

# **Doll Bones Study Guide**

## **Doll Bones by Holly Black**

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## Plot Summary

Doll Bones by Holly Black is a novel that follows three children from imagination to puberty and back again. Zach, Alice and Poppy have been friends for years. They go to the same school, and spend a great deal of time together, most of it lost in their imaginations. Playing an ongoing game of make-believe, the three friends have created an entire world of fiction in which they serve an old porcelain doll they call the Queen who is confined in a cabinet in Poppy's house along with other things that Poppy has been forbidden to touch. Her mother had first found the Queen at a tag sale and was convinced she would be worth a great deal one day. Somehow, the doll seemed to watch everyone and everything in such a creepy manner that Poppy's sister was afraid of her. None of them can remember when they decided to make her the Great Queen, but since then, they'd served at her pleasure in 'the game'.

Playing almost daily, they'd created a legend in which the Queen ruled from her glass tower, able to affect those who disobeyed her, causing bad fortune, illness and even incarceration. The game is a form of escapism that allows each of them to develop parts of their personality that would otherwise not exist. Each of the three friends faces issues at home that are complicated and use the game to allow their personalities to explore possibilities.

When Zach's father returns to his mother after a three year separation, he decides that Zach is too old for make-believe and while Zach is at school, he throws out all of the action figures they used in the game with the exception of the few that Alice and Poppy had in their possession. Unable to reveal the depth of his loss to them, Zach tells them he no longer wants to play. Unhappy and unable to understand, Poppy decides that Zach needs a real quest to put him back on track.

What follows is an adventure that takes them to East Liverpool in the neighboring state of Ohio. They are on a quest to take the Queen, who Poppy learned was made from the bones of a small girl named Eleanor Kerchner, back to her family's grave site where she will finally be able to rest in peace. The quest will test their friendships, and their beliefs in what is real and what is merely imagination; blurring the lines between fantasy and reality until none of the three friends are sure which is which.



# Chapter 1

## Summary

It is early autumn and a cool wind comes across the sparse lawn in front of Poppy's house, threatening to blow Neptune's Pearl right off the asphalt that represents the Blackest Sea. Poppy, Alice and Zachary play a game of imagination and creation involving pirates, thieves, a great queen and a pirate ship, each operating a character on her deck. A mermaid has just taken thief Lady Jaye over the side and into the sea. The pirate who captains this ship, William the Blade, jumps in after her, insisting no one will be left behind just as two of Poppy's brothers, Tom and Nate come out of the house. They tease 12-old-Zach when they see him playing with the girls before Tom finally passes a message along to Alice that she is expected to be home before dark.

Alice obediently gets ready to go, heading inside to grab her backpack from Poppy's house. She can't help but stand and stare at the Great Queen, now the central figure in their game, locked in her cabinet. Zach joins her, giving her Lady Jaye and asking if she is okay. In a rare outburst, Alice expresses her feelings of confinement and restriction as imposed on her by her grandmother, citing the woman's increasing paranoia. Poppy arrives, inviting Alice to spend the night, but Alice knows she has to decline. Poppy talks with Zach about the game, even suggesting that once the current quest is complete, William the Blade can finally figure out where he comes from. Zach counters with the possibility that the Queen may issue another quest, such as perhaps freeing her from the cabinet.

Poppy leads the way to her room entering just as Alice is leaving with her bag, obviously unhappy, and after she is gone, Zach realizes that lately Alice doesn't seem happy any time that he and Poppy spent time together without her. He and Poppy delve further into the lives of William the Blade and Lady Jaye, talk about aliens, basketball and zombie uprisings before Zach heads downstairs. He stops again to look at the Queen, and it seems as though her eyes are not as closed as they had been earlier. While he wonders if his imagination is running away with him, her lashes flutter as though she is about to wake.

## Analysis

The theme of family and varying lifestyles is introduced along with the strong friendship ties that seem to foreshadow a coming test of their loyalties.

The theme of friendship is clearly revealed in this chapter as the main characters are introduced - three adolescents who are best friends. Zachary, Poppy and Alice still play a form of make-believe and enjoy it despite at the age of 12 being almost too old for this kind of imaginary role playing.



The issue of peer pressure is briefly touched on as Zachary is teased by Poppy's brothers when they see him playing with the girls. Zachary hopes that he can continue playing the game forever, despite how hard it is sometimes even now to really get into it. When he is playing, he becomes the characters, using different voices and feeling as though he really is William the Blade, his main figure. Poppy and Alice are equally creative, coming up with story lines, or back stories for their characters.

The theme of encroaching puberty is examined here also as Zach notices that Alice seems to get angry when Poppy and he spend time alone together. To further confuse the matter for him, Poppy has begun asking him how his character feels about Alice's character. It is clear that she is trying to find out how Zach feels, but finds it easier to ask on behalf of a character. It seems that one or both of the girls are beginning to see Zach as more than just another playmate. Despite developing a different interest in Zach, both girls want to continue playing make believe as well. This does however foreshadow a change in the relationship these three have – an inevitability of puberty and growing up.

The theme of encroaching puberty also encompasses the transition from childhood. Alice, Poppy and Zach are all creative, highly imaginative young adolescents who use make believe to act out and overpower issues that in real life they have no control over. They bestow their characters with attributes that allow them to envision a different kind of life. Lady Jaye is wild, loud and is a thief - all character traits Alice does not have in her real life. Alice lives under her grandmother's thumb and careful eye, and is unable to enjoy much freedom or control over her life. She chafes with the constant control that her grandmother has over her, and the only time she is able to truly express herself seems to be when Lady Jaye is at the helm and in control. Much in the same way, William the Blade is a tough, self-possessed, cunning and adventurous pirate who is the master of his own destiny and is as ready to come to the aid of a damsel in distress as he is to accept a dangerous quest from the Great Queen. In fact, often Zach becomes so involved in the story they've created that he says things without thinking, surprising himself at times because it sounds right anyway.

