place checks where the system itself cannot. The novel ends with one of Citra's first entries in her official scythe journal, in which she writes that she's heard of a mysterious figure whom people call Scythe Lucifer—Rowan—who takes out corrupt scythes. This final turn offers a suggestion for a two-pronged approach to fighting corruption. While Citra, as a licensed scythe trained by the old guard, can work from within the Scythedom to enforce rules and check any of Goddard's supporters, Rowan can work on the outside to shift the balance of power to scythes like Citra and Scythe Curie, who believe in justice and will do what they can to stamp out corruption. By working in this way and offering hope for a fairer future, the novel suggests that artificial intelligence like the Thunderhead can only go so far—it's necessary for people to do the work themselves to ensure balance, fairness, and justice.



MORALITY, COMPASSION, AND CHOICES

As the novel draws the reader deeper into the political divisions within the scythe organization and specifically, after Citra and Rowan are taken on by Scythe Curie and Scythe Goddard respectively, *Scythe* asks a number of questions about morality and human nature. By comparing the different licensed scythes and how they choose to train their apprentices, Scythe considers whether or not behaving

morally and compassionately is something a person will do when there are few or no consequences for behaving otherwise, as well as what it even means to be compassionate in their line of work.

Prior to becoming apprentices, neither Citra nor Rowan think particularly highly of scythes. They generally find them cruel, unfeeling, and at times, not even especially human because their job is to kill others, something that Citra and Rowan don't find positive or moral. However, the scythe journal entries of Scythe Curie, which appear at the beginnings of most chapters, paint a different picture of what it means to be a good scythe in a moral sense. Curie meditates often on whether or not she's doing a good job and is compassionate enough to her victims and their families. When Scythe Faraday takes Citra and Rowan on as his apprentices, he confirms that, as far as he's concerned, Curie has the right idea: a good scythe is a compassionate scythe who doesn't think that killing people is good or right.

Both Scythe Curie and Scythe Faraday are meticulous in their methods, something that they believe allows them to be as compassionate as possible. Curie believes that gleaning should mimic death from the Age of Mortality, so she gives her victims no time to prepare—but then cooks her victims' families dinner the night after and provides them some closure. Faraday, on the other hand, diligently and empirically chooses his methods of killing as well as his victims, as he believes that people are all individuals and deserve to die in a way that aligns with who they are. He also attends every funeral for the people he gleans. This suggests that, as far as Faraday and Curie are concerned, compassion is something that comes with research and attention to detail. Essentially, it's something that they can develop when they take a keen interest in their victims and the victims' families, which in turn makes every death a personal, devastating experience for the scythe as well.

Following Scythe Faraday's (supposed) self-gleaning, after which Scythe Curie takes on Citra while Scythe Goddard takes over Rowan's training, Rowan discovers that not all scythes are as moral or as kind as Faraday was. While Citra continues to learn compassion first and foremost, Goddard, who is known for bloody, violent mass gleanings, teaches Rowan to enjoy killing and dehumanize his victims. Thanks to Rowan's innately compassionate personality as well as to his early training with Faraday, he's well aware that Goddard is turning him into a monster and a "killing machine," rather than a person performing a horrifying yet necessary service to humanity. The novel does imply, however, that despite Rowan's training and the awful things that Goddard makes him do, Rowan is able to maintain a sense of moral righteousness by choosing, at various points, to exercise his compassion and help potential victims of Goddard's crew escape. This creates the possibility that while a person's sense of morality is partially something innate and partially something learned, the true marker of morality is whether or not a person chooses to exercise his or her

compassion—Rowan, after his training, admits in his inner monologue that he has become a monster and does enjoy killing, but he still chooses to ultimately use this transformation for good by gleaning Goddard and Goddard's cronies. Further, after becoming a scythe, Citra hears of a rogue, unordained scythe known as Scythe Lucifer—whom she knows is Rowan—who takes out corrupt scythes with what he learned from Goddard. With this, *Scythe* suggests that while anyone is capable of becoming a compassionless monster like Goddard, it's also possible for anyone to use the exact same skills and thought processes to create positive change in the world.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



THUNDERHEAD

The Thunderhead—a sentient, all-knowing version of the Age of Mortality "cloud"—symbolizes the best and the worst elements of humanity. The Thunderhead is impartial, kind, and does the work of caring for the entire population by spearheading public works projects and policing infractions. However, the Thunderhead's oversight abilities only go so far since it's forbidden from interfering with anything related to the Scythedom, which is supposed to be self-policing. In this way, the Thunderhead mirrors the way in which the immortal humans of *Scythe* have become both godlike in that they can't die naturally and don't experience pain or suffering, while also remain, in a number of important ways, shockingly and vulnerably human. Immortal humans, and the Thunderhead, cannot control humanity's worst impulses and grabs for power as represented and carried out by select scythes, particularly Scythe Goddard.



ANASTASIA ROMANOV

The name Citra takes on when she becomes an ordained scythe—Anastasia Romanov—symbolizes Citra's hopes for positive change in the Scythedom. The historical Anastasia Romanov was seventeen years old when she and the rest of the Russian royal family were executed during the Bolshevik Revolution in 1918, and thus she never did anything of note. Though this is an odd choice given the precedent for scythes' names to come from mortal age scientists or philosophers (like Scythe Curie's choice of Marie Curie as her Patron Historic, for instance), Citra chooses her name as to symbolize the future for the Scythedom that she'd like to see. She points out that young Anastasia died before she could do anything—good or bad—for Russia, but Citra would like to take that idea of unused potential and cast herself as a

positive vision of the future. In this vision, all scythes are held to high standards of conduct and represent the most moral and righteous part of society.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Simon & Schuster edition of *Scythe* published in 2017.

Chapter 1 Quotes

Perhaps that is why we must, by law, keep a record. A public journal, testifying to those who will never die and those who are yet to be born, as to why we human beings do the things we do. We are instructed to write down not just our deeds but our feelings, because it must be known that we do have feelings. Remorse. Regret. Sorrow too great to bear. Because if we didn't feel those things, what monsters would we be?

Related Characters: Scythe Curie (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 3

Explanation and Analysis

In her gleaning journal, Curie explains why she must keep the journal in the first place: to create a record of the fact that she's human and experiences emotional distress because of her job as a scythe. The fact that Curie sees the purpose of the gleaning journals as primarily to make it known that scythes have feelings suggests that she's aware of the divide in the way that scythes see themselves and how the general population sees them. While good scythes, like Curie and Faraday, make a point to hold on to their humanity and the emotions that go with it, their job isn't one that invites sympathy from the public that both needs and fears them. This shows that one of the Scythedom's greatest challenges is to consistently justify its existence to the people it's supposed to serve.

The growth of civilization was complete. Everyone knew it. When it came to the human race, there was no more left to learn. Nothing about our own existence to decipher. Which meant that no one person was more important than any other. In fact, in the grand scheme of things, everyone was equally useless.

Related Characters: Citra's Dad, Citra's Mom, Scythe

Faraday / Gerald Van Der Gans, Citra Terranova

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 11

Explanation and Analysis

When Scythe Faraday invites himself for dinner at the Terranova apartment, Citra is the only one who gets it when he points out that her parents' jobs are pointless. This impresses upon the reader that immortality, while good from a number of perspectives, poses a number of problems and complicates the question of what it means to be alive. At this point in time, there's little point to doing anything—there's nothing to work for and there's nothing to chase except for one's own pleasure, as the possibility of dying doesn't meaningfully factor into anyone's sense of how to live their lives. Though Citra understands that as a regular person this is true, she later discovers that the only people exempt from this purposeless existence are scythes. They are, per the logic of life in Citra's world, the only ones who actually perform a meaningful service to the world by controlling population growth and making it so that everyone else can continue to live in this meaningless, albeit comfortable, state.

Chapter 2 Quotes

☹☹ Suddenly Kohl thrust his hand out, grabbing Rowan's and holding it tightly. Rowan allowed it. He wasn't family; he wasn't even Kohl's friend before today—but what was the saying? *Death makes the whole world kin.* Rowan wondered if a world without death would then make everyone strangers.

Related Characters: Scythe Faraday / Gerald Van Der Gans, Kohl Whitlock, Rowan Damisch

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 24

Explanation and Analysis

When Rowan insists on remaining in the room while Scythe Faraday gleans Kohl Whitlock, Rowan feels a new sense of camaraderie with his classmate. Though he and Kohl barely know each other, Rowan recognizes that it's a shared human experience to want to be comforted and not alone in one's last moments. Because of this, Rowan is able to see the truth of the saying that death joins people together.

If the reader takes the saying as true, then it's worth considering whether Rowan's future world, where death

isn't normally something to think about, is less connected than the world was in the Age of Mortality. Rowan certainly sees here how he had no reason to connect with Kohl until Kohl is on his deathbed, and Rowan's identity as a forgotten, pointless "lettuce kid" would support this. Again, this functions to point out the ways in which immortality isn't all it's cracked up to be, and to illustrate the concrete changes immortality has on humanity and how people interact with each other.

Chapter 3 Quotes

☹☹ She assumed she would go to college, get a degree in something pleasant, then settle into a comfortable job, meet a comfortable guy, and have a nice, unremarkable life. It's not that she longed for such an existence, but it was expected. Not just of her, but of everyone. With nothing to really aspire to, life had become about maintenance.

Related Characters: Ben, Citra's Mom, Scythe Faraday / Gerald Van Der Gans, Citra Terranova

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 44

Explanation and Analysis

While considering whether or not to accept the offered apprenticeship with Scythe Faraday, Citra thinks of what she has always imagined her life to look like. Note how emotionless Citra is about the life she's laid out for herself. She's not excited about any of it; learning, marriage, and having children is just something she knows she'll probably do, rather than something she actively wants to do. This illustrates how immortality has rendered these traditional markers of adulthood and coming of age meaningless—remember that Rowan's grandmother has recently reset down to age 25 and is pregnant yet again. A person in Citra and Rowan's world can go through the motions again and again; these experiences are no longer one-time experiences and therefore, are less special and significant.

Being a scythe, on the other hand, would give Citra something to aspire to: being a good scythe and performing her job well. Though working as a scythe is never something that Citra is passionate about, per se, she does eventually come to understand the seriousness of the profession and the importance of doing it well. It gives her something to strive for and, at least judging by her gleaning journal entry that closes the novel, is a much more compelling lifestyle for her than the traditional trajectory would be.

Chapter 5 Quotes

☞ When it was decided that people needed to die in order to ease the tide of population growth, it was also decided that this must be the responsibility of humans. Bridge repair and urban planning could be handled by the Thunderhead, but taking a life was an act of conscience and consciousness. Since it could not be proven that the Thunderhead had either, the Scythedom was born.

Related Characters: Scythe Curie (speaker), Scythe Goddard

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 54

Explanation and Analysis

In her gleaning journal, Scythe Curie explains why the Thunderhead doesn't have power over the Scythedom: it, as far as humans know, doesn't have a conscience. However, it's also worth pointing out the issues with this logic, namely Curie's implication that all people inducted into the Scythedom will be moral and in tune with their consciences. This implication loses power especially once the narrative introduces Scythe Goddard, who makes it abundantly clear that there's a growing faction of scythes who work very hard to suppress their consciences and instead take joy in killing, as well as tormenting victims before they're gleaned. Further, when the Thunderhead speaks to Citra later, it also suggests that if it doesn't have a true conscience, it at least cares about the fate of the people it oversees. All of this suggests that while the Scythedom was a good idea in theory and came from good intentions, it's not actually properly serving its purpose and was founded on faulty logic.

Chapter 7 Quotes

☞ The idea that not all scythes were good was something neither Rowan or Citra had ever considered. It was widely accepted that scythes adhered to the highest moral and ethical standards. They were wise in their dealings and fair in their choices. Even the ones who sought celebrity were seen to deserve it. The idea that some scythes might not be as honorable as Scythe Faraday did not sit well with either of his new apprentices.

Related Characters: Scythe Goddard, Scythe Faraday /

Gerald Van Der Gans, Citra Terranova, Rowan Damisch

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 79

Explanation and Analysis

One of Scythe Faraday's offhand comments in the lead up to Vernal Conclave tips off Rowan and Citra to the fact that not all scythes are fair or moral. This is a major coming-of-age moment for both of them, as it completely shatters how they once thought about the Scythedom and how it functioned. As outside observers and as uninitiated children, the Scythedom appeared perfect and infallible (if terrifying)—but now, as almost adults, they're beginning to understand that within the Scythedom, there's both good and evil. It's telling too that they were able to go along with believing that even the famous scythes were likely still good and fair, especially since the reader learns not long after this that both Rowan and Citra know of Scythe Goddard and his violent mass gleanings. This makes it clear that in order for young people to come of age, they have to become part of the community and become familiar with the community's nuances and edges.

☞ "But people *could* read it. The Scythe Archive is open to everyone."

"Yeah," said Rowan, "like the Thunderhead. People can read anything, but no one does. All they do is play games and watch cat holograms."

Related Characters: Citra Terranova, Rowan Damisch (speaker), Scythe Curie, Scythe Faraday / Gerald Van Der Gans

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 82

Explanation and Analysis

As Rowan and Citra discuss the necessity (or the futility) of preparing to keep a gleaning journal, Rowan suggests that it's not actually important to keep one since nobody ever reads them. This suggests, first of all, that Rowan believes that the journal is something performative that he's doing for others. He essentially is focusing on the audience for his prospective future journal, rather than the act of writing it. Scythe Curie's journal entries at the start of every chapter,

however, begin to show that the purpose of the journal is just as much to allow scythes to grapple with their own moral failings and the difficult aspects of their jobs as it is for the public. While the public having access to this struggle is an important aspect, it's not the only aspect.

Rowan's point, however, also gets at the novel's insistence that in an immortal world, seeking out information is no longer something fun, interesting, or even useful for the general public. They have little incentive to check up on scythes, which in turn creates a void in oversight, and leaves the Scythedom even more ripe for corruption than it might be otherwise.

Chapter 8 Quotes

●● He clicked on each name and brought up four pictures. He immediately regretted it, because the moment those names had faces, they became people instead of parameters.

Related Characters: Scythe Faraday / Gerald Van Der Gans, Rowan Damisch

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 89

Explanation and Analysis

One day, Scythe Faraday tasks Rowan with doing the necessary research to choose the next gleaning victim, something that Rowan finds emotionally difficult. Because Faraday leans so heavily on using statistics from the Age of Mortality to choose his victims, it's very easy for Rowan to dehumanize the possible people when they exist for him only as parameters. Seeing their photos and learning more about them, however, impresses upon Rowan that even if these people do fit these specific parameters, they're still people, first and foremost. This allows Faraday to shape Rowan's compassion and impress upon him that the job of a scythe *should* be difficult, as taking human life isn't something that should be undertaken lightly. It forces Rowan to begin to come of age in a way that will prepare him for life in the Scythedom by giving him a taste of what ordained scythehood is like.

Chapter 13 Quotes

●● They removed their raincoats to reveal robes of all colors, all textures. It was a rainbow that summoned forth anything but thoughts of death. This, Citra realized, was intentional. Scythes wished to be seen as the many facets of light, not of darkness.

Related Characters: Citra Terranova

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 127

Explanation and Analysis

At Vernal Conclave, Citra realizes that the scythes wear brightly colored robes—and never wear black, the color of death and mourning—as a way to try to impress upon the population that they're not awful people or symbols of death. In an immortal age when the world's population only climbs higher and higher, scythes are the sole reason why humanity can continue to exist at all, and thus scythes are meant to represent goodness and prosperity rather than death. Citra's ability to recognize this tells the reader that she's truly growing up and coming of age in a context specific to scythes. While this is a logical view that most people perhaps should have, it's not one that, as far as the reader can tell, actually permeates into the general public. Instead, it's up to the scythes to recognize their own importance and necessity, and to continue to look the part of society's heroes, even when society doesn't fully accept their role as a hero.

Chapter 15 Quotes

●● The Scythedom uses the Thunderhead for countless tasks—but to us, it's simply a database. A tool, nothing more. As an entity—as a mind—the Thunderhead does not exist for us.

And yet it does, and we know it.

Estrangement from the collective consciousness of humanity's wisdom is just one more thing that sets scythes apart from others.

Related Characters: Scythe Curie (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 155

Explanation and Analysis

In one of her entries in her gleaning journal, Scythe Curie writes about how scythes, unlike the rest of society, are shut out from having a relationship with the Thunderhead. This, she suggests, not only separates scythes from the Thunderhead; it also separates them from the people who do have a relationship with the Thunderhead. Though this is supposed to be a good thing, note that Curie refers to the Thunderhead as the "collective consciousness of humanity's wisdom." This indicates that while scythes are supposed to be separate so that they can cultivate their own wisdom and not be influenced by possible negative forces, they're also missing out on wisdom that could be influential and helpful for them. Again, this suggests that there are fundamental flaws in the way that the Scythedom is set up.

Chapter 18 Quotes

☝ "Every scythe has his or her own method. That happens to be mine. In the Age of Mortality, death would often come with no warning. It is our task to mimic what we've stolen from nature—and so that is the face of death I've chosen to recreate. My gleanings are always instantaneous and always public, lest people forget what we do, and why we must do it."

Related Characters: Scythe Curie (speaker), Citra Terranova

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 191

Explanation and Analysis

After Scythe Curie takes Citra on their first joint gleaning expedition, she explains that she tries to mimic death in the Age of Mortality by killing quickly and in public. Elsewhere in the book, Curie explains to Citra that she also tries to target people who look "stagnant." Curie's method is similar to Faraday's reliance on the Age of Mortality statistics; both seek to replicate some element of how death played out in times gone by. This reinforces the idea that the scythes themselves are one of the only things that connects the majority of immortal humanity to their predecessors and their history in the Age of Mortality. Scythes exist to remind people that death still exists and, while terrifying and unwanted, is a necessary part of life if humans wish to continue to inhabit the planet. Notice that Curie seems to think this is one of the most effective ways for her to remind humans of the fact that they are human, given that she's previously suggested that humans without death are, to a degree, less human.

Chapter 22 Quotes

☝ "We believe in the Great Vibration, and that it will free us from being stagnant."

Stagnant.

It was the word Scythe Curie used to describe the people she chose to glean.

Related Characters: Brother Ferguson (speaker), Scythe Curie, Citra Terranova

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 227

Explanation and Analysis

When Citra goes to a Tonist cloister to inform Brother Ferguson that Scythe Curie gleaned his sister, he explains some of what the Tonists believe and uses language that mirrors Scythe Curie's. Though Citra finds it disturbing, this suggests to her that the Tonists might not be as crazy as everyone makes them out to be: they might be in search of the exact same thing that she and Scythe Curie are when they glean people. While the "Great Vibration" seems questionable and almost humorous, the idea that the Tonists want to escape stagnation suggests that stagnation is becoming a part of life since humans achieved immortality—and that it's a natural desire to want to escape it, either through death or through finding meaning in one's life.

Chapter 24 Quotes

☝ "Never lose your humanity," Scythe Faraday had told him, "or you'll be nothing more than a killing machine." He had used the word "killing" rather than "gleaning." Rowan hadn't thought much of it at the time, but now he understood; it stopped being gleaning the moment one became desensitized to the act.

Related Characters: Scythe Faraday / Gerald Van Der Gans (speaker), Scythe Goddard, Rowan Damisch

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 239

Explanation and Analysis

After a few weeks of training with Scythe Goddard, Rowan think back on Scythe Faraday's warning that a good scythe must remain sensitive to the fact that they're killing other humans. The way that Goddard is training Rowan seems

designed to rob Rowan of his humanity and make killing seem like something good and normal. This is importantly different from *death* being good and normal; what Goddard is going for is a normalization of *killing*, not just of death. In other words, he's attempting to teach Rowan to enjoy the actual act of taking lives and to not have to think about the people he's killing, as Faraday asked him to do on the day he had Rowan choose the heroic dog lover to glean.