## **Discussion Question 1**

What kind of scenario has Poppy, Zach and Alice created, and how does it compare to their real lives?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Who are the characters created by Zachary and Alice and how do they differ from their real personalities?

## **Discussion Question 3**

How do Zach and Alice feel about Poppy's home life and why?



## Vocabulary

ramshackle, chafed, ominously, reputation, dismemberment, convicted, resigned, surplus



## Chapter 2

### Summary

Zach's father comes home from his job at the restaurant tired and limping as Zach hurries out the door joining Mr. Lockwood's class just after the buses arrived at school. One of his basketball teammates, Alex Rios, greets him and they discuss the upcoming game against Edison. Poppy passes a note to him after class that says "Questions." These are a part of the game, existing outside the game in which any of them had to answer questions about game content with answers known only to the questioner. He answers the questions about William the Blade during history including whether or not Lady Jaye likes him; who William thinks his father is; and even whether or not William has nightmares, the answers coming to him automatically as though they already were a known truth so much so that they felt real to him.

The story stays with Zach even after he finishes. He walks home alone, suddenly fearful partway there, the feeling so strong that he runs the rest of the way. The kitchen smells of spaghetti, chasing the creepiness away with its normalcy. He goes up to his room and realizes after a moment that his action figures including William the Blade were not where he left them. After a look around the room, Zach is convinced they are gone. Without William the Blade, the story was over and he hopes that he's just misplaced them, but they aren't anywhere he can think of. A sense of panic creeps over him as he calls out to his mother, asking her where they are. She assures him she's taken nothing from his room, assuring him he'll find them if he cleans up, but Zach knows they are gone.

It only takes a moment for his father to admit that he'd taken them, telling Zach it was time he grew up and got rid of them. Zach is livid and even his mother takes a stand with him, but the garbage men had already collected the trash where his father had thrown them. Zach is so angry that he yells at his father, whose certainty begins to slip as he realizes the depth of the mistake he's made. Feeling as though he's been beaten, Zachary thinks about the characters, all dead now, and tells his father to leave him alone assuring him that the time to be his father had passed years ago. Unable to eat, he goes to bed so despondent that he doesn't even change into his pajamas; doesn't cry; and doesn't sleep, his anger growing as the long night wore on. He is too angry to tell anyone what had happened and the only way to avoid it was to end the game.

### Analysis

The theme of family is strong in this section, delving into the kinds of issues that often occur when separations involve children. In this case, Zachary is still trying to get used to the fact that his father and mother are back together again.





The theme of trust is touched on when Zach's father returns after a three year absence. The break that their family suffered caused Zach to lose trust in his father and for three years, he and his mother have been forced to manage without him.

The intricacies of the loyalty of blood is examined as Zach continues to try to placate his father by performing well in activities he approves of so that he can do things he likes without criticism.

This segment also continues to delve into the issues of puberty as seen through the eyes of those affected. Like other boys his age, Zach has gone through a growth period that the author compares to taffy stretching, affecting his confidence, and his performance on the court improving both dramatically. Suddenly, his peers want to spend more time with him, and even Alice acts strange around him at times. In his mind, he hasn't changed much and can't understand when Alice giggles with her friends and won't talk to him when they are around. Other than the fact that he feels a sense of friendship and belonging with his teammates, Zach doesn't feel like he has changed that much, but even his father treats him differently. Half of the time, his father tries to be his friend and treats him like an equal adult, and the other half of the time he tries to be the father he was before he left, asserting his parental control wherever he deemed it necessary.

In this segment, the subject of privacy is touched on, and the key issue considered is the question of when does a child rank old enough to be afforded the right to privacy? While Zach is at school one day, his father goes into his room and gathering all of his characters and throws them into the garbage. By the time Zach gets home, the trash has been picked up and they are gone for good.

The line that divides love from hate is examined in this issue as Zach is livid, and in that moment hates his father for ruining everything. He hates him for coming back after being gone so long and is angry with himself because it matters so much which only seems to amplify his father's opinion that he was acting like a child. He is even partly angry with Poppy and Alice, but only because they haven't lost their characters. This is the first time that the depth of Zach's loss is felt. His anger is so all-consuming that he can't tell anyone what happened without it choking him, and decides his only course of action is to end the game. The loss is so immense that he is unable to deal with it at all.

## **Discussion Question 1**

How does puberty affect Zach's relationship with his peers, with Alice, and with his father?

## **Discussion Question 2**

What are questions and how do they affect the game and its players?



## Discussion Question 3

What changes occur as a result of Liam moving back in with Zach and his mother, and how does this affect his relationship with Zach?

## Vocabulary

defensive, overwhelmed, punctuation, expendable, improvising, elaborate, placating, silhouetted



## Chapter 3

### Summary

Zach's mood doesn't improve the next morning, despite his mother's assurances that his father had done all he could to try to get his things back but had no success. Luckily, he doesn't see Poppy or Alice on the way to school, reluctant to tell them the game is done. He almost ditches school for the day, but changes his mind at the last minute, arriving late as a result. Lunch is tasteless and he begs off practice after school feigning illness. Alice catches up with him on the way home, relaying a message from Poppy to walk slowly so that she would be able to catch up after getting a book from the library. Leo joins them and Alice asks if he's okay, but he dodges the question and then Poppy reaches them. They talk about superstitions and ghosts, even joking about possession until Leo peels off to go home leaving Alice, Poppy and Zach to go the rest of the way alone. He knows there is no way to avoid what is coming.