☝ "Embrace it, Rowan. Suckle at its transformative breast. You may think gleaning is an acquired taste, but it's not. The thrill of the hunt and the joy of the kill simmers in all of us. Bring it to the surface and then you'll be the kind of scythe this world needs."

Related Characters: Scythe Goddard (speaker), Rowan Damisch

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 240

Explanation and Analysis

During a training session with Scythe Goddard, following Rowan's refusal to act like he likes gleaning, Goddard gives him a pep talk and encourages him to embrace killing as part of his nature. Goddard implies here that violence and the desire to hurt others is a normal part of the human psyche. This suggests that he has a very different view on human nature than the other scythes in the novel do. Curie seems to suggest that humans are generally good but apathetic and lazy by nature, while Faraday seems less concerned about the general populace and more interested in making it clear that compassion is something developed, not something innate. This line of thinking would line up more with Goddard's, as it would agree with him that there's a degree of cruelty in everyone that people must learn to suppress.

Chapter 27 Quotes

☝ "I was headstrong and stupid in my early days. I thought that by gleaning just the right people at just the right time, I could change the world for the better. I believed, in my arrogance, that I had a keen grasp of the big picture that others lack. But of course, I was just as limited as everyone else."

Related Characters: Scythe Curie (speaker), Scythe Goddard, Citra Terranova

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 273

Explanation and Analysis

After Citra and Scythe Curie watch footage of one of Scythe Goddard's gleanings, Curie reflects on the scythe she was in her youth. She takes aim at her youthful arrogance: at the time, she felt she was the only person capable of creating positive change in the world, and that her vision was the only one that was valid and useful. In her old age, however, Curie understands that everyone wants to do the right thing and everyone also believes that they have a unique perspective on life—and while technically this may be true, this doesn't make any one perspective better or more valid than any other. This is why Curie is so supportive of Citra achieving the scytheadhood and fighting corruption from within the Scythedom. Curie doesn't see acting as a vigilante as something especially useful anymore; as far as she's concerned, a better course of action is to create systems that perform oversight effectively and rely on those.

Chapter 28 Quotes

☝ "Would the Thunderhead grieve our passing, I wonder? And if so, would it grieve as the child who has lost a parent, or as the parent who could not save a petulant child from its own poor choices?"

Related Characters: Scythe Curie (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 294

Explanation and Analysis

Scythe Curie ponders in one of her gleaning journal entries how the Thunderhead thinks of humans and how it would feel if scythes gleaned everyone in the world. The way that Curie thinks of the Thunderhead suggests that she sees it as more than a sentient, all-knowing piece of technology. She suspects that it can feel emotion and very possibly cares about the beings it oversees. Curie's choice to see the Thunderhead in this way speaks to the fact that regardless of how human or not the Thunderhead actually is, it functions as a symbol for humanity mostly because people want it to reflect them. Curie wants to believe that the

Thunderhead is compassionate, just like she is, as that makes it more palatable to have it controlling the lives of everyone (except for scythes) on the planet.

☝ Tyger left with the other professional party people, with whom he seemed to share much more in common now than with Rowan. Rowan wondered if there was anyone from his old life he could relate to anymore.

Related Characters: Scythe Goddard, Tyger Salazar, Rowan Damisch

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 311

Explanation and Analysis

After one of Scythe Goddard's parties, where Tyger works as a professional partier, Rowan realizes how little he has in common with his old best friend anymore. This impresses upon Rowan how much he's changed since becoming Faraday's apprentice. While he and Tyger once connected over the fact that they both felt ignored by their families, Rowan's experiences have made it impossible for them to connect over anything. This is because Rowan's experience of coming of age in the Scythedom is very different from Tyger's experience of achieving relative freedom as a member of the general populace. Immortal life gives most people little reason to grow up at all—and the parties that Goddard hires all seem to be conventionally beautiful young people. In other words, there's little incentive for someone like Tyger to grow up emotionally or physically; he literally gets paid to stay young in every way. Rowan, on the other hand, is becoming a part of a greater community with a purpose unlike anything that Tyger can even fathom, which makes him see Tyger's behavior as even more shallow than he once did.

Chapter 29 Quotes

☝ "But if this really is a scandal in the Scythedom—" "—then your best possible position would be to achieve scythehood yourself, and fight it from the inside."

Related Characters: Scythe Curie, Citra Terranova (speaker), Scythe Goddard, Scythe Faraday / Gerald Van Der Gans

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 319

Explanation and Analysis

When Citra finally admits to Scythe Curie that she's been researching the possibility that Scythe Faraday was murdered, Curie shuts down the conversation by impressing on Citra the importance of becoming a scythe and fighting corruption from that perspective. This reflects the way that Curie herself has come of age over the course of her long lifetime. While she once believed in acting as an individual and using her power as a scythe to make big decisions for all of humanity, she now sees the value in a slow system with many voices that, in theory, will come to some consensus and present a more united front. Her encouragement to Citra indicates that Curie doesn't want Citra to have to go through the same painful learning process that she did and instead, she'd like Citra to fully grasp the importance of working within a system to change things from the beginning.

Chapter 33 Quotes

☝ "With each gleaning I commit, with each life taken for the good of humanity, I mourn for the boy I once was, whose name I sometimes struggle to remember. And I long for a place beyond immortality where I can, in some small measure, resurrect the wonder, and be that boy again."

Related Characters: Scythe Faraday / Gerald Van Der Gans (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 369

Explanation and Analysis

In his gleaning journal, Scythe Faraday recognizes that his job means that he's consistently separated from the innocent boy he once was. This drives home the novel's insistence that entering the Scythedom is the only real way for people to grow up in the immortal world the novel presents. With little purpose to even living, aside from chasing pleasure and amassing slightly more money than one's neighbors, there's little incentive to grow, learn, and behave in mature ways. In the Scythedom, however, a person is forced to come of age horrifically and continue to do so every time they glean a person. While the novel presents this as a necessary evil and a good thing for the people in the world (without gleanings, population would spin out of control), Faraday's musings show that there's a huge cost to making people perform this service, and losing

their childish innocence means that they're even more fundamentally cut off from the rest of society.

Chapter 36 Quotes

☝☝ My greatest wish for humanity is not for peace or comfort or joy. It is that we all still die a little inside every time we witness the death of another. For only the pain of empathy will keep us human. There's no version of God that can help us if we ever lose that.

Related Characters: Scythe Faraday / Gerald Van Der Gans (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 387

Explanation and Analysis

In an entry to his gleaning journal, Scythe Faraday admits that he prays that humanity will never lose its sense of empathy, as that would signal the end of humanity as he knows it. Though Faraday has thus far implied that empathy and compassion are things that people learn, suggesting that they're not necessarily inherent human qualities, this entry would suggest that he actually believes the opposite. However, this doesn't change Faraday's belief that regardless of whether cruelty or empathy or the natural human state, it's still important that people continue to *choose* empathy. This suggests that Faraday thinks that what actually makes people human is their capacity to choose to be kind, not the kindness itself.

Chapter 38 Quotes

☝☝ It was then it occurred to her that every scythe, since the Scythedom began, had to take this test. Every single one of them was forced to take the life of someone they loved. Yes, that person would be revived, but it didn't change the cold-blooded act. A person's subconscious mind can't differentiate between permanent and temporary killings.

Related Characters: Ben, Citra Terranova

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 410

Explanation and Analysis

When Citra learns what her final test is—rendering Ben

deadish in front of a committee—she realizes that this is going to be her true coming of age moment, as it's been for scythes since the Scythedom began. This reminds the reader that the immortal world has mostly deprived the general populace from any meaningful coming-of-age traditions, whether they be religious traditions like a bar or bat mitzvah, or graduating college, or learning to drive a car. Instituting a formal tradition like this at all makes it clear that scythes are the only people in the world of the novel who truly come of age.

That the tradition is something so horrendously violent and personal is intended to test whether or not the scythe candidates are capable of behaving compassionately while staying true to their purpose as scythes. As Citra realizes, it takes a great deal of emotional strength to be able to sacrifice a loved one, regardless of whether or not it's temporary, for the sake of becoming a scythe and serving the greater good. This, in turn, also reinforces that becoming a part of the Scythedom entails giving up ties to one's blood family.

Chapter 40 Quotes

☝☝ "Had she lived, who knows what she might have done. Perhaps she could have changed the world and redeemed her family name. I choose to be Scythe Anastasia. I vow to become the change that might have been."

Related Characters: Citra Terranova (speaker), Rowan Damisch, High Blade Xenocrates

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 428

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Citra offers her justification for taking Anastasia Romanov, a twentieth century Russian princess, as her Patron Historic. Anastasia Romanov died at 17 as a victim of civil war and therefore, wasn't able to accomplish anything of note. Citra suggests that Xenocrates in particular see Anastasia Romanov as a symbol for the future that might have been in the mortal age, and, with Citra's ordainment as a scythe, the future that can be in the Scythedom. This Patron Historic also represents a middle ground for Citra in terms of working within the Scythedom and stepping outside of it to carry out vigilante justice. It calls out Xenocrates directly for the way that he treated

Citra and tried to wrongly accuse her of killing Faraday, and it does step outside of the guidelines that most scythes follow for naming. In this way, Citra is able to earn the thing

she needs to work within the Scythedom by bending the rules to work in her favor.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

In her gleaning journal, Scythe Curie explains that all scythes must keep a record of the "innocents" they glean. She insists that all people she kills are innocent, though she's performing a great service to the world by gleaning people. Her journal, which is public, is the record, and it's intended to justify for the world why she does what she does and to show that she does grieve for those who die. Not grieving would make her a monster.

One day in November, Citra is doing homework when her mom answers the door to find a scythe, Scythe Faraday, outside. Citra's mom is immediately terrified, and Citra is scared as well. Faraday steps inside in his ivory linen robe, which Citra believes is intended to make him look more pleasant, but she's still afraid to have a scythe in her home. He greets Citra and her brother, Ben, by name, and invites himself to stay for dinner. Citra wonders if Faraday is going to eat and then glean someone in the family.

Citra and Ben sit with Faraday in the living room and discuss the scientist Michael Faraday, who is Faraday's "Patron Historic" (namesake). Citra notices that Faraday looks relatively old and asks if he's old by choice. Citra's mom believes this is rude, but Faraday says he likes direct questions and shares that he is almost 180 years old. He laughs and says that looking older makes people think that he's wise. Citra's dad arrives home from work, shakes Faraday's hand, and then they all sit down for dinner. Citra's dad notes that he hasn't seen Faraday around, and Faraday responds that he believes that in order to do his job well, he needs to be somewhat anonymous. This offends Citra.

In these excerpts from gleaning journals, which begin every chapter, scythes attempt to justify their actions for their readers, both the reader of the novel and the prospective readers within their own world. By insisting that scythes have emotions and grieve, Curie suggests that scythes actually have a very difficult job and one that's morally complicated.



"Gleaning" is permanent killing in this immortal world. Citra's fear shows that she mostly thinks of scythes as having questionable morals—it would be horrible to force someone to serve dinner and then kill them, especially given how scared Citra and her family are of being in close contact with a scythe.



Pay close attention to what Faraday says about looking old making people think that he's wise. This word choice suggests that Faraday isn't convinced that he's wise; it's just something he's trying to portray to the masses. This flags for the readers that scythes are more complicated than Citra gives them credit for, and that they specifically struggle with how to present themselves and their profession to the world. While they aspire to look wise and knowledgeable, in reality, they question if they know enough.



Near the end of dinner, Faraday asks Citra's family to tell him about themselves. Citra's dad works in historical research, while Citra's mom is a food synthesis engineer. Faraday suggests that both jobs are useless—society can synthesize everything and anything, while studying the past will never yield new information. Citra gets his point; humans are so advanced now that there's no more to learn. She angrily spits that Faraday should glean one of them and move on. Her parents and Ben dissolve into fearful tears while Citra's dad tries to apologize. Faraday says he likes being challenged before grabbing a huge knife out of their kitchen. He asks Citra's mother to kiss his ring, which will grant her immunity from gleaning for a year. She does, and Faraday explains that he's here to glean their neighbor. As he leaves, he tells Citra she'd make a good scythe.

After Faraday leaves, Citra's dad turns up the TV volume so they can't hear anything. An hour later, Faraday returns with the knife and gives it back to Citra. She refuses to take it but finally accepts when Faraday gently points out that everyone is complicit in what scythes do. When Faraday leaves, Citra throws the knife in the trash.

CHAPTER 2

In her gleaning journal, Scythe Curie writes that gleaning is difficult, even though it's necessary. Now, there are no diseases or accidents, but people still must die. Humans failed to colonize the moon and Mars, so there's nowhere else for all the people to go. She understands why scythes must do their work, but wonders why she was chosen and what fate she might experience after she dies.

Rowan sits next to the bed of his friend Tyger in the revival center, as Tyger recently threw himself out of a 39th story window. Rowan doesn't want to be at home, as his grandmother recently reset down to age 25 and is pregnant again, much to Rowan's mom's annoyance. Tyger awakes and is thrilled to learn that he'd been "deadish" for four days, a new record for him. Rowan immediately begins to lose patience with his friend's obsession with making a mess by "splatting," but laughs when Tyger says he has to remind his parents that "the lettuce" is still around. Both Rowan and Tyger are middle children and have declared themselves "lettuce kids" that are easily forgotten. Tyger started splatting a few months ago and likes that he can force his parents to spend money on him by doing so.

Citra's understanding of what Faraday is saying suggests that immortality has made living somewhat useless: there's nothing more to learn or strive for, so what's the purpose of even being alive? Citra's anger when she grasps this suggests that though she comprehends the importance of the question, even immortal humans are still naturally offended when their purpose on earth—and by extension, their very lives—are questioned. This implies that even in an immortal world, humans do still want to live. In other words, dying hasn't yet become anything other than the scary unknown that is in the reader's world.



Throwing the knife away allows Citra to tell herself that being complicit and understanding that scythes are necessary doesn't mean that she has to like her complicity. She'll later discover that her ability to understand both sides of this is what gives her the compassion that scythes need.



It's important to keep in mind that failing to start colonies in space means that while humans may be immortal, they're not infallible. In other words, they're still human and aren't yet entirely godlike—and in important ways, society as a whole still experiences failure and difficulty.



The idea of Tyger and Rowan being "lettuce" kids speaks more broadly to how it feels to live in an immortal age: while Tyger and Rowan might experience more acutely a sense that they don't matter, in reality, nobody truly matters anymore. Because of this, people like Tyger are drawn to spectacle and display by doing things like "splatting." Later in the novel, this idea explains some of why Scythe Goddard likes to glean so violently—instead of splatting, he wants to make his mark by becoming famous for his violence.



The next morning, Rowan runs into Scythe Faraday at school. Rowan offers to walk with him to the office since he's going there too. In the office, Faraday asks for Kohl Whitlock. Rowan scornfully points out that Kohl is the star quarterback and then makes a point of following Faraday and Kohl into the principal's office. Faraday grudgingly agrees that Rowan can stay, especially when Kohl asks that "Ronald" stay. Rowan pulls up a chair and asks why Kohl has to die. Faraday sighs and explains that he selected Kohl to follow statistics from the Age of Mortality, when .303% of deaths were of teens that drove drunk—which Kohl does.

Faraday explains that he's going to kill Kohl by electrocuting him. Hearing this, Kohl grabs Rowan's hand. Rowan asks if Kohl has any last words. Kohl doesn't, but Rowan decides to make up something good. Faraday attempts to make Rowan let go of Kohl's hand, but Rowan refuses and painfully flies backwards when Faraday electrocutes Kohl. Rowan thanks Faraday for letting him stay, and Faraday notes that Rowan did a good thing by comforting Kohl. Rowan insists that anyone would've done it, but Faraday points out that nobody else offered. Rowan says that he doesn't want immunity, and Faraday warns him that nobody will thank him for what he did.

Just before lunch, Marah Paulik, Kohl's girlfriend, slaps Rowan for letting Faraday kill him. Rowan tries to explain, but Marah won't listen. A crowd forms around them and students begin to mutter when Rowan says he held Kohl's hand. Marah insists this is a lie, as Kohl wouldn't have touched someone like Rowan. Rowan understands that his classmates want someone to blame, and he hates that Faraday was right that nobody will appreciate his kindness.

CHAPTER 3

In her gleaning journal, Scythe Curie offers the history of her world. In 2042, "computational power became infinite" and "the cloud" became "the **Thunderhead**." Schooling suddenly became less interesting, as people knew everything, and humans conquered death. People switched to the Chinese calendar method of naming years for animals and the year of this writing is the Year of the Ocelot. The exact history is in the Thunderhead if anyone wants to look.

Faraday's explanation as to why he chose Kohl shows that while there may not be anything of note to learn from the past, people in the novel's present still draw on the information there to make decisions about how to act. This also suggests that while death may be less common in an immortal world, it's still something that can come up suddenly and dramatically—not much has actually changed since people lived mortal lives.



Choosing to stay, comfort Kohl, and honor him by making up last words shows that Rowan is already a compassionate character. It's worth keeping in mind that in a world where nobody dies naturally, it's not as societally necessary for people to behave like this—the success of a society doesn't depend as much on cooperation and alliances as it does today, when not cooperating can result in deadly war.



Remember that Faraday is quite old; he no doubt has had many years to observe how people handle death, and, specifically, how people want to be able to blame others for bad things. This experience allows Rowan to learn the rather bleak lesson that behaving compassionately won't always earn him respect or help him get ahead.



Curie's tone when she says that the entire history is available for anyone willing to look suggests that there's a degree of apathy among the populace when it comes to learning about or understanding the past. This gestures to the idea that those who forget the past will inevitably repeat it, and in doing so, foreshadows the coming conflict.



In January, Citra receives an invitation to the opera in the mail. Receiving it by mail is the oddest part, as nobody but eccentric people sends mail anymore. At the opera, an usher takes Citra to one of the box seats, which are for the elite. In the box is a boy (Rowan) in an ill-fitting suit. Rowan thanks Citra for the invite and Citra laughs, showing him her identical invitation. Rowan doesn't laugh. The two watch the show, which is an opera from the Age of Mortality. It makes little sense to them, as war and murder no longer exist. During intermission, Citra and Rowan try to figure out who invited them. They have little in common, but when Scythe Faraday steps into the box, Citra is convinced he's going to glean them. Instead, he sits down with them.

Rowan thinks back to how things changed after Kohl Whitlock was gleaned. After being beaten regularly for weeks, Rowan told the student body that the scythe was his uncle and will let Rowan choose the next student to be gleaned. Students ignored Rowan after that and Rowan even asked to change schools. He was thrilled to get the opera invitation until Faraday showed up. After the opera, Faraday gives Rowan and Citra a card and tells him to meet him at the address in the morning. The address is for the Museum of World Art. Though they arrive before opening, the security guard lets them guests in.

Faraday leads them through galleries of old masters' paintings and finally, Rowan asks why they're here. Faraday asks what they've learned and then, how it would be different if they were in the post-mortality galleries. Rowan suggests that that art in those galleries is less troubled. Faraday suggests it's uninspired, which Citra says is just an opinion, and Faraday encourages them to look for the emotion in the next gallery. It's filled with huge paintings that move Rowan. Faraday takes them to a diner next and as he talks about world population, he pulls out a ring like the one he wears. Citra shrinks back as Faraday says that he's been given a ring so he can take an apprentice. Both Citra and Rowan try to refuse, but Faraday sternly says that he wants both of them to train, but only one will become a scythe.

When Citra tells her parents later, she's shocked when her mom asks Citra if she'll accept. Citra's mom says she'll support Citra in whatever she wants, but points out that scythes lead comfortable lives. Remembering that the families of scythes get immunity from gleaning, Citra realizes this is about Ben. She goes to bed thinking about how she expected her life to go and wonders if she could find purpose in gleaning. Rowan's decision is easier to make; he doesn't want anyone else to have the responsibility, and the art in the Age of Mortality galleries was moving for him.

The idea that Citra and Rowan cannot grasp an opera about war and murder reveals that immortality has robbed humanity of its ability to feel a wide range of emotions. It suggests that along with this, people have become less empathetic, since they no longer experience as many bad things as they did in the Age of Mortality. Given what the reader has read of Scythe Curie's gleaning journals, it's likely that Faraday likes the opera because his job as a scythe means that he has a greater capacity for compassion and therefore finds the story meaningful.



It's telling that Rowan experiments with power here by threatening other students with a lie, as it plants the seed for the reader that Rowan is capable of saying and doing morally questionable things in order to make his life more comfortable. With this, it suggests that anyone, even someone as kind and compassionate as Rowan, is capable of acting in the wrong.



Faraday implies in the gallery that once humans became immortal, they lost touch with their emotions and now aren't as capable of feeling anything—good or bad—as they once were. The fact that Rowan can and does experience deep emotions in the gallery indicates that people are still able to reach down and draw on some sense of collective memory in order to tap into those emotions. This, Faraday would likely suggest, will make Rowan a good scythe, especially given that the novel overwhelmingly suggests that a good scythe is an emotional and compassionate one.



It's telling here that Citra makes her decision for the sake of someone else, while Rowan makes the decision mostly for himself. While Rowan's choice can be read as compassionate (the reader will later learn that there are awful, immoral scythes out there), thinking for himself suggests that Rowan is more likely to want to work outside of established systems, even when those systems are family units bound by love and blood.



CHAPTER 4

Scythe Curie writes that she just had her cultural audit, which returns the ethnic breakdown of the people she gleaned. Her ratios are within the accepted range, but she wonders if the cultural index is actually effective at freeing the world from bias.

Citra thinks of what Scythe Faraday told her when he picked her up from her parents' house: that she basically has a learner's permit to glean; that she must become incorruptibly moral; that she and Rowan cannot entertain any thoughts of romance; that she must study history, philosophy, science, and killcraft. She accepts her green armband that marks her as an apprentice and tells herself that she can just fail to perform. Rowan is similarly unsettled that he chose to follow through with this. He's shocked to see that Faraday lives in a sparsely furnished home in a rundown part of town—a conscious choice, as nobody is poor now.

Soon after Rowan and Citra unpack their things, Faraday calls them to accompany him to the supermarket. Rowan is distraught, thinking they'll glean there, but Faraday says they just need food. Citra smirks at Rowan, but then admits with a sigh that they're not really in a position to be friends. Rowan suggests that they can still look out for each other, and he hopes she'll take his suggestion to heart.

CHAPTER 5

Scythe Curie writes that humanity's greatest achievement was ending government. As "the cloud" transformed into the **Thunderhead**, people realized that it was better suited to running things than politicians. All war, waste, and abuse dissolved as soon as the Thunderhead took power. It knew how to care for the population and gave people a utopia. The only thing it doesn't have control over is the Scythedom, which is still the responsibility of humans. This is because killing is "an act of conscience and consciousness." Curie wonders if the Thunderhead would've done the job better than humans.

Here, by questioning the effectiveness of something seemingly utopian like the cultural audit, Curie offers the possibility that the utopia of the novel is actually flawed and possibly, a true dystopia.



It's important that Faraday makes sure that his apprentices learn history, philosophy, and science. This indicates that at least as far as he's concerned, in order to be a good scythe, a person must have a firm education in a variety of subjects. Faraday's choice to live in such a small house also shows that despite the economic parity among all people, there's still a sense that living with less is morally superior to using one's wealth to purchase as much as possible.



While in theory, whoever wins the scythehood will formally come of age as part of a community in the Scythedom, the process of coming of age for Citra and Rowan is one that's isolating from peers. They have little incentive to truly connect to each other, given the competition between them.



Keeping the Thunderhead separate from the Scythedom and its aims means, in theory at least, that the society of the novel isn't going to dissolve into a conflict of man versus machines. However, by leaving the responsibility to glean in the hands of humans, the novel is able to explore how humans function when there's effectively very little oversight—there are no politicians or governments with laws to enforce, after all, so the Scythedom is mostly self-governing.



Citra realizes immediately that shopping with a scythe is very different than shopping alone. Some people pretend Faraday doesn't exist, while others run away. Still others go out of their way to suck up to the scythe in the hope that Faraday will grant them immunity. Only one woman seems genuinely pleased to see Faraday and is interested to hear that Rowan and Citra are his apprentices. After she moves away, Faraday explains that she works in the coroner's office and he grants her immunity every other year. Soon, Citra realizes that two teens are trailing them through the store. She wonders if they're "unsavories," people who like breaking minor rules, and points them out to Rowan. Rowan suggests they just want to watch a gleaning.

While Citra, Rowan, and Faraday are in the checkout line, one teen races forward and kisses Faraday's ring, giving himself immunity. Faraday calmly says that he'll find the teen as soon as his year of immunity is up, and the teens run away. Rowan asks if Faraday will really track the teen down, and Faraday says that it's punishment enough to have to live in fear for a year. In the parking lot, Faraday pulls out his phone and motions to a woman who dropped her purse. He explains that they'll glean her later. When Rowan asks why, Faraday sighs and says that in the Age of Mortality, 1.25% of accidental deaths happened in parking lots.

That afternoon, Faraday, Citra, and Rowan go to the woman's office, and Faraday tells her that he's going to kill her with a life-ending pill that activates when she bites it. He refuses to let her call her children, but promises to deliver a letter to them. Faraday gives her privacy to write it and tells Rowan that even if the woman chooses to splat, she'll still die. Back in the woman's office, Faraday asks Rowan to give the woman the pill. He refuses, as does Citra. Faraday says this was a test—he'd be concerned if either accepted—and gives the woman the pill himself.

When the woman crunches on the pill, she goes limp. Citra starts to cry and checks for a pulse when Faraday asks her to. Citra is shocked that the death was so uneventful and is even more shocked when Faraday gives her the letter to present to the woman's family at her funeral. Faraday says he goes to the funerals of all his victims as an act of common decency.

Because of the control that the Thunderhead has over the population, it's impossible for people to do more than break minor rules. The word choice used for these people, "unsavories," suggests that the general, rule-abiding populace has no issue following the rules of their society and sees rule breaking as a fruitless, silly endeavor. It also implies that there's nothing to gain from breaking the rules, and that breaking rules is something morally inferior—something that Citra and Rowan will later learn is actually untrue.



Though Faraday's choice of this woman appears somewhat random within the parameters he sets up, his choice to work within these parameters shows that he believes the best way to do his job is by being meticulous and relying on these outside metrics in order to choose his victims. This does absolve him of some responsibility—he can blame his choices on statistics and not have to admit any bias or conscious choices by doing this, which might help him cope emotionally with his job.



Testing Citra and Rowan in this way again reinforces Faraday's assertion that a good scythe shouldn't enjoy killing, and shouldn't want to do it. By giving his apprentices some choice in the matter (or at least the illusion of choice), Faraday helps them learn how to think for themselves, evaluate situations, and push back against authority when necessary.



Attending funerals is another way that Faraday can make it clear to the public that he cares about his victims and mourns their passing—this isn't sport for him; it's a horrendous, soul-sucking job. Alongside the statistics he uses, attending funerals is another way he can try to atone for what he does.



CHAPTER 6

Scythe Curie lists the Scythe Commandments. They are to kill without bias or malice; to give the families of those gleaned immunity for a year; to kill the families of people who resist gleaned; to serve as a scythe for one's whole life; to live a moral life and record things in a journal; to not kill scythes other than oneself; to have no possessions aside from robes, the scythe's ring, and the journal; to not marry or reproduce; and to follow no other laws. Curie writes that she takes one day per year to meditate on the commandments. She's often horrified by how malleable the laws are, and she wishes she could speak to some of the scythes who helped develop the rules. She wonders why they came up with the last one, as it seems a recipe for disaster to put oneself above other laws.

A businessman sits in his favorite seat, 15C, ready for his flight to finish boarding. He makes small talk with the woman next to him until, five minutes before takeoff, a scythe (Scythe Goddard) enters the plane. He's wearing robes that are royal blue with diamonds and is accompanied by three other scythes, all with bejeweled robes. Goddard addresses the plane: he's going to glean everyone on it. Thinking quickly, the businessman races to the back of the plane and opens the door, ready to jump. Goddard says that he'll kill the families of everyone who jumps.

The businessman stays in the plane and approaches Goddard when Goddard calls him. The scythe in orange has a flamethrower out, but Goddard tells him to put it away. He then asks the businessman to choose the order in which everyone will be gleaned. The businessman sees that Goddard is enjoying this, and he understands this will be a bloodbath. He refuses and tells the other passengers to kill themselves before the scythes do. Goddard draws a blade and the businessman throws himself on it.

CHAPTER 7

Scythe Curie writes that she used to wonder why she never saw scythes out and about in regular clothes. She knows now that scythes must remain separate from the rest of humanity. Being a scythe, unlike other uniformed professions, doesn't allow for downtime or an identity outside of being a scythe.

Scythe Curie has a point when she notes that being above the law makes it very easy to abuse one's power. With this, Curie recognizes that the element of human nature that desires power is the one capable of destroying the Scythedom, no matter the good intentions represented by the laws. Her comment that the laws are "malleable" and her implication that horrible things have already happened reinforces that this is the Scythedom's one weak spot, and signals to the reader to be on the lookout for abuses of power to find the villains.



Goddard and his crew represent a method of gleaned that differs significantly from Faraday's. Note that by gleaned a bunch of people at once, Goddard inspires far more terror than Faraday does, something that Faraday might suggest makes Goddard a less moral and less compassionate scythe.



Goddard's enjoyment of toying with his victims suggests that he's drunk on the power he wields as a scythe and wants the general populace to worship him and treat him more like a god. The businessman's suicide, in effect, allows the businessman to feel less complicit in what scythes must do and turns him into a heroic victim, not a death necessary for the good of the rest of humanity.



The idea that scythes must be separate from the rest of the population in all ways is another way that scythes must atone for the work they do. However, it can also be argued that depriving them of a sense of connection with the population could contribute to the environment that creates scythes like Goddard.



Scythe Faraday tells Rowan and Citra that over the next year, they'll learn how to glean using blades, firearms, poisons, and martial arts. The teens are a bit unsettled to discover that the garage of Faraday's house is his weapons den, containing all manner of weapons. In the mornings, Rowan and Citra learn Black Widow Bokator, a deadly martial art from Cambodia developed for scythes. They spend the other half of their days studying from books. When Faraday explains that scythes must average five gleanings per week to meet the quota, Rowan suggests that scythes get weekends off. Faraday very seriously says that good scythes don't get days off. The idea that there are bad scythes disturbs Rowan and Citra.

Citra finds that she never grows numb to gleaning. Faraday assures her that this is a good thing, as she needs compassion to be a scythe. Rowan and Citra learn that Faraday never repeats a gleaning method, as he believes that each person he gleans is an individual who deserves a unique end. Citra is uneasy about having to practice killing and hopes she'll fail to become a scythe. Rowan has mixed feelings; Faraday's insistence on being moral and ethical gives Rowan purpose, but he also feels like he's committing a crime.

Faraday gives Rowan and Citra leather-bound journals to use as their apprentice journals. Rowan hates writing in it, though he recognizes that he needs to take it seriously if he wants to be a scythe—all scythes' journals are available for the public to read. He watches Citra write one evening and can tell that she took penmanship in school, something that, at this point, is an elective. He wonders if he and Citra would've gotten along in school and tries to figure out how he actually feels about her.

About a month in, Faraday lets Citra attend her aunt's wedding, provided she wears simple clothes. Citra returns home early, as only one cousin even tried to speak with her. Talking to her parents was awkward, and most guests avoided her. She wonders if this is why Faraday allowed her to attend at all.

CHAPTER 8

Scythe Curie admits that there are things that even scythes don't understand. Earlier, a woman asked Curie where she'll go after gleaning, and didn't accept Curie's explanation that her memories and "life recording" are stored in the **Thunderhead**, while her body would be buried. After Curie gleaned the woman, she admitted she doesn't know where people go when they're dead.

It's telling that Rowan and Citra are so disturbed to learn that there are bad scythes in the world, especially since neither of them thought highly of Faraday—a "good" scythe—when they were normal members of the public and first met him. This indicates that the general populace isn't well informed when it comes to scythes and how they function.



Faraday's insistence on coming up with new gleaning methods that fit each person again shows that scythes have far more insight into the general populace than the population has into scythes, something that creates a major imbalance of power. This suggests that while the world of the novel might be cast as a utopia, it actually suffers from a lack of information and openness.



It's possible to read Citra's interest in penmanship as another indicator that she's the sort of person who would make a good scythe, as it would suggest that she's more interested in the mortal world and habits from the Age of Mortality that the scythes seek to replicate by gleaning.



As Citra comes of age and becomes more entrenched in the Scythedom, she naturally starts to move away from her family. This reminds her that per the Scythedom's rules, blood family is less important than a scythe's job.



This woman's question shows that even though humans are immortal at this point, they still have the exact same questions about death and the possibility of life after it that people did in the Age of Mortality. In other words, humans aren't as fundamentally different now as Citra and Rowan might think.



One morning, Faraday announces that he'll glean alone. He leads Citra to the weapons den to polish blades. He pulls down a rapier and explains that as a young scythe, he gleaned a fencer. They duelled three times until finally, Faraday won. Faraday says that that man is the only person who ever thanked him. Citra asks why Faraday used her knife when he came to her apartment block. He explains he wanted to test Citra's reaction. She begins to polish, wondering if she's capable of beheading someone.

Faraday then tasks Rowan with doing research for his next gleaning. Rowan almost lets the **Thunderhead** help him, using Faraday's list of parameters, but catches himself—scythes can't ask the Thunderhead for help. He gradually uses Faraday's parameters to narrow down the population of MidMerica to four people, all strong swimmers, dog lovers, and local heroes. Rowan continues to research the four possibilities, hoping something will make a choice obvious, until Faraday returns home. Faraday shouts for Rowan to choose one, and Rowan points to a man with bedhead. Rowan closes his eyes and Faraday praises him. Faraday says this should never be easy.

The next afternoon, Rowan's chosen man returns home to find Faraday in his living room. Rowan closes the front door, locking the panicking man in, and explains that he's been selected for gleaning. Rowan says that he fits a profile: lots of people used to drown in flooded rivers trying to save their pets. Citra emerges from a bedroom, having sedated the man's dogs and suffered a bite, and Rowan kneels in front of the man. He tells him that he's a good person. The man closes his eyes when he learns that Faraday plans to drown him, but refuses Citra's offer of a sedative and follows Faraday to the river.

Citra is impressed by how Rowan behaved, as he did most of the emotional work. She refuses to let Faraday take her to the hospital to have her bite healed, as she feels she owes the man a night of pain. Rowan is modest about his admirable behavior, which makes Citra mad and also attracted to him.

CHAPTER 9

Scythe Curie records a poem written by one of the first scythes. It reminds her that despite the goals of the Scythedom, she has to be careful—the power of scythes means that they're susceptible to the worst parts of human nature.

The experience with the fencer likely impressed upon Faraday the importance of treating each of victims as individuals deserving of attention to detail and compassion. This also illustrates how thankless of a job being a scythe is, since if Faraday is about 180 years old, he's then been gleaning for around 160 years—and has only been thanked once for his work.



Not being able to ask the Thunderhead for help reminds the reader—and Rowan—that scythes don't experience surveillance by the Thunderhead like the rest of the population does. Just as Rowan cannot use the Thunderhead to help him, the Thunderhead cannot take any interest in Rowan. This again makes it clear that scythes are a self-policing bunch, which leaves lots of room for abuse and poor choices that could easily go unchecked.



The way that this man accepts his death, especially when considered next to the way the woman in the parking lot died, impresses upon Citra and Rowan that the experience of facing death is something that, in general, can make people stoic and impress upon them the importance of both living and dying. Accepting death gracefully, these victims' behavior would suggest, is the only way to properly live out one's last moments.



Citra's choice to not have her bite healed quickly shows that she already feels compelled to sacrifice her own comfort in order to make up for the horrific job she's learning to perform—she's becoming more like Faraday by the day.



While Curie thus far seems to be a good scythe, it's telling that she acknowledges the pitfalls of human nature. This suggests that being good and moral is something that someone must choose to do; it's not a natural state of being.



A young girl named Esme is eating pizza in a food court after an exhausting day in the fourth grade. She's tired of her mother's attempts to get her to eat healthily to control her weight. As she bites into her pizza, four scythes, including Scythe Goddard, appear at the food court. They begin to kill everyone in the food court. Esme crawls in a panic and manages to squeeze in between a trashcan and the wall. After a few minutes, Goddard approaches Esme, pulls her up, and says the gleaning is over. He says that he's given Esme's mother immunity. Esme accepts her pizza and follows the scythes away. Goddard tells her that her life will be everything she ever dreamed of.

Esme's willingness to follow Goddard without question speaks to the power that scythes have in this society, as it's clearly unthinkable to Esme to ask why or object to being kidnapped—it's probable that nobody else in the mall would be willing to help her. There is a wild imbalance of power here, and not least because Esme is a young girl. This continues to build up Goddard as an unethical and corrupt scythe, as he gives little thought to uprooting a ten-year-old from her life.



CHAPTER 10

Scythe Curie muses about whether there's ever been a time when people weren't bored. She thinks of how the news archives from the Age of Mortality make it seem like back then, people had reasons to do things. Life was scary, with people peddling drugs, killing without permission, and stealing cars. Now, nobody rages against the system. Curie wonders if this is why the **Thunderhead** allows for a bit of economic inequality, as it gives people *something* to strive for. Curie writes that while she doesn't want a return of crime, it'd be nice to have something else besides scythes to scare people.

Curie basically implies here that death—and by extension, the scythes that carry out death—is the only thing that scares people. Given what the reader has already seen in terms of Goddard, this seems pretty misguided from the start—people should be fearing corruption and abuse of power, even in this utopian society. Curie's lack of acknowledgement of this offers the possibility that, at least at the time of this writing, she's not aware of the corruption currently brewing in the Scythedom.



One afternoon in March, Rowan goes to visit Tyger and play basketball. Tyger shares that everyone in school thinks that Rowan will return to get revenge on the students. Tyger is shocked when Rowan says he can't play favorites and grant him immunity. Several other kids arrive, try to refuse to play, and then lose on purpose when they see Rowan's armband. Rowan is frustrated; the only person who challenges him now is Citra. He hates how afraid of him everyone is.

The exchange between Rowan and Tyger functions to show Rowan how much he's changing, even after only a few months training as a scythe. This works like Citra's family wedding did and impresses upon him that he's going to have to leave his old life behind in full if he's going to become a scythe.



Feeling rebellious, Rowan invites Tyger to come to Faraday's house since Faraday is gleaning in another city. Rowan briefly thinks he wants Tyger to meet Citra, but then realizes he doesn't want to take the chance that Citra will be attracted to him. Tyger is unimpressed by Faraday's house until Rowan shows him the weapons den. Tyger begins pulling pistols and blades off the wall, and Rowan realizes that this could get very dangerous. He uses a Bokator move to pin Tyger just as they hear the door open. Rowan slips out, sees that it's Citra returning from a run, and watches her step into the bathroom. He tells Tyger that it's Faraday and pushes him out the front door.

Tyger's idolization of the weapons and of being a scythe shows Rowan just how far removed the general population is from what scythes do. For Tyger, the weapons are cool and exciting; for Rowan and scythes like Faraday, the weapons are unfortunate and tragic tools to accomplish their heartbreaking job. Rowan shows that he's beginning to grasp this when he scares Tyger by telling him that Faraday is home. He knows that the idea of coming face to face with an angry scythe is terrifying for someone like Tyger.