### Analysis

The continuing theme of separation and reunion are examined, along with the issue of privacy. Zachary struggles to deal with the loss of this remnant of his childhood, erased in one thoughtless action by his father. His father recognizes that he invaded his son's privacy and removed his things without his permission. Had he merely taken them, and put them away, the action could have been discussed or undone, but once he'd made the decision that it was time for his son to grow up, in his mind there would be no going back. In that one action, Zach feels as though he is being forced to leave that part of his childhood behind, and he is still too angry and upset to share the depth of his loss with either Alice or Poppy. The loss is so profound to him that he almost skips school that day, anxious about having to face Alice and Poppy.

The feeling of resentment is one that encompasses everyone in Zach's mind and what Zach's father doesn't recognize is that he has pushed his son away from him in such a profound way that it would take an equal but opposite profound action to enable Zach to forgive him. Zach's anger and resentment extends outward to his mother, who allowed his father to move back in after three years, and even to Poppy and Alice, who still have their own figures and have no idea of the separation anxiety he is experiencing. Zach's mother is convinced that they can just 'talk things out' later that evening, but for the time being, Zach is beyond reach to either her or his father. He even considers leaving home as he walks to school that morning, pushed into adulthood so hard and so fast that now a part of him is eager to complete the transition, but recognizes that staying home would make that impossible.

On the way home, he chastises himself for taking the same route and thinking that he might be able to avoid Poppy and Alice and the walk home is a tension filled journey while Zach wonders when someone will ask the inevitable question, 'Want to play?'



Again in this segment, the author shows Poppy's ability to create stories or scenarios when she suggests that it is important to hold your breath when you walk by a graveyard or risk inviting the newly dead to enter through your mouth and then possess you. When Alice insists she should have told them before they passed the graveyard she tells them that perhaps she didn't know then and had only just learned it herself the hard way. In fact, it was possible she wasn't Poppy at all now. She speaks with little or no affect to sell the illusion further.

## **Discussion Question 1**

How has the loss of his action figures affected Zach, and in which ways does this show?

## **Discussion Question 2**

What is one of Poppy's strengths, and how does she embrace it in this section?

## **Discussion Question 3**

What is the likelihood that Zach will forgive his father, and what makes you think so?

## **Vocabulary**

anticipating, superstitions, involuntarily, portmanteau, heralding, enchanter, possessed



# Chapter 4

## Summary

Alice is the first to suggest they get together, and Zach quickly tells them he can't. Instead of giving them the whole speech he'd prepared the night before, he just adds that he doesn't want to play anymore. For a minute, he considers telling them the truth, but then just quietly tells them he's too busy and they can continue without him if they want. Poppy is obviously upset, and tries to negotiate a little more time out of him but Zach stays the course. The more he thinks about it, the angrier he gets at his father, and his voice turns cruel as Poppy continues to press him. Alice suggests the mall instead, risking her grandmother's wrath, but Zach declines that as well. Poppy begins to lose her temper as well when Zach tells her he lost the Questions she'd given him, grabbing his arm and asking him what changed.

Finally, resigned to the fact that he doesn't want to play anymore, Poppy asks only that he bring his 'people' over to say goodbye to theirs. Again, he refuses and Poppy's face reveals the depth of the pain she feels, trying to convince him, but Zach lashes out at her telling her they aren't real and that she can't pretend forever. Poppy doesn't cry, but is close. She offers the only thing she can think of – to take the Queen out of her cabinet.

For a moment, he finds himself considering the possibilities. The Queen could give her blessing and all of William's crimes would be forgiven. He would be able to take Neptune's Pearl to any dock he wanted and the curse would be lifted. She could even reveal who William the Blade's father was. For a moment, he wondered what it would mean for the world but then reality intruded again and he remembered that William no longer existed. He

Zach tells Poppy 'no' one final time and, apologizing, walks the rest of the way home head hanging. That night over dinner, Zach's father apologizes, but sounds forced and Zach has little to say. The next day at practice, he is so aggressive that he is benched and lectured, and on the way home he thinks about running away again. He avoids Alice and Poppy the next day by hanging out with Alex Rios, but the following day Alice pushes a note into his hand on the way by. It says that there is an issue with the Queen and asks that he meet them at the hermit's place after school. The note adds that it's important, the final word underlined three times. Instead, he stays late after school, talking the coach into letting him shoot hoops.

## Analysis

The theme of separation anxiety continues as the thought of the fate of his characters is almost unbearable to Zach. The situation only gets worse when he tries to explain the situation to Poppy and Alice after school.



This touches on themes of loyalty and honesty, as Zach stubbornly refuses to share the depth of his loss with his friends. He can see the pain on their faces, and even desperation as they realize how serious he is and though he doesn't want to hurt either one of them, he can't bring himself to tell them the truth. Such a large portion of his life is ending and he is unable to deal with the depth of emptiness and pain he feels at the loss of not only his action figures, but the adventure itself.