After three months, Citra has decided that she wants Faraday to choose her to be a scythe. She understands the importance of scythes and wants to live a life of purpose. Her biggest challenge is Bokator, which she learns from Scythe Yingxing. Yingxing took a vow of silence, and Citra muses that it seems that every scythe has given up something to atone for their job. Rowan asks her one day what she'd give up and notes that she's already giving up having a family, but Citra thinks that feels too far off to think about. She focuses on learning Bokator, which is silent and demanding. As she and Rowan spar, he pins her but she finds that she likes feeling his heart so close. It makes her angry.

Note that Citra's main reasoning for wanting to be a scythe is to live a life of purpose. After her training, she understands even more deeply that the rest of humanity is just existing and has little purpose. Within the logic of their world, scythes are the only people who have a purpose, even if what they do is morally repugnant to most people, including some of the scythes themselves. Despite this, Citra's realization that she has a crush on Rowan shows her that she's still a normal, if righteous, teen, and that she'll have to fight those impulses to become a scythe.



CHAPTER 11

Scythe Curie writes that humans aren't what they once were. Now, humans cannot grasp the emotions expressed in Age of Mortality art and literature; only love stories still resonate, and even then, they seem strange. Curie says that mortals thought love was eternal, but now, people know this isn't true. She wonders what humans are if they're no longer human.

This entry suggests that humans in Curie's present are in a sort of transformative phase. They're still bound to their predecessors by a fear of death, but they're becoming something different that shares little in common emotionally with humans of the past.



In early May, Scythe Faraday takes only Citra with him to a gleanings of a young man with a wife and two kids. The man slips into a bedroom when Faraday explains why he's here but rather than accept his fate, the man breaks Faraday's jaw. Citra struggles to perform some Bokator moves as Faraday slits the man's throat, leaving Citra to sit with him while he gleanes the rest of the family. Citra listens as Faraday sharply tells the wife to show courage. When the woman is done comforting her children, Faraday says that the man *didn't* fight back—he and Citra had a fight. He grants the woman and her children immunity, and when he and Citra get home, he tells her she can't even write about this in her journal. Citra admires Faraday for his compassion.

It's impossible to tell whether Faraday told the woman he'd glean her because he honestly thought he was going to or to impress upon her the seriousness of what her husband did, but regardless, this instance brings the moral ambiguity of the scythe's job to the forefront. Even as Faraday exercises his compassion by lying and letting the family live, he still terrified them on the way there—and broke the Scythedom's rules in the process. With this, Citra begins to gain some nuance and understand that there are times when breaking the rules is appropriate.



Every night, Citra is tasked with bringing Faraday a glass of warm milk before bed. Often, after difficult gleanings, Faraday is already asleep, so either Citra or Rowan drink it. The night of the man's resistance, Faraday is asleep. His ring catches Citra's eye, so she picks it up to inspect it. She notices that Faraday is awake but instead of punishing her, he offers to let her try the ring on. She puts it on and asks if Faraday worries about someone stealing it. She realizes the ring is freezing and rips it off. Where she touched the ring, her fingers are frostbitten. Faraday inspects her hand and suggests she'll learn now to not touch others' things. He says that Rowan should bring his milk going forward. Citra apologizes, but Faraday says he orchestrated this and wants to see how long it'll take Rowan to touch the ring.

Curiosity about others' things is a normal and natural part of being human—and in this day and age, given the Thunderhead's oversight, it seems to be as far as people go (stealing seems uncommon and quickly punished, if it happens at all). This suggests that Faraday's attempt to bait Citra and now Rowan is, more than anything, an attempt to get each of them to retreat even further into their own isolated world and not engage with the outside world like they once did.



CHAPTER 12

Scythe Curie writes that she sometimes mourns for all the things that humans lost when they became immortal, such as religion. Now, there are "tone cults," but nobody takes them seriously. She recounts going to her local tone cult's gathering place to glean one of the congregants. The worshippers were singing the "frequency of the universe," and Curie wonders if they actually believe the tuning fork "bident"—their symbol—means something, or if it's just a big joke.

A week before Vernal Conclave in May, Scythe Faraday explains to Citra and Rowan what the conclave is. It exists because the Scythedom isn't controlled by the **Thunderhead**, so scythes get together to resolve disputes and discuss policy three times per year. He also says that the MidMerican Conclave is important, as the region sets trends for the world. Citra and Rowan will be tested at each conclave. Rowan has lots of questions, but lets Citra ask all the questions since they clearly annoy Faraday. The only question he asks is if they'll be disqualified if they fail. Faraday says there will be a consequence, but they'll continue with their training regardless.

A few days before conclave, Rowan and Citra stay up late studying. Citra, riled, slams her book shut and tries to quiz Rowan on his poisons. He gets the formula wrong for one, but he doesn't get upset about it. He tells Citra that he's worried, but less so knowing that he won't be disqualified. Citra slumps and halfheartedly says she doesn't fail things. Rowan pulls out another book on weapons and Citra says she'd miss Rowan if one of them could be disqualified. He considers taking her hand, but it'd be too awkward. Rowan makes a joke instead and wonders if Citra actually likes him more than she lets on.

CHAPTER 13

Scythe Curie writes about the quota system. She wonders if it will ever change. The population is growing still, but the **Thunderhead** can provide for the increase in people. It does suggest when there needs to be more scythes. Today, scythes glean about five million people per year, which isn't enough to balance the growth. Curie can't fathom how many scythes and gleanings would be required to stop population growth altogether.

What Curie misses here is that even if a symbol is objectively ridiculous, symbols still mean things—even if, as is possible in this case, the bident just represents a joke the tone cults are playing on the rest of society. It's shortsighted of Curie to discount that even if this is all a ruse, for those who buy into it, the bident is still a symbol of defiance of the immortal age.



Notice that while Faraday explains the purpose of the conclaves, he doesn't necessarily let on that he has any worries about how they function and if they do so effectively. This suggests that he's possibly unaware of what Scythe Goddard is up to with his mass gleanings, which casts these conclaves as the only time per year that scythes are able to function as a community—and therefore, are only really able to check on each other at those times.



Recall that scythes aren't allowed to fall in love. The budding romance between Citra and Rowan then, while normal in terms of teenage development, is in direct opposition to what they're both trying to do as they train to become scythes. This suggests that Citra and Rowan are in a situation where they're getting a close look at what they're giving up by following through with their training.



Again, Curie's clear distaste for gleanings on a massive scale would, per Faraday's beliefs, make her a good scythe. The fact that she's considering the possibility that scythes will one day need to glean more people, and finds such a thing horrific, leaves open the possibility that she doesn't entirely trust the Thunderhead to make good decisions.



It's pouring rain on the day of the Vernal Conclave, which is held in the MidMerican city of Fulcrum City in a former Capitol Building. Scythe Faraday insists on taking a standard train the day before and at 6:30 in the morning, he leads Citra and Rowan to the Capitol Building. Citra is concerned when she realizes that the High Blade doesn't know that Faraday took two apprentices. Citra notices the public lined up to see the scythes and watches some scythes get out of limos. She and Rowan follow Faraday and ignore the crowd. Inside, she's shocked to see that the scythes' different colored robes look like a rainbow, which she realizes is the point—scythes represent the light, not darkness.

In the rotunda, there's an elaborate breakfast spread. Faraday points out several notable scythes to Citra and Rowan, including Scythe Curie, who's known as the Grande Dame of Death. Citra notices a scythe in blue robes studded with diamonds. Faraday doesn't try to hide his distaste when he says that's Scythe Goddard. Both Rowan and Citra have heard of Goddard, which makes Faraday suspicious, but they both say they're not impressed by his mass gleanings. Their attention soon shifts to a large man wearing a gold robe, whom Faraday says is the High Blade Xenocrates of MidMerica. Xenocrates introduces himself to Citra and Rowan, and Citra privately thinks he seems insincere and untrustworthy.

Rowan tries to hide how nervous he is from Citra. He inserts himself into a conversation between two older teens who expect to get their rings today and are complaining about having to deal with oversight for the first four years of being a scythe. Rowan insists it takes four years to get a college degree and laughs when they insult him. Citra insults the almost-scythes in return. Faraday steps in, reminds the young scythes that they can't demand respect yet, and sends them away. He tells Citra and Rowan that the girl will get her ring, but the boy won't as he angers too easily.

The doors open to admit the scythes to the huge chamber. Once everyone is seated, the scythes stand to each recite ten names of people they gleaned. Citra is bored quickly. Then, the scythes ceremonially wash their hands, which continues to bore Citra, but the disciplining that takes place after that holds her interest. Xenocrates reprimands several scythes for gleaned too many rich people or people with too much Spanic in their ratios. Xenocrates also reads an anonymous note accusing Goddard of unnecessary cruelty in his gleanings. Nobody owns up to the accusation and Xenocrates moves on. Faraday whispers to Citra and Rowan that Goddard likely accused himself so that nobody will go after him.

Keep in mind that the scythes and the work they do is the entire reason that humanity is able to exist as it does at this point—scythes are, therefore, the only ones with a purpose and the only ones actually giving back to their community in a meaningful way. Citra's ability to focus on the scythes' rainbow of robes and understand what they mean is indicative of how successful her training has been this far, as she can grasp that scythes are necessary.



The fact that Citra and Rowan know of Scythe Goddard speaks to the space they inhabit as apprentices: they're not scythes yet, and so they still carry with them the sense of fear and awe for scythes that they had as regular teens. This means that someone like Goddard, who's known for mass gleanings, would be a far more terrifying figure for them than someone like Faraday, who believes that anonymity is essential to doing his job properly.



Faraday's ability to shed light on who will become a scythe and who won't allows Rowan and Citra to see him as even more knowledgeable and trustworthy than they already thought he was. This interaction begins to show that one of the most important aspects of being a scythe's apprentice is forming a trusting relationship with one's mentor and learning to become a part of the Scythedom community.



Keep in mind that it seems to be common knowledge for scythes and the general public alike that Goddard conducts bloody mass gleanings. It's telling, then, that even if Goddard put the accusation forward himself, Xenocrates doesn't push the issue. Xenocrates is, in theory at least, the most powerful person in this room and should take such accusations seriously in order to do his job properly. This suggests that he might be sympathetic to Goddard for some reason.



Rowan pays attention to more of what goes on outside the assembly room during mealtimes. He believes that the most important business happens there as he overhears scythes making side deals, pushing agendas, and building alliances. Faraday doesn't join in on any of this. Rowan watches Goddard the most and has the distinct feeling that Goddard is aware of Rowan's gaze.

Lunch is a lavish buffet and uncharacteristically, Faraday fills his plate. Curie approaches Rowan and Citra and tells them that for scythes who take their vows seriously, conclave is the only time they get to eat nice food. Citra tries to ask Curie about when the apprentices will be tested, but Curie brushes her off. As the afternoon wears on, Citra wonders what she'll miss during her test. She watches with interest as salespeople peddle new poisons and weapons. One woman sells "The Touch of Quietude," which makes a scythe's touch deadly. The Weaponsmaster tests it by using it to glean the saleswoman.

Midway through the afternoon, Faraday speaks up for the first time to advocate for an oversight committee to tackle questions of granting immunity. The matter runs out of time, so Xenocrates announces that they'll deal with it first thing at the next conclave. Faraday quietly deems this interesting. Then, Xenocrates announces that it's time to deal with the apprentices. Three of the four candidates for the Scythedom receive their rings from Scythe Mandela and choose their Patron Historics, while the rejected boy strides out of the room. Xenocrates calls forward the rest of the apprentices.

CHAPTER 14

Scythe Curie writes in her journal that she believes people still fear death, just not as much as they used to—today, the chance of being gleaned is miniscule. Nobody counts their age anymore, except for children. The oldest living person is around 300 years old, and Curie wonders how things will change in 1,000 years. She wonders if they'll all be skilled in lots of things, or if they'll all be bored.

Citra and Rowan join the other six apprentices in lining up in front of the assembly. Curie steps forward to examine the apprentices with one question each. The first boy fails his question, which asks what he should do if a woman throws herself on his blade while he's trying to glean her child. The second apprentice passes her question about what to do in a poisoning gone wrong, and the third successfully lists five specific poisons. Curie then asks Citra for the worst thing she ever did. Citra lies and says she pushed a classmate down the stairs when she was eight. Curie somehow knows she's lying, fails her, and sends her to Faraday.

Goddard would want to be aware of any new apprentices, as he likely sees them as more vulnerable to his celebrity and advances than older, established scythes like Faraday and Curie.



The Weaponsmaster's gleaning continues to show Citra and Rowan that even if politics don't exist in the outside world, politics and alliances are still alive and well in the Scythedom. Remember that the Scythedom isn't under the Thunderhead's control; this suggests that political angling is something natural and human that the Thunderhead stopped in the rest of society.



It becomes clear here that Faraday is watching closely for everything Xenocrates allows to pass and everything he doesn't. This suggests that not even Faraday finds Xenocrates especially trustworthy, something that validates Citra's first impressions of him and, given how much Citra and Rowan trust Faraday, will likely color their impressions of Xenocrates going forward.



As far as Curie is concerned, immortality leads to boredom—more evidence that immortality makes life inherently less worth living. Her suggestion that people don't fear death as much also seems misguided, given how terrified Citra's family and Rowan's entire school were to see Faraday.



Curie appears to be trying to test the apprentices' senses or morality and compassion, as well as get a sense for the kind of people they are. It's unclear why Citra lies here. Though she has no way to know whether or not Curie would see through the lie, there appears to be little incentive to not tell the truth, especially now that she's decided that she'd like to receive the scythehood. It's possible that Citra feels too unspeakably guilty about what she did to admit it, which would suggest that she has good character.



Curie then asks Rowan what he fears most. Rowan nonchalantly insists he's not afraid of anything, which Curie deems unacceptable. Citra wants to hit Rowan, as she knows he's doing this to make her feel better. Faraday says with surprising intensity that Rowan shouldn't have done that—his "nobility" could be used against him later. After Curie finishes with the apprentices, the focus of the Scythedom slips. At the end of the day, one of Goddard's group, Scythe Rand, stands and says she takes issue with Faraday's two apprentices. She suggests that there needs to be a real element of competition and proposes that the winning apprentice glean the loser. Faraday tries to protest, but Xenocrates allows the motion to pass.

CHAPTER 15

Scythe Curie writes that she sometimes wishes she could have a relationship with the **Thunderhead**. Others call on it for advice, but scythes are forbidden from using it as anything other than a database. This separates scythes further from the "collective consciousness of humanity's wisdom." Curie wonders what the Thunderhead thinks of scythes—whether it despises them or just ignores them.

During the train ride home, Citra tries to say that she won't glean Rowan. Rowan points out that whoever wins will have to glean the other. He also says that he doesn't think this is about them, and he privately thinks this is an attack on Scythe Faraday by Scythe Goddard. Citra suggests they both fail, but Faraday assures her that they'll choose one of them regardless. Rowan tries to calm his thoughts and refuses to speak to Citra. Citra spends the entire night awake once they get home, thinking that scythes aren't supposed to be petty. She vows to be like Faraday if she becomes a scythe, and wonders if there's some wisdom in this new stipulation—the winner would never forget what the ring cost.

Breakfast is a silent affair. Faraday finally speaks and says he's going out alone, but for Rowan and Citra, nothing has changed. After Faraday leaves, the tension in the house rises. Rowan stays in his room with his door cracked in the hope that Citra will come to talk, but she goes for a long run. After she returns, he knocks on her door and enters to find her practicing with a knife. He asks if she wants to talk about the new rule, but Citra insists there's nothing to talk about. Rowan sits on the bed next to her and shifts closer. He wants to kiss her and is surprised when Citra kisses him. She declares that they've gotten the kiss out of their systems now and that she hasn't fallen in love. Rowan leaves and says he's not in love either.

Faraday shows here that anything anyone says can be used in a political way. This suggests that not even he trusts the Scythedom entirely, and he recognizes the importance of playing the game in order to keep oneself safe and in power. Xenocrates's unwillingness to shut down Scythe Rand's suggestion tells Faraday that Xenocrates and Goddard are somehow in cahoots—and that both of them are in direct opposition with Faraday in particular.



The way that Curie speaks about the Thunderhead suggests that at this point in time, the Thunderhead has become a sort of godlike figure for the general population. Denying this relationship to scythes means that the scythes have to police their own actions, something that, again, leaves them vulnerable to corruption.



Citra's ability to see that there might be a point to such a situation suggests that she's coming around to the Scythedom's way of thinking—she'll learn much later that what the ring actually costs is having to practice gleaned a loved one. Recognizing this now puts her in front of Rowan in their competition to win, as it shows that her thinking is naturally more in line with what it should be as a compassionate, honorable scythe.



Kissing allows Rowan and Citra to feel, for a moment, like normal teens and get another glimpse of the kind of life they'll be leaving behind, since they cannot fall in love. While banning scythes from romantic relationships certainly has its upsides—scythes won't favor their families, as they won't exist—it also deprives them of something that might also be a natural and normal part of being human. This adds more contradictions to the scythes' lifestyle, as they are in many ways the most human of humans but are forbidden from experiencing normal human emotions.



CHAPTER 16

In his gleaning journal, Scythe Goddard rails against how the other scythes tried to direct his behavior at conclave. He says that he gleans with pride, and that scythes are above the law because they deserve to be. He wants scythes to love what they do, since their world is perfect.

An executive, Maxim Easley, opens the door of his mansion to find Scythe Goddard and his followers on his doorstep. He maintains a poker face as he learns that his gate guards have been gleaned and lets the scythes in. Goddard introduces himself and Scythes Volta, Chomsky, and Rand. They compliment his home and ignore him when he asks what their business is. Rand and Volta start to explore the house as Maxim's panic rises. He asks if Goddard knows who he is, and Goddard seems not to. Chomsky recognizes Maxim's name as being the face of a "turncorner" company (a company that reduces people's physical age) and laughs.

Desperately, Maxim tries to offer Goddard anything. Goddard says he wants Maxim's estate and puts a knife to Maxim's throat when Maxim tries to offer him his mortal-age cars. Goddard removes the knife and asks about the size of Maxim's staff. Scythe Rand returns, dragging the pool boy. Chomsky touches the young man and he collapses dead. Chomsky looks delighted. Goddard offers Maxim, his family, and his staff immunity for every year he chooses to stay at the estate. Maxim kisses the ring, but is confused when Goddard tells him to resign from his position at work—Goddard needs a new pool boy.

CHAPTER 17

Scythe Curie writes in support of the rule that scythes can't glean each other, as well as the rule that scythes *can* glean themselves. She admits that she's considered it several times, but she decided not to when she wondered who might replace her.

Citra and Rowan wake up after midnight to the sound of pounding on the front door. They see that Faraday is still gone, which is unusual but not concerning. Rowan suggests that Faraday forgot his keys, but a pair of BladeGuard officers are on the doorstep. They ask for Citra and Rowan to come with them, but Citra says they won't go. High Blade Xenocrates steps out of the shadows, asks Rowan and Citra to follow him, and says that Faraday gleaned himself.

Goddard's entry would suggest that he didn't actually accuse himself—though it's also possible that, since he knows his journal is open to the public, he's not telling the truth here either. Either way, there's no oversight for this since the Thunderhead cannot control him.



Notice here that it's unclear whether Goddard truly doesn't know who Maxim is, or if he's just messing with him. Either way, Goddard is certainly enjoying Maxim's panic, which continues to show the reader how mean and power-hungry Goddard is. This is especially true in situations like this, when Goddard is tormenting the general population. They have no way to stand up to him and absolutely no leverage; in this passage, readers know that Goddard will get what he wants, no matter what Maxim says.



Chomsky's delight at what seems to be the poison from conclave indicates that Goddard's followers are just as coldhearted as Goddard is, especially since they seem unperturbed about killing the pool boy in front of Maxim and make no attempts, like Faraday might have, to comfort Maxim or make the pool boy's death feel meaningful or necessary at all.



Curie's choice to not glean herself shows that as a scythe, what keeps her going is knowing that she has a huge responsibility to make the world a better place—something that someone else, like Goddard, might not take seriously.



That Xenocrates is here at all flags for Citra, Rowan, and the reader that this is an extremely serious matter, given that it seems he takes little interest in apprentices unless they're in front of him at conclave. This also opens up the possibility that Xenocrates has something to gain by involving himself, showing again that politics is alive and well in the Scythedom.



Rowan, Citra, and Xenocrates take a private hypertrain to Xenocrates's home in Fulcrum City. He lives in a cabin situated on top of the city's tallest building. He tries to comfort Rowan and Citra, but they can't decide if they can trust him. Xenocrates explains that Faraday threw himself in front of a train and says it makes perfect sense: self-gleaning by a mentor scythe frees apprentices, so Faraday gleaned himself to spare Citra or Rowan from killing the other. Rowan suggests that this was Xenocrates's fault, offending the High Blade. Xenocrates refuses to look them in the eye as he says that two scythes have offered to take over the teens' training. Scythe Curie will take Citra, while Scythe Goddard will take Rowan.

Rowan's brashness and unwillingness to respect authority figures like Xenocrates suggests that he could either be a fantastic scythe and stand up to corrupt scythes like Goddard, or he could be an awful one and turn his issues with authority on the Scythedom as a whole. Scythes Curie and Goddard taking over the training reinforces that the issue of Citra and Rowan is becoming a battle between good guys and bad guys, with the apprentices acting as pawns.



CHAPTER 18

Scythe Curie writes that she's never taken an apprentice, as she doesn't want to subject someone else to the scythes' way of life. She wonders what motivates other scythes, whether it's vanity, the fact that scythes can't have children, or to make sure that there's a scythe capable of replacing a mentor scythe when they self-glean. Curie suspects that if she takes an apprentice, it will be for other reasons.

This entry was clearly written long before the novel's present, but it still shows that Curie feels like her responsibility is to support the Scythedom, not just serve herself by taking an apprentice as a surrogate child. With this, she implies that taking on Citra is something she's doing for the greater good, not her own desires.



Scythe Curie takes Citra to her home near the eastern edge of MidMerica. The house is called Falling Water. It was designed by a mortal age architect, bridges a river, and was in disrepair before she raised the money to restore it. Citra tries to not be impressed and asks if scythes aren't supposed to live simple lives. Curie points out that living here means the house can be preserved. She leads Citra to a bedroom on the third floor with a view of the forest. Citra asks why Curie took her on, since it's clear Curie doesn't like her. Curie says she has her reasons and leaves.

While Citra has a point, Curie's insistence that her presence is the only thing preserving the house resituates scythes as the keepers of Age of Mortality arts and culture. She implies that nobody else would be willing to preserve the house, either for the enjoyment of it or for the sake of preserving humanity's history. Because of her relationship to death, then, Curie shows that she's far more connected to the mortal age.



Citra wakes up hours later when Curie flips on the light in her room. Curie asks if Citra forgot about dinner and then lets Citra lead the way back down to the first floor through the maze-like hallways. Citra is prepared to cook as she did for Scythe Faraday, so she's surprised to find the table set with two plates of steaming food. Suspecting a trap, Citra asks why Curie cooked for her. Curie says that cooking is her hobby, and Citra is here and hungry. Citra wonders if Faraday had a secret hobby and thinks briefly of Rowan.

Citra's lack of trust of Curie is understandable, given the trauma and turmoil she's been through in the last 24 hours. However, it also suggests that Citra is fundamentally suspicious of the Scythedom as a whole, which indicates that the Scythedom isn't doing a good job of making itself look impartial and welcoming to new scythes. Instead, it looks corrupt and untrustworthy.



After blueberry pancakes the next morning, Curie and Citra go out gleaning. Curie drives an antique Porsche and explains that it was a gift from an antique car dealer whose father she gleaned. Citra is confused, especially when Curie says that the dealer appreciated the solace she provided after the gleaning. They drive to a small town and walk leisurely down the street, which makes Citra uncomfortable. Curie asks Citra to look around for someone who looks "ready to conclude" and "stagnant." Citra is irritated, but follows Curie as she starts to tail one tall man who she insists seems tired. Curie taps the man on the shoulder and as he turns, stabs him in the heart.

Citra shouts that Curie didn't give the man warning, and Curie angrily orders Citra to lie flat on the ground and apologize to her. Curie strides away, Citra in tow, and once they're back in the car, she calmly asks Citra to track down the man's family and invite them to her home. Confused, Citra asks if Curie is upset with her. Curie explains she disciplined Citra like that because she has to uphold an image, but she's merely annoyed. Citra understands and tracks down the man's current wife and three young children.

The family arrives at Curie's home that evening. Curie grants them immunity immediately and then she and Citra serve dinner. Curie asks the man's wife to tell her about her husband, and soon, the wife and the children are going on about the man as Curie listens. She then offers the woman a knife and offers to let the woman kill her with no consequences. The woman refuses. Later, Curie and Citra wash dishes and Curie says that when Citra is a scythe, she'll do things her own way. Citra asks why Curie took her on. Curie says that Scythe Goddard offered to take both Citra and Rowan, but she couldn't bear the thought of him pitting them against each other every day.

Citra understands, but thinks Curie's offer didn't do much good—she or Rowan will still have to glean the other. Citra then asks why Curie gleaned the man without warning. Curie explains that in the Age of Mortality, death came suddenly. She believes it's her job to kill quickly and in public, to remind people of what scythes do and why they have to do it. Citra asks how Curie got to this point after her noble youth, in which she gleaned the president and corrupt businessmen, but Curie refuses to answer.

Curie's parameters for choosing gleaning victims suggests that she's trying to mimic the Age of Mortality in such a way as to give people a sudden end when they seem done living—which, the novel might suggest, doesn't necessarily happen when a mortal person reaches what would be considered old age. This may give some people freedom, though Curie's meditations on stagnation and boredom suggest that she doesn't see immortality as a great thing for these reasons.



Remember that Curie is one of the most famous scythes; this means that she must perform for the public, and that means punishing Citra loudly and openly. When Citra is able to accept and understand this, it again shows the reader that she's beginning to come of age and realize that her own comfort is less important than upholding the ideals and the traditions of the Scythedom.



Curie shows here that while Faraday chooses to show the families of those he gleaned respect by attending funerals, she feels it's more important to get to know them on a personal level and share intimately in their grief. When she suggests that all scythes do things differently, it opens up the possibility that there are a variety of ways for a scythe to show their victims and the families that they care and mourn their loss, even when it's necessary.



The revelation that Curie gleaned the president suggests that while a person may only come of age once, a person is able to continue gaining wisdom as they get older—she's presumably decided to take Faraday's insistence to heart that anonymity is important.



CHAPTER 19

Curie writes about a mortal age cartoon in which a coyote tries repeatedly to kill a bird. The coyote's plans backfire every time, but it's funny because he always returns to try again. Curie notes that now, people laugh when someone temporarily dies. She suggests that immortality has turned people into cartoons.

That night, Citra asks how Scythe Curie knew she was lying during her test at conclave and admits that she pushed a girl in front of a speeding truck. Curie doesn't express any emotion as she asks what happened. The girl died immediately and nobody, not even the girl, knew that Citra did it. Curie says they'll have to fix this.

The teenager Rhonda Flowers is eating ramen when her terrified mother sends her to the door to speak to "them." Curie tells Rhonda they're not here to glean, so Rhonda closes the door. Citra explains that they used to go to school together, and asks if Rhonda remembers falling in front of the truck. Rhonda thinks that it was annoying, since she missed her dance recital. Citra admits to pushing Rhonda and Rhonda smiles, feeling victorious for finally having proof that someone pushed her. Citra apologizes and says that to make amends, Rhonda can push her in front of a truck now. Rhonda laughs and thinks about it. She says she's busy and asks Citra to take her out to lunch.

Citra is both relieved and humiliated. On the way home, Curie points out that in the Age of Mortality, Citra's transgression would've been called "murder," and she says that Citra will atone for her misdeed by becoming a scythe. Curie says that most people would've forgotten about the crime once Rhonda was revived, but Citra holds onto things. She suggests that this is why Faraday chose her as an apprentice. Citra remarks that she's surprised the **Thunderhead** didn't see her push Rhonda, but Curie says it probably did, since it has so many cameras. It just decided that Citra wasn't worth punishing.

This idea sticks in Citra's head. She thinks of how, before becoming the **Thunderhead**, criminals and governments abused the information stored in the cloud. Since Thunderhead came to power, there haven't been any breaches of personal information. It watches and listens, and acts on what it chooses to. Citra wonders if it saw Scythe Faraday die. She wonders if Faraday was murdered.

The idea that people are now cartoons isn't necessarily a flattering one, though Curie has a point. The cartoons like the one she mentions overwhelmingly feature characters that don't mature or grow in meaningful ways—just like people in Curie's world.



Choosing to tell Curie the truth about what she did indicates that Citra is beginning to trust Curie to take care of her and not judge her. In other words, Citra is realizing that there are some members of the Scythedom that she can count on to uphold the ideals, even if it's not all of them.



It's likely that Curie knew that Rhonda wouldn't take Citra up on this offer—but she also likely knew that it would provide Citra some relief to get this off of her chest. This shows that, as Curie alluded to when she wrote about the coyote and roadrunner cartoons, death really isn't all that meaningful for people anymore—especially when, in most cases, it's not permanent. Rhonda's choice to not push Citra, however, also suggests that people are kinder by nature than one might expect.



Here, Curie suggests to Citra that having a guilty conscience is what will make her a good scythe—she'll never be numb to killing and will remember every person she gleaned. It's also telling that Citra trusted the Thunderhead so completely and didn't realize that it could simply choose to not punish her. While this may also be the result of a guilty conscience, it suggests that Citra believed the Thunderhead was unshakably good, like she believed the Scythedom was.



It's telling that Citra jumps immediately to murder at this point, as it indicates that the Scythedom is doing a very poor job of appearing impartial and good to its new scythes and apprentices. Citra can make this leap because she recognizes the Scythedom is ripe for abuses of power with no oversight.



CHAPTER 20

Scythe Goddard writes that when he was young, he thought it was stupid that in the mortal age, people were punished for purposefully killing others. He thinks this is hypocritical, since so many people also loved nature, which killed everyone. Humans are now a greater force than nature, and scythes should be revered like nature once was.

While Scythe Volta accompanies Rowan to Goddard's residence, Rowan starts thinking to himself that he's going to die. He and Citra are still opponents and he knows he can't kill her, so he vows to let her win. This makes him angry, as he feels his entire life will have been for nothing. He watches Volta, a junior scythe with "Afric leanings" and gold robes studded with citrines, and insults the robes. Volta laughs, but seems offended when Rowan asks why he follows Goddard. Volta defensively says that Goddard is interested in the Scythedom's future, unlike the old-guard scythes.

The car drives up to a huge estate and lets Rowan and Volta out into the middle of a loud party. A servant leads them to a pool. Goddard is lounging next to it and greets Rowan warmly. Rowan tries to refuse champagne, but Volta shoves a glass in his hand and disappears. Goddard explains that this party is for Rowan. Rowan finds the whole thing surreal as he's never even had a birthday party, and he tries not to be impressed by the spectacle. He sits next to Goddard and questions whether Goddard is following the rules to only own his ring, journal, and robes, and Goddard notes that the estate and party supplies were donated. He suggests that old-guard scythes take things too seriously. Rowan thinks that Scythe Faraday's seriousness is what made him agree to train as a scythe in the first place.

Rowan looks around and notices a young girl playing in the pool. He comments that a guest brought their kid, but Goddard says the girl is Esme and she's the most important person in attendance. Goddard says cryptically that Esme is the key to the future as a party girl in a tiny bikini approaches. Goddard asks the young woman to take Rowan and give him a massage. Rowan tries to refuse, but finally accepts and wonders if, since he's going to die, it's okay to indulge.

Notice how Goddard is able to use some of the exact same ideas that Curie and Faraday did to justify his horrible actions. This reminds the reader that rules and regulations don't exist in a vacuum; they exist in the hands of humans and can therefore be manipulated and abused.



The fact that Rowan chooses to throw the competition just because he loves Citra reminds the reader that no matter how much scythe training Rowan will receive, he's still a teenager experiencing normal teenage emotions and the power of his first love. This again reminds the reader that though the Scythedom is supposed to be composed of people in touch with their humanity, it still deprives them of important elements of the human experience in doing so.



Goddard's insistence that everything was donated is, of course, a loose interpretation of the term—Maxim Easley had little choice but to give Goddard his way, given how powerful scythes are. This again reminds the reader that Goddard is capable of twisting any of the Scythedom's rules in order to fit his own worldview, and suggests too that because of this, Rowan may be vulnerable and at risk here. It seems as though there's hope for Rowan, however, when he recognizes that this is a dangerous situation and reminds himself of how much he admires Faraday.



Rowan's inner monologue suggests that mentally, he's returning to the mindset he held for the non-apprentice portions of his life as a coping mechanism. Per his logic, his life doesn't matter now anyway since he's going to let Citra win, so it isn't so bad if he participates in Goddard's parties. This again shows that behaving morally isn't a state of being; it's a choice that must be made repeatedly.



CHAPTER 21

Scythe Curie writes that those who revere scythes disturb her. Plenty of people want to be scythes, and long ago, people would dress up and pretend to be scythes. There were no laws against it because of the separation between the **Thunderhead** and the Scythedom, but scythes voted to glean impersonators publically. Curie rarely hears about impersonators now, but she wonders if they want to die and know this is the only surefire way.

The party at Scythe Goddard's mansion continues for another day. Rowan almost enjoys it, but he's jerked back to earth when scythes shake his hand and wish him luck in the competition against Citra. On the afternoon of the second day, Goddard calls an end to the party, and it's over within the hour. Volta fetches Rowan from outside and takes him to a wine cellar in the basement. Scythes Goddard, Rand, and Chomsky are there, and Rand passes a "tweaker" over Rowan's body to do something to his nanites. Then, the scythes strip down to their undergarments and begin to beat Rowan. Rowan discovers that they turned off his pain nanites.

The first day after the beating, the pain is so bad that Rowan wants to die. Volta visits and spoons soup into Rowan's mouth. He speaks to Rowan with genuine compassion. Late the next day, Esme visits Rowan. Rowan asks why she's with Goddard, and she explains that he told her to follow after gleaning at a mall. Rowan believes there's more to her presence, but he can't figure out what it is. Esme says that she thinks Rowan will be a good scythe. He tells her he won't be a scythe, but she suggests that he'll want to.

Goddard visits Rowan on the third day. He helps Rowan out of bed and stands him in front of a mirror so Rowan can see his bruising. He insists that Rowan's adult self will emerge from this broken body, but Rowan spits that that's silly. Goddard says that Rowan has been given the opportunity to become greater than anyone else. Goddard pulls out a tweaker and activates Rowan's healing nanites so they can begin training tomorrow. Rowan asks why he didn't reactivate Rowan's painkilling nanites, and Goddard says that Rowan needs a clear mind—and that means experiencing pain.

Recall that there's no way for people to die of their own volition now; splatters like Tyger are revived immediately, and scythes cannot glean those who ask to die. The idea of scythe impersonators, however, especially given the fact that scythes are supposed to symbolize goodness and humanity, suggests that this is one of the few ways for people to connect with their humanity.



Beating Rowan without his pain nanites effectively plunges Rowan back to the Age of Mortality (though he can't die from the trauma). While it's easy to dismiss Goddard's methods as inhumane, it is important to note that again, he's drawing on the same logic as Curie and Faraday did—that something like this will connect Rowan to the Age of Mortality, and that that connection is necessary to be a good scythe.



The way that Esme speaks to Rowan indicates that as mysterious as she is, she's a naturally compassionate person, given that she can clearly tell that Rowan isn't a bloodthirsty monster like Goddard and his cronies are. She also suggests that she's aware of how powerful and attractive Goddard makes scythood look. She is, in other words, a mini, human surveillance system.



Goddard shows here that he likes to dramatize and romanticize his work and his beliefs in a way that makes them attractive to some and ridiculous to others. Again, however, he's drawing on the idea that scythes must give up something in order to be a good scythe. Faraday lived simply; Citra allowed her dog bite to heal naturally. Goddard, on the other hand, believes that scythes should give up their comfortable positions as painless creatures.



CHAPTER 22

Scythe Curie writes that the only natural death left is death by fire. She finds it comforting that there's one thing that the **Thunderhead** can't control, though it tries. It monitors smoke and heat everywhere. The Tonists sometimes try to burn their deadish, but they're often unsuccessful.

Citra spends her days training and gleaning with Curie. She learns to recognize the signs of "stagnation," though she questions whether it's a good metric to go by. Curie does explain that she never gleans children. Scythe Faraday seldom gleaned children, but the one he gleaned while Citra was with him shook him. Citra vows to never glean children. She thinks sometimes of Rowan and hopes that if she can prove that Faraday was murdered, she won't have to glean or be gleaned by Rowan.

Curie leaves reaching out to the families of the gleaned to Citra. Citra discovers that this is so she can develop compassion. One afternoon, Citra can only discover one estranged brother of Curie's latest gleaning, which is unusual. She discovers that the brother lives in a Tonist monastery. Normally Citra wouldn't go anywhere near Tonists, but she can't back out of tracking down family members. She lets herself into the chapel and tries not to look at the disturbing Tonist images in the stained glass. She doesn't know exactly what the Tonists believe, but she knows it's a silly conglomeration of mortal age faiths.

Citra approaches a clergyman in the chapel. He introduces himself as Curate Beauregard and grudgingly agrees to fetch Brother Ferguson. Citra looks at the giant tuning fork rising out of a basin of smelly water, the symbol of the Tonists. Brother Ferguson appears behind Citra and tells her that she can strike the bident if she wants. She ignores this and tells him that his sister was gleaned, that he needs to arrange for a funeral, and that he's eligible for immunity. Maddeningly, Brother Ferguson says that death by scythe isn't natural, so Tonists don't acknowledge it. He doesn't want immunity and will let the Thunderhead provide a funeral.

Because the Thunderhead cannot control fire, it stands to reason that fire is the last truly dangerous natural disaster. The Tonists that Curie mentions show that it's possible to try to harness fire as a tool, but it's not an easy thing to do.



Notice how, as Citra progresses through her training, she begins to think more critically about the kind of scythe she'd like to be and idolizes her mentors' methods less. This shows her coming of age and beginning to fit herself into the Scythedom as a whole, while also showing the reader that between Citra and Rowan, Citra is the only one still honestly preparing to be a scythe.



Curie has already said that the Thunderhead has rendered religion pointless in her society. It's worth noting that religion as a whole is intended to give believers a sense of purpose and a roadmap for how to live their lives, no matter who or what a person worships. This suggests that despite Citra's derision, there is still a reason for religion, it's just less pressing given that there's little incentive to make the most out of one's life.



Though Brother Ferguson tells Citra little about what the Tonists actually believe, it's important to note that he doesn't accept the role of scythes in society. In particular, his insistence that a scythe's gleaning isn't natural suggests that the Tonists aren't actually all that sold on the idea of immortality at all—meaning that they might actually be strange allies for the Scythedom, who seek to make sure that death still happens in their immortal world.



Angrily, Citra picks up a mallet and hits the bident as hard as she can. It resonates loudly and is simultaneously jarring and soothing. Brother Ferguson says it was G-sharp, though some Tonists believe it's A-flat. He offers to answer any of Citra's questions. She asks what Tonists believe, and he says they believe "flames were not meant to burn forever." He says they don't actually worship darkness; instead, they worship "wavelengths and vibrations" that humans can't see. They believe doing so will "free [people] from being stagnant." Citra asks about the dirty water, and, excitedly, Brother Ferguson says it contains disease from the mortal age—but now, it does nothing to people.