Friendship is tested, and while the girls are hurt, they still try to salvage the situation. Both girls are willing to push the limits of their own boundaries to fix things; Alice is willing to go to the mall instead despite the fact that she is not allowed to go there, and Poppy is willing to take the Queen from her cabinet which would certainly get her into trouble. Poppy even asks him to allow their characters to say goodbye to each other in the hopes that somehow she would be able to draw him back into the world they'd created, but Zach is adamant and his demeanor leaves little room for argument. Poppy and Alice are dumbfounded.

Zach suffers through an insincere apology from his father at the dinner table, knowing that he isn't really sorry. His mother adds that she knows how hard it is for Zach to adjust to the changing circumstances and gives him a chance to air how he feels, but Zach has nothing to say.

This segment again shows just a small fraction of the complexities that can arise when parents who have separated for some time decide to try again. Often the children of such relationships are caught in the middle, fighting torn loyalties and unable to reconcile the change back to a full family unit again. Zach resents his father's attempts to treat him like a son again almost as much as he resents him trying to treat him as an equal or an adult. Mostly, he just wishes his father would go away again. His mother is caught between them both, but Zachary does little to explain how he is feeling and she is sure that things will work themselves out. She has no idea that Zachary is repeatedly considering running away from home. One thing is certain. Zach has no intention of forgiving his father, regardless of how much or how sincerely he tries to apologize. Some things are simply unforgivable in his mind.

The link between anger and aggression is seen here as Zach's feelings aren't completely hidden. He allows some of it to seep through during practice where his uncharacteristic aggression gets him benched. Zach continues to try to avoid both Alice and Poppy.

## Discussion Question 1

How does Zach handle the loss of his characters when Alice asks him if he wants to get together with them?



## Discussion Question 2

How do Alice and Poppy respond to Zach's decision, and why doesn't he simply tell them the truth?

## Discussion Question 3

What last effort do Alice and Poppy make to reengage Zach in the game, and what happens?

## Vocabulary

confusion, negotiation, carnivorous, illustrated, surrendering, aggressively, methodically



# Chapter 5

## Summary

Zach wakes in the middle of the night, unsure why until he hears a tapping sound. He gets up and looks out the window, surprised to discover Poppy and Alice outside. They motion for him to come down. He grabs his sneakers and a sweater before creeping downstairs. The clock shows just past midnight as he puts on his coat and goes outside. Alice tells him they are going to The Silver Hills – a metal junkyard half a mile away. He jogs along with them to the old shed they used to use as a clubhouse and follows them inside.

Once they sit down, Poppy takes the Queen out of her backpack and Zach is silenced by her open eyes which stay that way even when they lay her down. Poppy tells him the story she told Alice who is now a believer, describing how she'd taken the Queen out of her cabinet and then began having dreams in which a young girl insists that she help bury her bones so that she can finally rest.

Zach is mad at first, thinking it is all a prank but the more the girls talk, the more believable it somehow becomes that 'Eleanor Kerchner' was once a young girl whose father was so distraught over her death that he cremated her and used her bones to recreate one of her favorite dolls. Each night, Poppy insists, Eleanor came to her, insisting she will never rest or allow Poppy to until her bones are buried. As a final offering of proof, Poppy pulls off the dolls head to reveal a burlap bag inside, filled with ground ash and bone and labelled as having come from East Liverpool, Ohio.

The girls had already decided to take up the quest and Zach is surprised that Alice is willing to go despite how much trouble it will likely cause her. Having left their families a note, Alice and Poppy plan to take the three-hour long bus ride and return later that same night. Alice is surprised when Zach finally agrees to come. He hurries home to dress properly, pack food and water, and leave a note like they did before meeting at the mailbox. Zach packs what little cash he has, a book about poisonous plants, a sleeping bag, a flashlight, and a small garden spade. Zach isn't sure if he is leaving because he believes their story, or because it gives him an excuse to finally leave home for good.

## Analysis

The author uses a dream theme to explain how Poppy came across the knowledge she now seems to have about Eleanor and her history, giving her the ability to convince Zach and Alice to help her set things right. The idea that the Queen is actually created from the bones of a young girl who died under tragic circumstances is compelling and draws on their collective imaginations, casting them as possible heroes in their own real-life quest.





The friendship theme continues in this segment when Poppy and Alice come to Zach in the dark of night with the story of the history of the Queen. Zach is understandably skeptical, knowing that this is Poppy's strength – the ability to spin yarns that are at once believable and at the same time villainous, but this time Poppy's face is pale and drawn. The depth of the friendship between the three of them is obvious when, despite his reservations, Zach agrees to go along with them to East Liverpool.

The implication of a proper upbringing is felt here as the author draws on a family theme making it clear that Zach's parents raised him to behave like a man; to protect the people in his life he cares about. As such, he never considers leaving them to go so far at night and alone, despite the degree of fear and insecurity he is feeling himself. Alice agrees to go with them as well providing that Zach is also going and despite the degree of trouble she will be in as a result, which foreshadows his growing importance to her over and above their three way friendship. Trying to do the right thing as he'd been raised to, Zach suggests they talk to the police but Poppy is sure that will only make things worse. Poppy is determined to get on the bus to East Liverpool whether they come with her or not.

While daunting Zach feels as though he's embarking on an epic fantasy quest which somehow fills the void in his life at the moment. Leaving his parents a note, Zach assures them he'll be back later, but the idea of just continuing on has occurred to him as well. Truthfully, he isn't sure if he agreed because he believed Poppy and her ghost story, or because it gives him the opportunity to leave while still keeping the back door open to return if he decides to later.

## Discussion Question 1

Why is Poppy's story so hard for Zach and Alice to believe?

## Discussion Question 2

What makes Zach decide that he will go with the girls, despite his reservations?

## Discussion Question 3

What condition does Zach insist Poppy and Alice abide by if he is going to join them?

## Vocabulary

adrenaline, insomniac, plaintively, demonic, conjured, equivalent, trepidation, disembodied



# Chapter 6

## Summary

Zach waits with Poppy and Alice at the bus stop, each of them increasingly on edge as the departure time comes and goes without any sign of the bus. When the bus is fifteen minutes late, Alice is ready to give up, convinced it isn't coming, but as they discuss the issue, the bus rounds the corner. Zach questions Poppy, asking her if she knows where to go when they get there, and she assures him that Eleanor will tell them what they need to know when they get there. All Poppy knows is that the grave is located under a willow tree. When it is clear that Zach doesn't believe her, Poppy asks why he came along. Alice is tired, and pulls up her legs to sleep and Zach holds her ankle up. They employ 'rock, paper, scissors' to decide who will take the first watch and Poppy loses.

Zach dozes, waking when Poppy shrieks in time to see an old man just letting go of a bit of her hair. Calling himself Tinsloe Jones, he reeks of old and damp and has alcohol on his breath as he teases them about aliens and senile drivers who likely won't get them where they're going until they get off the bus two towns before East Liverpool, scared and tired. Before they can regroup, a bus station employee calls out to them, and they separate, meeting up again outside the bus station after the girls climb out of the bathroom window to join Zach. Together, they run into the dark of the unknown town.

## Analysis

The theme of encroaching adulthood continues as Zach thinks about the life his parents have. His father had come up with alternate and magical sounding names for where they lived but as Zach grew up, he realized that his father had simply been employing sarcasm, losing the magic he once felt. In fact, thinking back, the only time his parents seemed positive was when they spoke of the future and how things would be better, but as time wore on, they didn't seem to believe that anymore either. Mostly now, he sees the dreams his parents had as lies they told. Zach's decision to go with Alice and Poppy stemmed largely from watching his parents give up on their dreams and recognizing that most adults suffered the same kind of disappointment in life as they watched their dreams deteriorate into the day-to-day grind of survival.

As with each new generation, Zach acknowledges that his parents have given up on the dreams they'd had, and are now living a life of disappointment. Zach is determined not to give up on adventures and dreams. He knows where that road leads. Alice doesn't want to be the first one to give up or back out even knowing the severity of the punishment she will face if her grandmother finds out. Despite understanding that, and feeling bad for her, Zach still selfishly wants Alice to come. Alice is the one who manages to temper Poppy's ideas, figuring out how to make them work even when they sound crazy. When the bus comes into sight, Zach can clearly see how relieved Poppy is, and how filled with dread Alice is by comparison. Putting his own feelings aside, he



quietly tells her she doesn't have to go, revealing his feelings for her in the unselfish gesture, but Alice figures either way she will be in trouble so she may as well go with them. Once they are under way, she begins to feel better.

The adventure theme continues now that they are actually under way, but with little experience in adventuring in the real world, they are largely unequipped to cope with Tinshoe Jones when he engages them.

In this segment, the theme of possession continues. Poppy is steadfast in her belief that the Queen was made from the remains of a girl named Eleanor, and that she wants to be taken to the family plot in East Liverpool. Tinshoe Jones also conducts himself as though the Queen is a small child and assigns creepy attributes to her, reinforcing the story Poppy is telling. Fear and inexperience has them running into the unknown.

## **Discussion Question 1**

How does Zach's father feel about where they live, and how has Zach's feelings about his father's opinion changed over the years?

## **Discussion Question 2**

What does Zach believe is the mark of a child becoming an adult, and how does that affect his behavior?

## **Discussion Question 3**

How does Tinshoe Jones interact with Poppy, Alice and Zach, and how do they react to him?

## **Vocabulary**

impelled, dispensed, exasperated, moldering, hallucinated, ominously, authoritative



# Chapter 7

## Summary

Zach, Alice and Poppy stop outside the back of a tattoo parlor, tired and unsure. Taking out her bus schedule, Poppy searches for East Rochester and they determine that they were only two stops from East Liverpool. Alice and Zach discuss possible options for getting home when Poppy quietly insists that she plans to wait for the next bus and go on regardless of what they decide to do. Alice worries about where Poppy will sleep and Zach adds his suggestion that they bury the Queen the following weekend or the one after that one, but Poppy knows that if they don't do it now, they'll never come back a second time. She talks about how people always put off things that they want to do, never actually doing them, and she didn't want to be that kind of person. It is a sentiment that Zach can relate to. He suggests they try walking the two stops further overnight but Poppy doesn't relish travelling by flashlight.

As they trouble shoot the situation, Zach can feel William creeping into his psyche and his voice coming through, suggesting they make camp until the break of day. Then, he continues, they can walk along the river to East Liverpool. Alice is astounded that he wants to walk at all, but Zach, channeling William's personality, and calling her 'my lady' explains that he wants to rest, feast on their supplies and make a fire to warm their bones. In the morning, he tells her they can talk again about their situation if she still wants to go. Listening to them, Poppy can't help but rub in the fact that it appeared Zach did miss the game despite what he said, breaking the mood immediately. Poppy can't help but add another comment about the game, feigning innocence when the comment is directed at Alice about Lady Jaye but still garners a dirty look from Zach.

Alice can't understand their conflict seeing as they both wanted to continue, and that was what they were doing. Looking at the map, Alice notices a small park nearby, and it appears as though there is enough of a forest to stay hidden from the road. It is too close however to build a fire, and Alice grouses, wondering how she'd been talked into doing any of this. They cross the highway and climb down the bank until they feel reasonably hidden.