Brother Ferguson confirms here that the Tonists don't believe that immortality is a good thing, though the rest of his explanation is much less convincing. The pool of diseased water suggests that the Tonists really worship the Age of Mortality and the way that people lived then, and so they try to mimic the Age of Mortality lifestyle as much as they can. Again, this seems to line up with some of the Scythedom's beliefs.



CHAPTER 23

Scythe Goddard writes that his purpose is the opposite of the **Thunderhead**'s. While the Thunderhead sustains humanity, he "prunes" it. He also believes that it's freeing to no longer have a relationship with the Thunderhead. Without it, Goddard himself is the most powerful entity he knows. He sees nothing wrong with his gleaning methods.

Goddard reveals here that he doesn't actually believe that what he does is necessarily good for humanity. Instead, it's good for him, as it gives him more power. This makes it abundantly clear that corruption is alive and well within the Scythedom.



Citra begins spending an hour or two every day on Scythe Curie's computer, looking through the "backbrain" of the **Thunderhead** for anything that would help her piece together what happened on Scythe Faraday's last day. She misses Thunderhead's intrusions and offers of help, especially when she realizes that the backbrain is arranged like a real brain, with associations between concepts rather than associations by location. The Scythedom has algorithms to search the backbrain, but Citra knows she can't ask Curie if she can use them. Citra wonders if the Thunderhead is watching her and finally realizes that she can manipulate the Thunderhead. She asks to visit home and Curie agrees.

This passage suggests that Thunderhead is really a symbol for an idealized version of humanity, though one that's still frustrating for someone who can't interact with it properly. The realization that Citra can manipulate the Thunderhead keeps the fact that normal humans, like Citra and Rowan themselves, can also be manipulated into believing all manner of things. It reminds the reader that humans aren't infallible.



Curie walks Citra up to her family's apartment. Citra feels as though she's longing for something and notices that her dad's hug seems obligatory. Ben is in awe of Curie, especially after Curie leaves. Citra's mom is shocked that Curie is still around, while her dad asks if Citra knows what name she'll take after she's ordained. Citra suggests a walk. Being out with her family is somewhat awkward; only Ben behaves normally. Citra leads them past Faraday's old house and makes a point of taking family photos from similar angles as every public camera.

That Ben still idolizes Scythe Curie drives home for Citra how young Ben is and how much she's changed since she began her apprenticeship with Faraday. She now has little in common with her blood family and instead, shares more with the Scythedom, a family of sorts that she hopes to join. This indicates again that Citra's coming of age happens as she moves away from her family and into a purposeful life in the Scythedom.



On the ride home, Citra asks Curie if anyone ever calls her by the name she was born with. Slowly, Curie says that she's not in contact with her family, and nobody knows her by her given name. She finally says that she was born Susan. When they get home, Citra uploads her photos to the **Thunderhead** and sneaks out of bed late at night to revisit them. She begins to explore the links between her photos and those taken in the same locations.

Learning Curie's given name allows Citra to connect more deeply with her mentor and see her more as a multifaceted, flawed individual instead of just as the Grande Dame of Death. Curie's choice to share this information suggests that she's also growing closer to Citra and wants to make sure that Citra can make these connections and see she's human.



CHAPTER 24

Scythe Goddard writes that gleanings should be iconic so that they achieve immortality in the collective memory. He says that this is why scythes are here: to connect people to their mortal past. He feels he owes people a "spectacular end."

Though Scythe Goddard's insistence that death shouldn't be forgotten would likely go over well among most scythes, his focus on spectacle suggests that he's in this more for his own selfish motives than for anything else.



Rowan can feel himself growing numb. He remembers Scythe Faraday telling him to not "lose [his] humanity," as losing that would turn him into a "killing machine," and now he gets it. He believes that gleanings become just killing once a person is desensitized to it. One afternoon, after Rowan gleaned five dummies with a samurai sword, Goddard reprimands him for "attacking like a bot." Goddard says that Rowan needs to embrace his predatory nature and enjoy killing. Though Rowan wants to hate this, he does find that there's something attractive about honing his skills. Goddard gives Rowan a knife and sends him back at the dummies.

Here, Rowan is doing everything he can to hold on to some sense of compassion and human decency, as he recognizes that Goddard is corrupt and has extremely questionable ideas about what constitutes a good scythe. Notice too that Goddard is training Rowan with multiple dummies in a way that seems extremely violent. Even if Rowan were to become a scythe, with this training, he'd have to work very hard to glean like Faraday or Curie do.



Rowan spends his days training with Goddard, Chomsky, Volta, and Rand. Rowan often disagrees with what Goddard says, but he never argues. Because of this, Rowan begins hearing Goddard's voice in his head. Some days, Goddard throws parties that seem to start out of nowhere. Rowan notices that more and more scythes come to the parties over time.

The fact that Rowan starts to hear Goddard's voice in his head speaks to the power of a mentor on a young person like Rowan, even if that mentor isn't a good person. A mentor still has the power to fundamentally change the way a young person thinks and turn them into someone entirely different.



Rowan grows strong and muscular. He writes thoughtful things in his journal, but it's not genuine—Goddard reads everything. Rowan sometimes ignores his vow to let Citra win the scythead, and he wonders if he'd be like Faraday or like Goddard. He wonders if it'd be a tragedy to enjoy gleanings. Volta is the only person who seems aware that Rowan doesn't fully buy Goddard's philosophy. Rowan likes Volta the best, as Volta seems genuine and explains why Goddard beat Rowan. He insists that feeling pain allows them to experience more joy, which Rowan thinks might be correct.

The simple fact that Rowan is even considering whether it'd be awful to be like Goddard as a scythe speaks to the power that Goddard has over him at this point. Were he still with Faraday, Rowan would likely be able to see immediately that being like Goddard would be a humanitarian tragedy. Volta's role as a secondary mentor means that Rowan has one voice of reason (at least relatively) to guide him in the right direction, which may allow Rowan to take the useful bits and discard the harmful ones.



Esme lurks around Goddard's mansion and continues to perplex Rowan. She seems to like Rowan and tells him to stay with Goddard after he becomes a scythe. One morning, she follows Rowan into the weight room and tries to convince him to play cards with her. Rowan has no choice but to agree. After their game, Volta reminds Rowan that they need to keep Esme happy and be nice to her.

One day, Rowan arrives for training to find Chomsky, Volta, and Rand there with Goddard and a bunch of people. Rowan realizes with horror that he's going to practice gleaning on real people. Goddard assures him that the people will be taken away by ambudrones; he's not going to actually glean them. He says that the people are being paid and tells Rowan to do his job. Rowan wants to refuse, but he's terrified to discover that he knows how to do this and *can* do it if he ignores his conscience. Goddard asks Rowan to kill all but one person. Rowan takes a deep breath and flies at the volunteers, leaving the last girl alive. Goddard praises Rowan, and Rowan smiles. Half of him is disgusted; the other half is euphoric.

CHAPTER 25

In his journal, Rowan writes that he's amazed at what's happened in the last few months. Scythe Goddard is training him to be a deadly weapon, and he looks forward to performing well at the next conclave.

The engineer at Magnetic Propulsion Laboratories tries to believe that his job is useful. He suspects that after the outrageous and senseless deaths that happened when humans tried to colonize Mars and the moon, the **Thunderhead** now proceeds cautiously with space exploration. He believes that one day, humans will conquer the universe.

Volta wakes Rowan up at dawn and tells him to get ready: they're gleaning today. A helicopter arrives on the lawn as Chomsky practices aiming his flamethrower. Rowan tries to do the math of how many people they'll glean and realizes they'll glean about 250. It'll be a massacre. He hesitates, but knows he can't refuse. He tells himself that he's not one of them, but he still feels the same thrill as when he practices gleaning with real people.

It's telling here that Volta presumably doesn't know either why Goddard has Esme, and yet, he's not willing to question Goddard's motivations in front of Rowan. This tells Rowan that Volta is more sold on Goddard's way of doing things than Rowan might like.



This exercise is a clear attempt on Goddard's part to desensitize Rowan to the act of killing. Citra will later mention that though people are immortal, it's still impossible for people in this world to differentiate between real and temporary death—which means this will be traumatizing for everyone involved. Rowan's euphoria afterwards suggests that Goddard might be correct that there's something violent latent in all people—just like kindness, however, acting on one or the other is a conscious choice.



Given the possibility that Goddard's journal entries aren't genuine, it's questionable whether Rowan's are either—especially since the access to his inner monologue indicates that he's aware that Goddard is bad news.



This engineer still believes fully in the righteousness of humans conquering everything they possibly can and notably, still feels good about his job. This offers insight into one of the few ways that humans can feel meaningful in an immortal world.



Rowan's inner struggle makes it very clear that both compassion and evil are choices, and Rowan is struggling to commit to either. Importantly, he still knows which choice is the right one, but behaving cruelly is starting to feel more natural to him than behaving compassionately.



The helicopter lands on the roof at Magnetic Propulsion Laboratories. Goddard, Chomsky, Rand, Volta, and Rowan push past a security guard, and the scythes race down the stairs. Rowan tells the security guard to run. Goddard decides they'll start on the sixth floor and work down. They take a security badge from a woman and Rand gives Rowan a fire hatchet to break things. The scythes begin walking among cubicles while Goddard speaks, killing everyone. Nobody notices Rowan entering the next room of cubicles and directing people to the back stairway. Rowan continues to quietly tell people how to get out until the massacre ends, fifteen minutes later.

Though the text doesn't mention whether or not the engineer from the beginning of the chapter is gleaned, this mass gleaning suggests that Goddard is trying to make the point that even these "meaningful" jobs have their limits—him. In other words, this is a way for Goddard to display his power and nothing else. Rowan's choice to behave kindly and help people offers hope that Goddard isn't going to corrupt him too terribly.



The building is on fire when Goddard leads Rowan and his followers out. He points out to Rowan that the firefighters can't put the fire out, since they can't interfere with scythes. He loudly announces that the gleaning is over and invites the survivors to step forward and receive immunity. This begins a mad rush for the scythes. Goddard gives his ring to Rowan, and Volta tells Rowan that this is the life of a god.

By giving Rowan his ring and letting him grant immunity, Goddard tries to entice Rowan with some of the more fun aspects of being a scythe. Goddard recognizes that Rowan is susceptible in this regard, and getting to play with this power could bring Rowan over to his side.



CHAPTER 26

The first World Supreme Blade, Scythe Prometheus, writes that scythes are wise, but not all-seeing. He says that human nature is still a strange thing, and he can only hope that the scythes' laws will help curb its worst impulses. He hopes that the **Thunderhead** will help them if they ever need it.

At this point, it appears that the scattered hopes that the Thunderhead will step in at some point are hoping that the Thunderhead is a different entity than what it actually is, given that it's impossible to know if it has a conscience or not.



Scythe Goddard serves his scythes a feast that night. He, Chomsky, and Rand seem thrilled with their day's work, but Rowan and Volta are disturbed. Esme whispers to Rowan that Volta is always cranky after a gleaning. Midway through the meal, Goddard learns that they gleaned 263 people—they're now ahead of their quota. Goddard is annoyed and grouses that the quota keeps them from gleaning like this daily. Volta notes that the families of the gleaned will arrive tomorrow, and Rand sighs that she hates them. Rowan excuses himself to play cards with Esme. She suggests that they ask the servants to play with them, but notes that none of them like her or Goddard, since Goddard stole their house.

The simple fact that Goddard wants to glean like this daily is disturbing and offers more evidence for why Goddard isn't a scythe because he believes in the mission. Instead, he's a scythe because he wants to be powerful and is more than willing to abuse a system that isn't set up to check people like him. Rand's inability to empathize with the bereaved suggests that, like Goddard, she sees herself as a god deserving of worship and not as someone who serves the populace.



Rowan understands now that Esme is a prisoner here too. He asks her if Goddard ever really talks to her, and if she knows why he granted her immunity. Esme is silent for a minute and then says that Goddard *hasn't* given her immunity. As Rowan heads for his bedroom, he hears crying coming from Volta's room. He lets himself in and Volta is immediately furious. Volta throws things at Rowan, but Rowan sits down. He says that he knows Volta isn't like the others. Volta says that Goddard is the future, and he doesn't want to be a part of the past. He also says that Rowan won't be able to escape this either.

Rowan says that he knows Volta only pretends to like mass gleanings. Volta slams Rowan against a wall and accuses him of blackmailing him, but Rowan says he doesn't want anything. Volta lets Rowan down and apologizes. He says that after being around Goddard, it's easy to think that everyone schemes. He says too that Goddard sees Rowan as a challenge, as if he can make one of Scythe Faraday's apprentices agree with him, he can make anyone agree. Rowan realizes that Volta isn't much older than he is, and wonders how Volta ended up with Goddard in the first place. He can see how Goddard's charisma is attractive.

Rowan whispers that he thinks Goddard is a killer, not a scythe, and killing like Goddard does is wrong. Volta says that the old scythes are rolling in their graves over Goddard, but there's nothing to do but join Goddard. It makes life easier. Rowan thinks that he knows now how easy it'd be to become a monster like Goddard.

CHAPTER 27

Scythe Curie writes that there's no official media coverage of gleanings. Individuals upload their own photos and videos of gleanings, which gives some scythes fame. She's famous for gleanings she committed 150 years ago, and she wishes she weren't.

The way that Volta justifies following Goddard suggests that Citra may be right to suspect that Faraday was murdered: he implies that it's unsafe and bad to be a member of the old guard, which Faraday was a part of. Choosing a side like this means that Volta likely prioritizes his own wellbeing over the wellbeing of the people he's supposed to serve, and is willing to sacrifice kindness and compassion to do so.



What Rowan actually wants is a friend and a confidant, which Volta shows every sign of possibly being. His honesty with Rowan betrays how uneasy he feels about his position in Goddard's inner circle. It also allows Rowan to clearly trace how someone like Volta—or like Rowan—could be taken in by someone like Goddard, which will later give Rowan more information to use when he chooses whether or not to follow Goddard himself.



The way that Rowan sees it, Goddard is right: killing is something natural that must be overridden by learning to be compassionate, and with the right environment, it's easy to learn to rely on that monstrous part of him than it is to choose to be kind and moral.



Curie sees that fame is a distraction from the true work of gleanings, which she sees as curbing the population and caring for those who are left behind with compassion.



Citra can't wait to share what she's learned about Scythe Faraday with Rowan at Harvest Conclave. She keeps her investigation a secret from Curie and spends her days training. Citra learns that what makes a bad scythe is laziness, prejudice, and a lack of foresight. Today, bad scythes like Scythe Goddard are called innovative. Citra and Curie watch a few videos of Goddard's gleaning at the Magnetic Propulsion Laboratory, and Curie confesses that she used to think she could make the world a better place by gleaning the right people at the right time. She says that since she gleaned the president and his cabinet, she morphed into the Grande Dame of Death and is now used to scare children into obedience. She cautions Citra to stay anonymous and suggests that Rowan is untrustworthy after his time with Goddard.

At Harvest Conclave, Goddard and his group arrive in a diamond-studded limousine. Nobody notices Rowan trailing behind. Curie and Citra walk to the Capitol Building through a crowd. Several people try to touch Curie's robes and one person yells that he loves her. Curie slaps a cameraman and mutters to Citra that she hates the attention. She admits that she's nervous because Citra is being tested today. Citra notices that lots of people flock to Goddard and his crew. Curie says that she can't wait for Citra to be ordained and join the honorable scythes in fighting Goddard and his ideas. She leaves to greet friends, and Citra is annoyed to see that Rowan is busy entertaining his own crowd of admirers.

People surround Rowan before he can find Citra. Young apprentices ask what Goddard is like and speak poorly of their own mentors. Rowan misses Faraday, who would've known what the other scythes are truly like. Citra butts in, flatly compliments Rowan on his new friends, and storms away. Rowan chases after her and insists that he doesn't like the attention. They take a walk together so Citra can show Rowan evidence that someone, probably Goddard, bribed witnesses with immunity to say that Faraday self-gleaned. Rowan is shaken, but tries to list alternatives and tells Citra that once she's ordained, she can investigate and prove what happened.

Conclave proceeds as the last one did. Someone again anonymously accuses Goddard of being too generous with granting immunity, but Xenocrates waves this away. Curie tries to object but can't. She murmurs that Goddard is untouchable. Citra avoids Rowan at lunch and gets to meet old, revered scythes like Scythe Mandela. They discuss that Rowan is representing the enemy, but none of them do anything meaningful to stop Goddard during conclave.

Curie begins to get at the idea that it only takes one public action for one's identity and story to spin out of control and become something owned by the people, not the individual. She suggests to Citra here that it's more important to maintain control over one's own story and trajectory, as that will make a person less susceptible to corruption. Consider, for example, that Chomsky, Rand, and Volta barely have their own public identities, as they're so wrapped up with Goddard and aren't ever thought of as individuals.



Scythe Curie proposes to Citra here that the best way to fight corruption and negative change is by becoming a part of the system and then working within it to create change. This is, notably, what everyone thus far is doing, including Goddard. If Faraday was correct and Goddard did accuse himself in the last conclave, he's definitely manipulating the way that the Scythedom and conclaves work to shift public perception to be more favorable to him.



It's telling that Rowan basically tells Citra the exact same thing as Scythe Curie: fight corruption from within, not from the outside. This continues to show that this is generally the accepted practice among the Scythedom.



When none of the old guard scythes like Mandela and Curie do anything about Goddard, it makes Citra feel as though the Scythedom is even less trustworthy and looking out for the interests of the scythes and the population they have power over. This increases her paranoia and her belief that she has to do something to change the Scythedom's trajectory.



After Scythe Mandela ordains two new scythes, Scythe Cervantes calls the other apprentices to him for a Bokator competition as their test. Rowan and Citra fight each other last. Rowan knows that he has to throw the match but make it look like he didn't. Citra fights with the same goal and tries to taunt Rowan so he'll get angry and fight her for real. With ten seconds left, Rowan knows what he has to do. He darts at Citra, grabs her neck, and snarls that she'll get what she deserves. He snaps her neck and lets her deadish body fall. Cervantes disqualifies Rowan, and Rowan hopes that Citra never forgives him.

Rowan understands that by performing this illegal move and making it seem as though he's in Goddard's pocket, Citra won't trust him anymore and will be pushed into feeling like she has no choice but to win the scythehood. With this, Rowan makes it clear that he understands the importance of not furthering Goddard's message and giving him yet another follower, which would happen if he were given the ring.



CHAPTER 28

Scythe Curie writes that she fought against the movement to glean everyone born in the Age of Mortality. It was eventually decided that it was a bigoted violation of the scythes' commandments, and now there are few alive who remember the Age of Mortality. The **Thunderhead** didn't fight it and simply witnessed the Scythedom's mistake. Curie wonders if scythes decided to glean everyone, if the Thunderhead would stop it. She wonders if the Thunderhead would grieve, and if it would grieve, whether it would grieve like a child who lost a parent or like a parent who lost a child to poor choices.

Because Curie cannot have a relationship with the Thunderhead like other people can, there's no way for her to ascertain how exactly the Thunderhead feels about humanity. However, it's important to keep in mind that the two options that Curie gives suggests that she does believe that the Thunderhead is more than just a sentient, powerful robot. She suggests that it has emotions and potentially compassion, regardless of how it sees humans.



Citra is pronounced legally alive after two days. Curie visits that night and tells her that Rowan was disqualified, but they both failed the test. Citra remembers the look in Rowan's eyes and thinks that it was a dangerous, calculating look. Curie softly says that Rowan isn't who she thought he was.

Curie's warning indicates that Rowan's calculation was effective: Curie and Citra no longer trust him to be kind and to look out for the Scythehood. This means that Rowan now has the freedom to fight Goddard however he can, without worrying about Citra trying to lose.