## Analysis

The relationship these three friends have is tested repeatedly. Poppy is determined to continue, despite Alice and Zach's reservations. It is clear that Poppy would prefer they stay together, and Zach is in a quandary. If Alice insists on returning home, he can either go with her to make sure she gets home safely which would leave Poppy to continue alone; or he could go with Poppy to ensure her safety, and leave Alice to make it home alone. Either way, he would be leaving one of his friends alone, and Zach doesn't like either option.



The ongoing theme of encroaching adulthood and puberty continues as each of the three friends struggles to cope with the changes coming, each seeing things from the same but different perspective. When Zach tries to dissuade Poppy from continuing alone she explains her stubbornness in large part because she knows that if she agrees to give up now, they will never try again. Instead, they'll find excuses not to go, and they'll lose the opportunity they had to be the hero of this story. She fiercely defends her position, insisting that there are two kinds of people – those who do things that they say they will, and those who just say they will. She is determined to be the former and it is a sentiment that Zach can relate to. His parents have always had great plans but little follow through that left them disappointed with their lives. Poppy is determined not to simply give up and become an imagination starved version of their parents.

Zach thinks about how William would handle the situation, steering his ship by the stars, and the more he considers it, the more William's personality and voice slips in to mingle with his own. Drawing on William's courage, he is able to convince Alice that things will be fine, but Poppy breaks the spell by bringing up the game. When she does, Zach squashes William again, angry that she even brought it up. Still, Poppy pushes the boundaries by talking about Lady Jaye. Alice is tired, and has had enough of the bickering her friends are engaged in. She comments that she doesn't understand their attitudes as they are both getting what they want.

## Discussion Question 1

How do Alice, Poppy and Zach cope with being in a strange town in the middle of the night?

## Discussion Question 2

What prevents Alice from being able to go home on the next bus instead of continuing on to East Liverpool?

## Discussion Question 3

What does Zach do to calm Alice down, and how does Poppy ruin the mood?

## Vocabulary

adrenaline, perspective, provisions, meager, triumphant, propelling, crestfallen



## Chapter 8

### Summary

Zach takes his sleeping bag out of his backpack and opens it all the way so that they can all avoid sitting on the damp ground. Poppy takes the Queen out of her bag and the Queen seems to look as tired as they are. Then Poppy takes out everything else she brought and spreads it out, offering it up to the others. Zach does the same, suggesting that as usual, one of them should keep watch. Alice doesn't think that it is necessary, but Zach believes they'll sleep better. Poppy offers to take the first shift and wake Zach in an hour. Alice layers her clothes and wraps herself up in her coat and falls asleep almost right away. Poppy wraps herself in a thick blanket and leans against a tree with the Queen on her lap. Zach watches, a creepy feeling washing over him when he looks at the doll and he asks Poppy if the whole thing is just a game, but she assures him it is real. Too tired to argue, he lies down and falls asleep.

He dreams of a building, and a girl with yellow hair who watches her father make things from bone china. As soon as his mind realizes it is Eleanor, she turns to look in his direction. Then he is in front of a house and sees a woman that he instinctively knows is Eleanor's aunt who came to look after her when her mother died and her father showed no interest in remarrying. Eleanor's aunt is a strict and dour woman who gives Eleanor chores to keep her busy so that she won't play outside and get dirty. Then she took away all of the dolls that Eleanor's father had made for her, insisting children break things. She displays them instead with the reject pieces that Eleanor's father brought home. Zach watches her clean, and then he sees her making toys for herself by putting eyes on clothes pins and talking to them, calling them by the same names as she did her dolls.

When Zach wakes, and gets his bearings, he sees that Poppy had fallen asleep on her watch, and somehow the Queen was lying in the dirt right behind his head. Her eyes are wide open and when an ant crawls out of one socket, he scuttles back away from her. Looking around, he realizes for the first time that the sleeping bag has been shredded, and pieces of it are everywhere along with all of their food. He tries to figure out who made the mess, looking over at the doll first, and then at the squirrel who helped himself to an open jar of peanut butter.

### Analysis

The overall theme of friendship continues here, as despite discomfort and the fear of the unknown, Alice and Zach are still supporting Poppy's quest. Zach manages to help Alice feel comfortable by talking to her as though she is Lady Jaye and he is William the Blade. Zach likes adventure, but has never really roughed it and mostly he feels helpless, and isn't sure what they should be doing. Zach can't help thinking about how he'd met Poppy and Alice for the first time. Poppy had been bold even then, coming up



to him to talk to him. She'd brought Alice into the fold as well and Zach remembers how even then they'd tried to increase the power of their minds by concentrating their efforts together. Now their friendship had them trying to overcome obstacles and complete a quest against steep odds for real instead of with imagination and creativity.

Despite the fact that Zach longed for adventure and excitement, part of him still needs to know if this is all just an elaborate game. The author once again uses a dream theme in this section to convince Zach that Eleanor is more than Poppy's imagination. The dream is so vivid that it seems as though Zach had burst through the barrier of time and space, shown a glimpse of Eleanor's life so that he would believe and continue to help.

The author also uses this segment to continue the transformation of the Queen from the ruler of the land to the tormented ghost that is now leering and sinister. Zach is stunned and unnerved after the dream he had to see the Queen on the ground right above his head, and their supplies scattered around them. Despite seeing a squirrel in the peanut butter, the power of suggestion and circumstances have opened Zach's imagination to another reality entirely. This foreshadows that he is much more likely to try to help Poppy complete this quest than take Alice home.

## Discussion Question 1

Who takes charge of the situation they are in at this stage, and in which ways?

## Discussion Question 2

What details make Zach's dream feel more like a reality to him, and how does that change how he feels about what they are doing, if at all?

## Discussion Question 3

What possibilities might explain the destruction Zach wakes to find, and what does Zach believe the cause is?

## Vocabulary

hammock, despair, marauding, absently, orbs, scuttled, confetti



# Chapter 9

## Summary

Zach shakes Alice until she wakes up, and then shows her the mess he woke up to. Alice wonders if Poppy is responsible, but Zach doesn't think so. He is now a believer, despite Alice's attempts to convince him that a ghost could not have been responsible. While she suggests raccoons, the hairs on his arms stand up and Zach realizes that Alice is probably scared too. He quietly tells her that he thinks it was Eleanor even though Alice insists that Poppy probably got the story about Eleanor from a library book and has just gotten carried away as usual. Alice even speculates that Poppy used ashes from a grill to fill the doll to help convince them but Zach doesn't want to lose the feeling of possibility now that he has it.

Alice rummages through Zach's bag, looking for food of any kind, but finds Poppy's folded up note instead. He tries to take it back, but Alice wants answers. At that moment, Poppy shrieks and jumps to her feet ready to take on any threat. Still breathing hard, she explains that she'd dreamed she was Eleanor and had fallen. Zach suggests she look around and when he asks if Eleanor seemed angry, Poppy defends her immediately, insisting that Eleanor wants them to take her to East Liverpool and wouldn't do anything to make that quest harder for them. Poppy wonders aloud if Tinsloe Jones might have been responsible, but despite the shiver that runs up Zach's spine, he can't think of any reason that Tinsloe Jones would have followed them or done this.

They decide to head for the doughnut shop they'd seen the night before, doing their best to tidy up before leaving. Pooling their financial resources, they have a total of \$46.50 and a pile of pennies. Poppy suggests they save some for the trip home, and they each set aside the bus fare before going inside. The smell of food is intoxicating. They order hot chocolates, and each order a doughnut.

Poppy asks Zach if he'd want to be a ghost if he died, leading to a conversation about death, ghosts and poltergeists. Poppy gives them details of the dream she'd had, including what she saw, and the abuse she'd suffered before falling at the hands of Eleanor's aunt. Zach wants to tell them about his dream too, but somehow feels stupid about it now. In the harsh lights of the doughnut shop, what seemed so real ten minutes earlier now fills him with uncertainty. It all mixes together in his mind.

The man behind the counter calls out 'No problem' and when Zach questions him, he tells Zach that his 'blonde friend' looks hungry, giving the doll a doughnut on the house. Stunned, Zach turns to Alice who assures him it was only a joke, but she looks nervous now too. Zach reminds them that Tinsloe had done something similar; telling them he wouldn't talk to the blonde and the doughnut churns in his stomach.





Poppy insists on finishing the quest and getting Eleanor back to the graveyard so that she can rest, despite the fear in her voice, and Zach agrees, having already decided to continue on. Alice is reluctant, still thinking about what her aunt will do to her when she finds out, but finally agrees provided that if the return bus shows up before they have finished, they will get on it anyway. When Poppy won't agree, Alice wants to go directly to the bus station, but Zach steps in. As they get up to go, finally agreed on continuing for now, Poppy asks them again whether or not they believe her. Alice assures her they do before Zach has a chance to tell them about his dream.

## Analysis

When Zach wakes to find the damage that surrounds them after the dream he'd had of Eleanor, it is easy for him to believe it is all real. This is in part because he wants to believe, despite the skepticism he faces from both Poppy and Alice, because in his mind if ghosts really do exist there is every possibility that magic exists as well and that is something Zach truly wants to believe in. There in the woods at that moment it all seems possible.

The author uses encroaching puberty and the onset of adulthood in this segment to fuel the three friends on in their quest as Zach considers Poppy's comments from the night before. She knew that if they quit now they'd never try again. Zach has seen his parents give up on their dreams and knows that she is probably right. At home in 'real' surroundings, he might be embarrassed to consider magic as possible, but even the existence of dark magic would be better than the idea that there was no such thing at all in his mind. His parents, along with all of the other adults he knows, have all grown up to become bitter and unhappy and part of him equates that to their inability to believe in the possibilities anymore. Somehow, they'd given up, and Zach would rather do anything but become them, so he is desperate to hang onto the belief that all of this is real. So far, the evidence is on his side, especially when he considers his dream.

When Alice finds the Questions in Zach's pack, she is surprised and confused. Their friendships had been tested when Zach so suddenly dropped the game and began avoiding them. She didn't understand why he would pull away from them, something that had hurt her more than she wanted to admit. Here, the author foreshadows the complexity of Alice's feelings for Zach, but before she can explore the reasons behind his withdrawal from them and the game, Poppy wakes commanding their attention. She is still determined to continue, and now Zach, having dreamed about Eleanor, is a believer as well.

The lines between imagination and reality continue to blur as the author introduces a second witness to the ever growing connection between the Queen and Eleanor in the doughnut shop, where the man behind the counter comes over to their table after seemingly having had a conversation with the Queen, determined she was hungry, and then provided her with a doughnut on the house. Alice is sure he is just joking but Tinsloe had done something similar with them on the bus, insisting he wouldn't talk to 'the blonde' because he didn't like the way she looked at him. At this point, Poppy is



willing to leave her friends, feeling so strongly about getting Eleanor back to her grave site that she is determined to continue on even if she had to do it alone. Despite Alice's reservations, Zach manages to convince them that, as friends, they have to stick together.