Scythe Goddard brightly toasts Rowan when he, Volta, Chomsky, and Rand get home. Rowan sees Esme watching and feels ashamed, wondering if she knows what he did. Goddard proceeds to throw his biggest party yet. Volta approaches Rowan and says that Citra is conscious, and then he says seriously that Rowan shouldn't let her win. Rowan wonders if he should win, fair and square, and then glean himself immediately so he doesn't have to glean her.

For Volta, Rowan likely represents an innocence and a potential that, as far as he's concerned, no longer exists for him. He essentially encourages Rowan to do the exact same thing that Rowan counseled Citra to do: get into the Scythedom and then fight Goddard from within.



Goddard tells Rowan that parties like this are how people are supposed to live. Rowan wonders if Goddard could've killed Scythe Faraday and thinks that as far as he knows, Goddard hasn't done anything illegal. On the third day of the party, Xenocrates shows up. He seems uncomfortable. Rowan is even more shocked to see Tyger, who is now a professional partier. Tyger admits that his parents surrendered him to the **Thunderhead** because he splatted too many times, and the Thunderhead doesn't care if he wants to party. Tyger whispers that he'd love to get a job as one of Rowan's training subjects.

Volta is the first one to see Xenocrates arrive at the party, and he can tell that Xenocrates doesn't want to be there. Volta settles himself near Goddard to listen in on their conversation. Xenocrates asks if Goddard is concerned about his ostentatious lifestyle looking bad, but Goddard insists it's great PR. Xenocrates says that his biggest mistake was choosing Goddard as an apprentice. The two cryptically discuss that "the girl" will be dealt with, which seems to be the only thing that Xenocrates was here for. He starts to leave, but Goddard calls Esme over.

Xenocrates looks terrified as Esme sits on Goddard's lap. Volta wonders why Xenocrates is so uncomfortable and why Goddard is pushing the issue. Goddard introduces Esme and Xenocrates and then snaps his fingers at Volta, the signal he wants a dagger. Volta ignores it as Goddard suggests that Xenocrates dance and make a fool of himself, since he encouraged the scythes to laugh at him at conclave. Volta gives Goddard the dagger, which Goddard puts near Esme's neck. Esme can't see it, but Xenocrates can. Goddard suggests that Xenocrates go for a swim, so Xenocrates throws himself into the pool.

Rowan sees Xenocrates jump into the deep end, but the High Blade doesn't come back up. Rowan and Tyger dive down, pull Xenocrates's heavy gold robe off, and help him to the surface. Xenocrates tries to laugh that he fell in, which makes no sense to Rowan. He realizes that Goddard must've ordered Xenocrates in, but he wonders how and why Goddard has so much power. Xenocrates storms off.

Tyger's behavior impresses upon Rowan how little incentive is in his world for people to mature and truly grow up, especially when they're not scythes. The fact that there are such things as professional partiers also indicates that there's a lot to gain from not growing up, as Goddard's professionals are all beautiful young people (whether they're actually young or reset to be that way).



Xenocrates's robe—which is gold and ostentatious—suggests that it's possible that Xenocrates wasn't always the sort of person to wear threadbare slippers and live in a cabin, and his earlier lifestyle might have influenced Goddard more (there's no indication that scythes ever change the colors of their robes). This offers some hope that as scythes age, they can change for the better and see the error of their ways.



In this window into Volta's inner monologue, it's telling that he's horrified that Goddard wants the dagger when he has Esme around—this suggests that even if Rowan realizes that Volta is corrupted, he still has a firm grasp of his moral compass when he wants to and when he feels that it's safe to stand up to Goddard by exercising it.



The fact that Rowan understands immediately that this is a power play speaks to the kind of environment that Goddard fosters. It's one in which everyone is scheming, as Volta said, and where everyone is vying for power. Rowan's ability to watch this is indicative of his growing maturity.



As the party ends, Tyger finds Rowan again and excitedly says he hopes he can come earlier to the next party. Rowan is irritated with Tyger and wonders if he can relate to anyone from his old life. Goddard notices Rowan, and the two discuss Tyger and the fact that Rowan saw Xenocrates jump into the pool. Rowan notes that people are saying that a scythe killed Faraday, which seems to offend Goddard. He insists that Faraday gleaned himself, and says that even if he did glean Faraday, he wouldn't admit it to Rowan. Goddard threatens to glean Tyger if Rowan does poorly in training tomorrow.

Later, Volta and Rowan play pool and discuss the possibility that someone killed Faraday. Volta thinks that Citra is messing with Rowan. Rowan suggests that he start taking Esme on his runs with him to help her weight. Volta gives him a look and Rowan realizes that Xenocrates is Esme's father. Volta points out that Xenocrates's life would crumble if Esme were gleaned and it came out that he was her father. Rowan says slowly that Esme won't be gleaned as long as Xenocrates does what Goddard wants.

CHAPTER 29

In his journal, Rowan writes that he's apprenticed to a monster. He agrees with Scythe Faraday that nobody who loves killing should be a scythe, and he admits that he's afraid he's becoming a monster. Rowan tears the page out, burns it, and then writes about his training and how motivating Scythe Goddard is.

On Citra and Scythe Curie's first day back at Falling Water, Citra confesses that she's been researching Faraday's murder. Curie is shocked and disgusted with herself for not knowing what Citra was doing. When Citra admits that she told Rowan, Curie says that Rowan's choice to break Citra's neck suggests he's in league with Goddard. She tells Citra to forget this, achieve scythehood, and fight the scandal from the inside. Citra agrees, but feels like Curie is hiding something.

The next day, while Curie is at the market, two BladeGuard officers come to Curie's home and ask Citra to come with them. They refuse to show her badges and Citra attacks them. One shocks her and she comes to in a car, handcuffed. They accuse her of murdering Faraday. Because Citra is a member of the Scythedom, her fate is in the hands of Xenocrates. At his residence, she sits in a chair and refutes the charges. Scythe Mandela accuses Citra of trying to erase evidence of killing Faraday from the **Thunderhead's** backbrain. He pulls out his evidence: one of Faraday's journal entries, saying that his apprentice comes to his door at night and he's afraid she's going to kill him.

Rowan's question of being able to relate to anyone from his pre-apprentice days reinforces for Rowan how much he's changing and maturing. While once, Tyger was a close friend who made Rowan feel less alone in the world, he now represents a vapid, pointless life that Rowan himself almost took up. Calling out Goddard indicates that Rowan knows he needs to use his life for good and call out corruption where he sees it.



Remember that it's illegal for scythes to have children. Esme is then proof that there's major corruption in the Scythedom at the highest level in MidMerica, though his attempts to hide it—like his distaste for Goddard in the present—suggests that he may be changing for the better and understand why all of this wrong, while also feeling helpless to actually do anything.



Goddard's choice to read Rowan's journals is a conscious one to deprive Rowan of any privacy and through doing so, make it harder for Rowan to meditate on any of Scythe Faraday's teachings.



Again, Curie shows here that she believes fully in the scythehood's ability to police itself and perform proper oversight—provided there are enough good scythes, like her and Citra, in the mix. Citra's suspicion that Curie is hiding something indicates that while Citra may see the logic of this, she's still not willing to fully trust the Scythedom around her.



This event suggests that "the girl" that Xenocrates and Goddard were discussing was likely Citra, allowing the reader to understand that this is a false accusation with political motivation. Remember too that because the Scythedom is entirely separate from the Thunderhead, the Thunderhead has no power to step in and either free Citra or punish Xenocrates for engaging in unethical behavior like this.



Citra is shaken, especially when Mandela says that whoever killed Faraday used Faraday's ring to bribe witnesses with immunity. Mandela leaves. Xenocrates says that he's been studying "tor-turé" from the Age of Mortality, which is inflicting physical suffering until a person confesses. He says that he will "tor-turé" Citra if she doesn't sign a confession. If she signs, she'll be held in an old prison and after Winter Conclave, Rowan will glean her. Xenocrates gives her a pen and as Mandela opens the door to witness her signature, Citra punches Xenocrates. She pushes past Mandela and jumps off the building to splat.

Xenocrates isn't concerned until he sees that Nimbus agents—people who work for the **Thunderhead**—are the ones scraping Citra off the pavement. An agent says that while Citra is dead, she's under the Thunderhead's jurisdiction. Xenocrates threatens to glean the agent, but she points out that that would look biased. He screams in her face.

The way that Xenocrates pronounces torture (it would be pronounced tor-tur-ay as written) makes it clear just how far from the mortal age Citra's world is. In Citra's world, torture is so antiquated of an idea, nobody even knows how to pronounce the word anymore. This reminds the reader how far removed from death and fear this world is.



The revelation that the Thunderhead has human agents that work for it suggest that the Thunderhead may be more involved in day-to-day life than previously thought—and, given that it's taking Citra from Xenocrates, may fulfill Curie's hope that it will step in in times of need.



CHAPTER 30

Citra can hear someone talking to her and realizes that it's the **Thunderhead**. When she points out that they can't communicate, the Thunderhead says that Citra is dead and while she's dead, they can speak. It says that though it's separate from the Scythedom, it's still watching and it's very concerned. It explains that it's been running algorithms and sees that in most possible futures, Citra is important. The Thunderhead refuses to tell Citra how to make a pleasant future, but says it can "make her aware." Citra moans that this isn't fair and asks the Thunderhead to tell her what happened to Faraday. It refuses but says it can give her one clue: the name Gerald Van Der Gans.

While it makes sense that the Thunderhead is smart and cunning, it's important to pay attention to the way that it bends the rules in order to pass this information on to Citra. This indicates that, as Curie suspected, the Thunderhead does care for the humans it watches out for and does see that the Scythedom could become a problem if things continue unchecked. There is, Citra realizes, more surveillance happening than she thought.



CHAPTER 31

Scythe Curie writes that in addition to the ten formal laws of the Scythedom, there are several accepted conventions, including that a scythe can't glean a person who wants to be gleaned. Nobody in the post-mortal age knows what it's like to want to truly die, as the pain and suffering that drove people to that point no longer exist. Once, a woman came to Curie and asked to be gleaned, insisting she was done with life. Curie refused and ran into her ten years later, happy, remarried, and pregnant. The woman thanked Curie for letting her live. Curie still feels uneasy about it.

Curie likely feels uneasy about running into this woman later because she, as far as the reader could tell, seems to have exhibited every sign of being "stagnant"—yet Curie couldn't glean her exactly because this woman thought herself to be stagnant. This might flag for Curie that the conventions of the Scythedom should be revisited, as there's nothing from stopping people from impersonating a scythe and then dying horrifically.



Citra is alive again on Thursday morning. As she comes to, she hears a nurse say that Citra needs a few more hours before it's safe to be conscious, but Curie sends the nurse away. Curie tells Citra that Scythe Mandela told her about the accusation. Citra notices that there's snow outside, and Curie explains that they're in the Chileargentine Region—the **Thunderhead** moved Citra away from Xenocrates. Curie says it's time to go so that Xenocrates can't find her, and helps her into a car. As Citra falls asleep, she says that the Thunderhead spoke to her and told her the name of the person who killed Faraday.

Citra wakes up in a cabin and minutes later, Curie comes in with soup. She explains that it's her grandmother's recipe, and can purportedly heal a cold. Citra eats and then tells Curie about the journal entry that Xenocrates showed her. Curie sighs and says that the journal entry was about her, not Citra. She explains that Faraday took her on as an apprentice when they were both young, 50 years after humans achieved immortality. They both wanted to make the world a better place, as people still distrusted the **Thunderhead** and wanted to oppress others.

Curie admits that she was madly in love with Faraday and several times, she went into his room at night, planning to get in bed with him. He thought she meant to kill him. Curie confessed her love, he let her down easy, and they ignored each other for 50 years. Then, they became lovers and he showed her the journal entry. They were together for seven years until the High Blade found out. After 70 years of punishment, they became friends. Citra asks if Xenocrates truly thought the journal entry was about her, and Curie says he probably knows it wasn't—he just wants Rowan to become a scythe.

A Chileargentine scythe enters the room, speaks to Curie in Spanic, and leaves. Curie tells Citra that the local scythes are on their way to get her, so Citra will need to continue running alone. Curie is going to go home and tell the truth about the journal entry, while Citra will impersonate a Tonist and head north. Curie gives Citra an address, tells her that she'll find the final part of her training there, and then gives her instructions on how and where to go. Citra races away, finds a publicar, and opens the note. It says that when Citra arrives, she'll know what to do. Citra knows that she'll find Gerald Van Der Gans there.

Scythe San Martín draws his pistol and bangs on the door. Curie opens the door, shocking San Martín. He says he's here for Citra and pushes into the cabin. San Martín finds footprints out the back and sends his apprentice down the hill while he tries to leave out the front. Curie blows up the cars.

Curie's willingness to help Citra reveals that she's more than willing to stand up to Xenocrates and Goddard in order to do the right thing. This sets an example for Citra of how, when a person becomes a member of the Scythedom, they can then go on to push back on the people in power and thwart their plans. This essentially offers a combined tack, in which Curie works both from within and from the outside.



Again, by letting Citra in on Curie's own process of coming of age, she's able to encourage Citra to avoid making some of the same mistakes and jump instead to the parts and places where Curie—and in the future, Citra—will be able to make a meaningful difference. Curie also implies with her tone that while she and Faraday were idealistic, they weren't exactly successful in changing the world.



Curie's story makes it abundantly clear that becoming a scythe doesn't rob a person of all their normal human emotions, as Citra and Rowan might have thought. Instead, it just makes it harder and more dangerous to act on them. The understanding that Xenocrates is aligned with Goddard allows Curie to more effectively pick apart the political alliances set up to make Citra fail.



Giving Citra this journey—which she seems to think is about her getting revenge for Faraday's death—is a way for Curie to orchestrate a coming-of-age experience for Citra. It puts Citra in control of her own trajectory for a short time and allows her to practice her skills in the real world and with a real target. It also gives her the practice of evading the Scythedom so she has the experience and is less likely to try it again when she's ordained.



Curie's fearlessness in thwarting San Martín speaks to her trust of the way the Scythedom works—she trusts that Xenocrates isn't going to try to discredit or punish her, which explains why she wants Citra to become a scythe and work to fight from within.



CHAPTER 32

Scythe Curie writes that she often gleans in her dreams. She has one recurring dream of carrying a pitchfork and trying to glean a woman, but the woman doesn't die as Curie stabs and stabs. She always wakes up screaming.

This dream reminds the reader that the good scythes in particular are haunted by what they do, and they never grow desensitized to the act of gleaning.



Citra does as she's told and changes publicans every hour for the next day. She changes into her Tonist dress and pulls the hood over her head, sometimes only narrowly avoiding scythes pursuing her. Curie told her to go to Amazonia. This is because scythes from around the world used to vacation and glean in Amazonia, which makes the Amazonian Scythedom unfriendly and unhelpful to other regions. In Buenos Aires, Citra joins a group of Tonists. She tells them she's searching for whether the bident rings in A-flat or G-sharp and then excuses herself.

The experience of impersonating a Tonist, while difficult for Citra because she doesn't take them seriously, does impress upon Citra that the Tonists are a very convenient cover for her, since they oppose the Scythedom. This expands her worldview and helps her to feel more empathy and compassion for these people she believes are fundamentally different from her.



In the bathroom, a man bursts in, puts a knife to Citra's throat, and tells her that he's going to glean her. She admits that she's a scythe's apprentice, and he explains that there are disguised Chileargentine scythes on the train looking for her. He leads her back to his car and introduces himself as Scythe Possuelo, from Amazonia. A man walks slowly up the aisle with a device in his hand that starts beeping as he gets close to Citra. She reveals herself and he announces that he's arresting her. Possuelo points out that they're in Amazonia now, so Citra can legally defend herself. Citra pulls out a knife and, seeing a porter coming, confirms that it's illegal for scythes in Amazonia to not wear their robes and rings. Citra asks for the scythe pursuing her to be kicked off the train.

Amazonia acts as a larger symbol for working both within the system and outside of it, as Citra and Curie are trying to do. Though technically part of the international Scythedom, it functions more by its own rules and isn't willing to help other regions, especially in situations like this when there's foul play afoot. [This continues to remind Citra that as she matures and enters the Scythedom, her community will continue to expand and she can draw on a number of sources as she performs her work and fights corruption.](#)



Citra changes into street clothes from someone's luggage, and Possuelo advises her to take several different trains out of the next station to throw off her pursuers. Citra takes his advice and boards six trains before getting on a train to Caracas. She then follows the coastline east on foot, wondering what it will be like to confront a murderer. She knows that the **Thunderhead** usually prevents murder, but an ordained scythe would be able to murder. She thinks that scythes are powerful, yet extremely vulnerable.

For Citra, the concept of a murderer is something far removed from her lived reality, so the possibility of finding one, especially within the Scythedom, is extremely compelling for her. This allows her to feel like a hero as she moves toward Faraday's killer and feel as though she's serving humanity by rooting out corruption.



Citra finds the house she's looking for and settles in to observe. She knows that she needs to just harm the murderer and extract a confession. She wonders if she could stay in Amazonia and never have to face Rowan again. As night falls, Citra sees her target come onto the patio. She fires a pistol at his knee and races to him. She grabs the man and then drops him in shock when she sees that it's Faraday.

Faraday's existence shows that Amazonia is more than just a place for wrongly convicted scythes like Citra to hide—it's also a perfect place for someone like Faraday to reconnect with the human he is, not just the scythe he became.



CHAPTER 33

Scythe Faraday writes in his journal that immortality robs people of their innocence and youth. He says that every time he gleans, he mourns for who he was as a boy. He longs to one day become that boy again.

Citra carries Faraday inside and bandages his leg. He begins to wake and refuses to let her take him to a hospital—that would alert the Scythedom to the fact that he's alive, not gleaned. Half joking, he asks if Citra was so upset that he self-gleaned that she came to exact revenge. She explains that she thought he was Gerald Van Der Gans, and he says that was his childhood name. He asks again why Citra is here. Citra explains what happened since his disappearance. He explains that Curie is the only scythe who knows he's alive. A rainstorm moves through and Faraday says that Citra needs to sleep, as tomorrow they're going to study poisons—after all, Citra is still his apprentice.

This explains why Faraday quietly stepped away from his life as a scythe: he recognizes that gleaning does make him feel numb and old, and in a world where few come of age, staying emotionally young is compelling.



This exchange reveals that Curie sent Citra to Faraday so that Citra could continue her training, in the hopes that if Curie can clear Citra's name at home, Citra will be allowed to take her final test and become a scythe. Faraday's willingness to resume Citra's training speaks to his sense of responsibility to Citra and to the Scythedom, which he certainly still feels connected to on some level and definitely doesn't want to see fall into Goddard's hands.



CHAPTER 34

Scythe Curie writes that the longer people live, the faster time seems to go. She wonders if people truly become young again when they turn the corner, as they still remember everything. She believes that mortals had to work harder for their goals, as they didn't have an endless amount of time. Curie says that she sees more and more stagnation as time goes on.

At first, Rowan tries to keep a tally of all the people he renders deadish. He soon loses count, but he becomes a skilled killer and enjoys killing. Volta suggests one day that they break off from Goddard after Rowan is ordained, but Rowan knows that Volta won't follow through. Volta points out that Citra is gone and won't get the ring—Rowan just has to pass the final test. Rowan knows little about what happened to Citra, and nobody seems to know where she is. Xenocrates drops the charges, which sends Goddard into a fit of rage. He takes his followers on a gleaning rampage at a corn maze. Volta earns Goddard's fury by lobbing poison gas into the maze, but he tells Rowan that he did it to be humane.

Differentiating between physical youth and emotional youth reminds the reader that coming of age the first time is one of the only once-in-a-lifetime experiences available to people in the immortal world. By this logic, people don't become young when they turn the corner—they just look that way.



The way that Rowan thinks suggests that he still sees his life as futile, even with the competition element removed from it. Citra's absence, however, also leaves Rowan little choice but to steel himself to accept the ring if he passes his final test—though hopefully, he'll be able to escape Goddard's clutches. His assessment of Volta reminds him that not all who are chosen to be apprentices are as strong and unwaveringly moral as Faraday made it out to be, suggesting that Faraday wasn't as all-knowing as Citra and Rowan thought.



Several weeks before Winter Conclave, Citra flies home to Curie. She arrives to an apology note from Scythe Mandela, and Curie explains that Xenocrates will pretend the fiasco never happened. Citra says she won't forget, but Curie suggests that there's more going on than they realize. They discuss Faraday, and Citra says he mostly gardens and walks on the beach. Curie sighs and says she might join him in 100 years, once things are better in the Scythedom. She declares that Citra has to win the ring.

During her time with Faraday, Citra thought a lot about the morals and ethics of being a scythe. She knows that Rowan hasn't learned any of that with Goddard, but she still wonders if he learned enough with Faraday to believe it still. She suggests that Rowan might be a good scythe too, but Curie says that Rowan is surely twisted and no longer trustworthy. Citra questions whether she could glean him, but Curie says that if that comes to pass, it will be the second hardest thing Citra will ever do. Citra wonders what the hardest thing will be.

CHAPTER 35

Scythe Goddard writes in his journal that most of the Scythedom's traditions and rules need to be changed. It's no longer reasonable to have a quota. He believes that the scythes who glean many will make up for the scythes who wish to not glean as often. Scythes will be able to help each other this way.

Three days before Winter Conclave, on the last day of the year, Goddard decides to glean once more, shouting at Volta when Volta points out that they've reached their quota. Goddard says that it's already the new year in PanAsia, so their gleanings will count toward next year. Everyone but Chomsky, who insists on using his flamethrower, packs samurai swords. Goddard instructs Rowan to bring an extra as he says that they're going to glean "rabble." The helicopter lets them down in a park, and Goddard announces that Rowan will perform his first gleaning. Rowan is distraught, but Goddard insists that nobody will care. Rowan wants to fail, as he knows it's the only way he'll be able to cling to humanity.

Goddard leads the group to a Tonist cloister and says they're going to glean them all. Rand and Chomsky grin, but Volta nervously suggests that this would show bias. Goddard and Rand shoot him down and draw their swords. Volta draws his and says quietly to Rowan that it'll be over quickly. Goddard tells Rowan to stay at the gate to keep people from escaping. Rowan intends to let people out, but they're too afraid of him to try to move past. He finally leaves his post and starts to wander through the building.

Now that Citra has had her experience in Amazonia and has a better understanding of the nuances of the Scythedom, Curie is able to encourage her to see that the corruption is part of the Scythedom, regardless of what exactly is going on. It's a fundamentally flawed organization built with the best intentions, but that doesn't make it any less important that Citra join it.



Citra is right; Rowan has no education in ethics from Goddard, and that positions Citra as the top competitor for the ring—assuming that the test to become a scythe isn't rigged or something that Goddard somehow controls, a situation that seems very possible given Goddard's hold over Xenocrates.



Here, Goddard shows that he knows how to make his twisted ideas seem palatable by insisting that he's being helpful and wants to make the Scythedom better. He's able to do this because nobody reads journals, critically or at all, so there's no oversight.



For Rowan, this moment is of the utmost importance: this is his coming-of-age moment, and, as he sees it, he doesn't want to participate at all, as gleaning will turn him into a monster. This shows how much Goddard has twisted Rowan's perception of becoming a scythe. Now, becoming a scythe is something just as horrendous to Rowan as it is to so many other people who don't understand what actually goes into it.



Volta's behavior again reminds the reader that he still isn't fully able to ignore his conscience, much as he seems to want to in order to keep Goddard's support and favor. The fact that the Tonists are afraid of Rowan impresses upon him that even if he knows he's still good inside, his association with Goddard means that most won't understand that.



Rowan finds Volta sitting against a column, crying and covered in blood. He kneels down and Volta explains that he opened a door he thought was an office, but it was a classroom with a dozen small kids. One boy stepped forward, held up a small tuning fork, and said that Volta wouldn't hurt them. Volta gleaned them all. He starts to sob, and Rowan sees that he has the boy's tuning fork in his hand. Volta asks who they are and who they're supposed to be, but when Rowan says that they can work together to stop Goddard, Volta says it's all over. Rowan realizes that the blood is from Volta's own wrists. Volta asks Rowan to call him his real name, Shawn Dobson, and asks Rowan to promise to be a better scythe. Rowan promises, and Volta dies.

For Volta, suppressing his humanity enough to glean a room full of children is too much for him to live with. Volta is only around 20 years old, so it's telling that killing children at this age is enough to make Volta want to die—according to Curie, most scythes don't self-glean until they're more than a 100 years old. This also represents a turning point for Rowan, as he sees right in front of him the lengths that Goddard will go to spread fear and corrupt his disciples.



CHAPTER 36

Scythe Faraday writes in his journal that he prays every day. He doesn't know who or what he's praying to, but he asks for guidance and that he never become desensitized to gleaning. He says that he wants all of humanity to feel it when they witness death. Empathy is what will keep people human, and no god can fix it if humans lose their empathy.

What Faraday suggests here is empathy is both a natural part of being human, as well as a choice that people must repeatedly make if they wish to continue to be human. He suggests that losing empathy represents the point of no return.



Rowan finds Goddard in the chapel with just the curate alive. Goddard brightly tells Rowan that he can glean the curate. The curate spits that this massacre will help the Tonists' cause, and Rowan refuses to glean him. Rowan says that Volta self-gleaned, and Goddard knocks the curate out. Goddard says that Volta was weak and tells Rowan to take Volta's place, but Rowan refuses this offer as well. Goddard looks so deeply into Rowan's eyes that Rowan feels violated. He says that he knows Rowan loves killing and points out that scythes are called scythes because they're the weapons of mankind. He encourages Rowan to glean the curate and ignores Rowan when Rowan calls him a monster.

Goddard's lack of emotion for Volta makes it even more apparent to Rowan that he's an evil and heartless villain. This tells Rowan that if something were to happen to him, Goddard won't be there for him like Curie was for Citra, or like Faraday tried to be for both Rowan and Citra. Goddard is both a horrendous mentor and a horrendous person, which makes Rowan feel as though he has no choice but to start speaking the truth and take Goddard out.



Rowan feels dizzy from the smell of the blood and the smoke, and he almost talks himself into gleaning the curate. He pulls out his sword, steps forward, and realizes that Goddard always had him leave one person alive in his training to prepare him for real gleaning, when he can leave nobody alive. Rowan leaps forward and stabs Goddard. He tells Goddard that Goddard made him this way and rips his ring off. Goddard tries to speak, but Rowan beheads him. He fights with Chomsky and Rand and kills them both. The curate finally stops Rowan from bludgeoning Chomsky and offers to hide him from the Scythedom, but Rowan asks the curate to find survivors and get out. Rowan starts shooting off the flamethrower.

Violently killing Goddard like this allows Rowan to finally draw on all the things that Goddard taught him—but ostensibly, for a purpose that in the long run will serve humanity and better the Scythedom. This reminds the reader that while violence and cruelty may be inherent to human nature, just like empathy and kindness, it's a choice to draw on any one of those things and put it to work for a certain purpose. This, the novel suggests, is what makes humans human.



Rowan steps outside wearing Goddard's robe and ring. He tells the assembled firefighters that the fire is scythe action. The firefighter doesn't believe this, as Rowan clearly isn't a scythe, but Rowan kicks the firefighter to the ground and shouts his command again, which convinces the firefighter that he's a scythe. After the firefighter gives the order to fall back, he kisses Rowan's ring. Rowan feels dirty in Goddard's robes and thinks that he's become a monster.

Remember that impersonating a scythe is a gleanable offense; Rowan is taking a major risk by wearing Goddard's robes and acting like an ordained scythe. However, the fact that he's able to effectively convince the firefighter speaks to the fact that while evil, Goddard was able to teach Rowan how to behave in a compelling and terrifying way—something that's clearly useful.



CHAPTER 37

In his journal, Volta writes that Rand and Chomsky often discuss what methods of self-gleaning they'd like to use one day. Volta says he hates this game, as he fully intends to glean for thousands of years.

This journal entry was presumably written well before Rowan met Volta, and suggests that all scythes begin their careers idealistic and not fully aware of the sacrifices that they'll be asked to make.



Two days after Goddard's death, Xenocrates sits with Rowan and promises to ban fire in conclave. He marvels that Rowan made it out alive, but Rowan says he was stationed by the gate. He stares into Xenocrates's eyes and asks if this is the end of his apprenticeship. Xenocrates says that Rowan will still take the final test, and he or Citra will still have to glean the other. Maxim Easley arrives with champagne, and when Xenocrates asks why he's still here, Rowan explains that Maxim owns this house. Maxim says he's selling it.

At this point, Xenocrates has no real reason to continue to uphold Rand's suggestion of Citra and Rowan gleaning the other, which suggests that he's likely only doing so because he feels that he cannot bend the rules of the Scythedom once again. In other words, Xenocrates is likely—or hopefully—trying to reaffirm his loyalty to the Scythedom and behave properly.



Xenocrates mentions that there are rumors that a scythe addressed a group of firefighters. Rowan says he's seen the videos, and Xenocrates goes on to say that they've found the remains of Volta, Chomsky, and possibly Rand, all with the gems from their rings and their robes, but they haven't found either the diamonds from Goddard's robes or his ring. Goddard's skeleton also has no skull. Rowan suggests the investigators need to look harder. Esme appears in the doorway. Rowan calls her in and informs Xenocrates that Esme is returning to her mother. He asks if Xenocrates would like to take her there and winks. Xenocrates wonders if he should pay more attention to Rowan and agrees to take Esme home. As he gets up, he agrees to call off the investigation.

Again, the way that Rowan manipulates Xenocrates shows that even the nasty things that Rowan learned from Goddard can be useful to him, especially now that he's an outsider in the Scythedom after losing two mentors. Xenocrates's realization that he needs to pay attention to Rowan suggests that he's aware of many of the things Rowan could've learned from Goddard. Xenocrates trained Goddard, after all, so it's likely that he'll recognize some of Rowan's quirks that possibly came from Xenocrates himself.



CHAPTER 38

World Supreme Blade Prometheus writes that becoming a scythe shouldn't be easy. He says that the rite of passage to become a scythe is extremely cruel, which is why it will forever be a secret.

Prometheus's writing suggests that cruelty isn't actually something unique to Goddard. Instead, it's something secretly embedded in the entire Scythedom.



The day before Winter Conclave, Scythe Curie drives Citra to Fulcrum City. She'll take her test tonight and get her results tomorrow. Citra is troubled that she has to take it alone and that Curie won't tell her what it is. Citra learns that she'll be tested last, and finally a guard fetches her. He takes Citra to a room where five scythes, including Scythe Mandela, sit at one end. There's a table with five weapons on it, and Mandela directs Citra's attention to the other end of the room. Lights go up on a bound figure in a chair, a person on which Citra must demonstrate how she gleans. Citra pulls the hood off and sees that the person is Ben.

Horrified, Citra shouts that they can't make her do this. One female scythe steps forward, offers Citra a box with slips of paper, and says that Citra has to choose to do this. Another scythe says that Citra will render Ben deadish. The fifth scythe reads Citra the rules of the test and Citra opens her slip of paper. It reads, "knife." Citra hears Curie in her head, saying she can do it. She realizes that every scythe has taken this test. She also knows that it's impossible to differentiate between temporary and permanent killings; this will scar her *and* Ben. Citra asks why she has to do it, and Mandela gently explains that after this, Citra will have done the most difficult thing.

Citra picks up the knife, approaches Ben, and cuts his bonds and gag. Ben asks if Citra is going to hurt him. Citra doesn't lie, but she says that he'll go to a revival center. She says it will hurt, and then Ben asks to see the knife. Citra lets him hold it and Ben admits he's afraid. He asks if he'll get ice cream at the revival center and Citra nods. She asks him to close his eyes and tell her what kind of ice cream he wants. As he does, Citra stabs him like Curie stabs her victims.

The committee immediately begins to lob criticisms at Citra. Some feel she was compassionate; others think she's sloppy and took unnecessary risks. They dismiss her. Citra meets Curie in the hallway and shouts that she should've prepared Citra better. Curie leads Citra to the bathroom to wash and tells her how the other candidates did. She says that Rowan drew the pistol and pulled the trigger before they had even finished reading the instructions to him.

CHAPTER 39

The narrator gives a poem from the collected works of Scythe Socrates. It says that scythes are a weapon wielded by humanity, and that they're tragic songs sung by all humans.

The test is designed to force new scythes to recognize that by becoming a scythe, they must sacrifice everything from their previous lives—including a trusting relationship with one of their loved ones. The fact that Ben is a young child makes this even more difficult for Citra, especially since she's already vowed to never glean children. This then also tests her commitment to the Scythedom, even when it asks her to do something she finds awful.



The knowledge that the human brain at this point in time still cannot differentiate between real and temporary death suggests that all people who experience deadish—from Tyger's splatting to Rowan breaking Citra's neck—are fighting a natural human instinct as they hurt themselves and others. This reminds the reader that for all the advancements in the world of the novel, humanity hasn't yet been able to cure itself of a fear of death and pain.



The way that Citra conducts this practice gleaning shows that she has the emotional capacity as well as the skill to be a good scythe. Ben trusts her to take care of him and make this as painless as possible—though it's important to keep in mind that he'll likely never trust Citra as much again, and this is Citra's steep price to get into the Scythedom.



While Curie's account of Rowan's performance may be all fact, it doesn't take into account that Rowan may still be trying to throw the competition and give it to Citra. Acting so heartless like this may make the committee question if he'd simply follow in Goddard's footsteps if ordained.



By insisting that scythes are an essential part of the way that humans live in the immortal age, Scythe Socrates encourages people to understand their own complicity in gleanings.



Rowan arrives alone for Winter Conclave, dressed in black. As he ascends the steps, one scythe slips. Rowan tries to help him up, but the man spits that he doesn't want Rowan's help. Another scythe at the top of the stairs wishes Rowan luck and invites him for tea if he achieves scythehood. Citra stands with Scythe Curie, listening to the chatter about the tragedy at the Tonist cloister. She's angry to realize that scythes are only upset that scythes died; they're not at all upset that Goddard gleaned Tonists.

Recall that scythes all wear different colored robes, so that when they gather at conclave, the group looks like a rainbow, thus signaling that scythes are meant to represent light and good things for humanity. Thus, dressing in black is another way that Rowan can signal to others that he's not really interested in earning the ring, even if he's going through the motions and participating in his final test and in Winter Conclave. Citra's anger that people aren't mourning the Tonists shows that over the course of the year, she's learned that all people are deserving of respect and compassion, no matter how eccentric.



Curie anxiously says that Scythe Mandela told her that Citra performed well last night, but she says she won't forgive herself if Citra loses. Citra assures her that between her and Scythe Faraday, she's well prepared. Smiling and tearing up, Curie invites Citra to stay on as her apprentice. Citra calls her Marie and says she'd be happy to stay. Several other scythes approach to tease Curie about Faraday's embarrassing journal entry, and Citra watches Rowan enter the rotunda. She notices that Rowan seems strangely cold. Curie instructs Citra to not look at or talk to Rowan.

Agreeing to stay on with Curie indicates that Citra now sees her mentor as a full, multifaceted person with a lot to teach her going forward and a great deal of loyalty yet to show. Calling her Marie—after Scythe Curie's Patron Historic, scientist Marie Curie—specifically shows that Citra feels she's becoming Curie's equal, at least in status, which indicates that Citra sees herself at this point as having made great strides in her coming-of-age process.



Rowan doesn't approach Citra. He knows that if Citra wins, she'll glean him. He's afraid to die, but he's more afraid of the monster he's become. If he wins, he's decided that he'll just refuse to glean Citra. The worst that will happen is that they'll punish him, as they can't glean him. As Rowan eats breakfast, he watches Citra and thinks she's impossibly beautiful.

Rowan's inner monologue shows that, like Curie, he now understands that there's only so much the Scythedom can do to punish someone—and after what Goddard taught him, he's not afraid of being punished and knows he can stand up to anything.



Citra tunes out most of the morning's business until Xenocrates begins a debate on banning fire as a method of gleaning. Curie murmurs to Citra that though the fire was terrible, some scythes are glad to see Goddard gone. The motion passes. At six that evening, a scythe calls up candidates for the scythehood. There's only Citra and Rowan, as the other two candidates have already been dismissed.

Citra's inability to pay attention to the morning proceedings reminds the reader that while Citra is poised to win the scythehood, she's still young and doesn't fully understand the intricacies of the rituals. In other words, she still has a long way to go as she comes of age.



CHAPTER 40

Scythe Curie writes that she watches the "bejewling" of new scythes with joy and with sadness, as she knows that they're the future—but they'll also eventually become so tired that they'll self-glean. The ceremony allows Curie to believe that they'll all choose to live forever.

Curie recognizes that within the Scythedom, scythes still, in theory, experience a complete life cycle, as they're the only ones who are able to control how and when they die. They are the most human by this logic.



Citra and Rowan greet each other and then face Xenocrates. Mandela makes a speech and then says that Citra will receive the ring. The scythes cheer and Rowan congratulates Citra. Mandela asks Citra if she's chosen her Patron Historic and gives her the ring. Citra says she wants to be known as Scythe **Anastasia Romanov**. Xenocrates isn't pleased. He points out that the Russian czars were known for abusing power, and Anastasia Romanov didn't do anything of note. Citra meets his eyes and says that Anastasia was killed by a corrupt system and, had she lived, she could've changed the world. Citra says she'd like to be the change that might have been. Scythes begin to applaud.

Rowan knows they made the right choice as Mandela asks Citra how she plans to glean Rowan. She asks for a blade and Rowan asks if they should give the assembly a show. Citra punches Rowan in the face in retaliation for breaking her neck. She then holds up the knife, but a scythe stands up and yells for her to stop. The ring of every nearby scythe is glowing red: Rowan has immunity. Rowan looks at Citra's bloody fist and ring and says she's a genius. Xenocrates accuses Citra of doing this on purpose and laughs when she denies it. Citra leans close to Rowan and tells him to grab some knives and get into the car outside the exit. He tells Citra he loves her.

Rowan takes three blades and fights his way to the door. Citra watches him go and when he's gone, she kisses her ring to feel a bit of Rowan's blood. Rowan leaps into the passenger side of the car and is shocked to see Scythe Faraday driving.

In her gleaning journal, Citra writes that humans have always been their own worst enemies. Though the wars of the past are, in theory, a thing of the past, Citra sees that the Scythedom is in danger of losing its conscience and becoming prideful and greedy. She's heard rumors that there an unordained scythe out there, whom people are calling Scythe Lucifer, taking out corrupt scythes with fire. Citra wants this to be true and also wants it to be false. She hopes that if she ever meets Scythe Lucifer, he'll see her as a good scythe.

By choosing to take the name of Anastasia Romanov, Citra situates herself as a symbol of a brighter future for the Scythedom. This makes Rowan's black clothing and heartless actions seem especially dark and sinister by comparison, given that Citra is clearly differentiating herself from Scythe Goddard and others like him who wish to infuse the Scythedom with cruelty and unnecessary violence.



Though Citra now has the education to decide how to most compassionately kill people, she also learned from Faraday that there's something to be said for making the choice to bend the rules and let people live. Especially since Citra is standing up for Rowan's right to live just as much as she's showing Xenocrates that he can't bully her, this allows her to show the entire Scythedom what she stands for now that she's ordained.



Alive and in hiding, Faraday offers Citra and Rowan the opportunity to call on him to work to make the Scythedom a better place from the outside.



The revelation that Rowan is out taking down corrupt scythes as Scythe Lucifer preps the reader for the next book in the series and makes it clear that there won't just be oversight within the Scythedom in the form of Citra and Curie; now, Rowan will be policing things outside the formal organization to help the old guard scythes make the world a better place.





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