## **Discussion Question 1**

What does Alice discover in Zach's pack, and what conclusions might she be drawing from it?

## **Discussion Question 2**

What incidents in this segment seem to directly support Eleanor's lingering spirit exists?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Why is Alice anxious about time more than Zach or Poppy, and what conditions does she propose?

## **Vocabulary**

convey, ransacked, faltered, regurgitating, astonishment, ridiculous, poltergeist, disembodied



# Chapter 10

## Summary

Unlike everything Zach has read about adventuring overland, he finds the reality of it boring. He walks with Alice and Poppy who, after a while, begins to talk about the game, suggesting she might know who William's father is. Zach reminds her of her promise not to discuss the game, but she reminds him that she'd only promised not to ask why he'd quit playing. His heart wasn't in arguing with her, so he admits that he had some ideas himself. Poppy is stunned, but Zach just continues as though nothing had changed. Zach mentions that William wouldn't change who he is no matter who his father was, and Poppy asks him if that included if his father was the Duke of Deepwinter Barrow as well. Zach likes the idea, adding that if he was William's father, perhaps they would be able to assassinate him, or perhaps just pretend that he is the Duke's son for that purpose.

Alice stops as the path abruptly ends where another river converges with the Ohio. While there were bridges, they clearly didn't accept foot traffic. The three friends split up at the marina, hoping to find a way across the river, agreeing to meet up again in five minutes. Zach finds an old rowboat, but it is so damaged that he couldn't imagine it being seaworthy. Poppy calls him over to tell him that Brian's father has a dingy for sale.

Alice comes back then telling them there is no way to walk to East Liverpool, and apologizing, announces it is time to go home. Zach argues, but Alice threatens to reveal his secret where the Questions were concerned and he backs off, agreeing with Alice then. Poppy sees that, and counters the blackmail with some of her own against Alice. Alice backs down, horrified at Poppy's veiled threat, and terrified about what the consequences of her trip were going to be, but Poppy doesn't care.

Zach goes down the dock to look at the dingy, but it is shabby and not worth the money in his eyes. He turns and sees a small fiberglass sailboat with a striped black and white sail with a sunfish symbol on the cloth. To his surprise, the boat is named Pearl and to him that is an unmistakable sign. He jumps onto the hull and tells Poppy and Alice that they are pirates and as such will steal the vessel they need. The girls are stunned.

## Analysis

In this segment, the author reveals the likely truth about quests in real life when he describes Zach as bored. In books that he's read, characters never seemed to be plagued by the kinds of discomforts they were enduring now, or at least if they were, it was seldom mentioned. They all suffer such boredom that soon Poppy begins talking about William and musing about his parental history. Although Zach is bothered by it at first, he can't help but admit to himself that he wants to know how the story might have ended. He admits to having had ideas of his own as well. Their discussion reveals the



fact that Zach had lied to them when he told them he wasn't interested in the game anymore.

In this segment, the lines between reality and imagination continue to clash. Zach considers their options when they come to a section where a waterway must be crossed. He considers what William may have done, and again is confronted with the realization that make-believe is easier than real life.

The friendship theme is tested again when Alice insists that since there is no way to get across by foot on their quest now. Poppy isn't ready to give up, and neither is Zach. What follows is an argument that has everyone revealing they've been keeping secrets from each other. Poppy keeps repeating that she doesn't care and that her only concern now is Eleanor. Zach is angry and digging his heels in on all fronts. Nothing seems right to him and wonders for a moment about all of the nameless failures that had come and gone before him.

The author introduces providence bordering on directions when the Pearl is discovered. When Zach suddenly comes across the small sailboat it is like a message from the Gods - a boat just waiting for them. Zach doesn't even think twice. He calls the girls to him and they are just as astonished when he announces that they are pirates and won't be buying anything.

## **Discussion Question 1**

What conflict rages on between the three friends?

## **Discussion Question 2**

What impasse do they arrive at and why?

## **Discussion Question 3**

What message does Zach get from fate to continue on with the quest?

## **Vocabulary**

questers, provisions, precedent, brigands, lamenting, anguished, indecision



# Chapter 11

## Summary

Zach helps Poppy to come aboard, sending her to the front while he helped to balance in the middle. Alice unties the lines while Zach tries to remember everything he's read about sailing. As soon as the lines are untied, Pearl begins to drift from the dock and Alice jumps aboard. Within a minute or so she is laughing despite her earlier despair that they wouldn't honor their promise to go home with her. Zach understood the theory of the principles of sailing, but they sit in the water spinning with the current as he orients himself. Still angry, Alice avoids Poppy.

At that moment, Zach is happy despite everything going on. He is on a ship called the Pearl, the captain of his destiny. They begin to get a handle on her, carving more and more speed until Zack slows them down using the tiller. They sail for about an hour but seemingly much longer. The time they have is running out and by 2:40 they still hadn't arrived and even Poppy is getting nervous. Then she suddenly sees the pottery factory and tells Zach to turn around. They try to turn but capsize instead. Zach rights the vessel and helps both Alice and Poppy get back on board. For a moment, they don't say anything, but then Alice loses her composure. She lunges at Poppy, grabs the Queen and throws her overboard. For a moment, everything freezes. Then the Queen hit the water, bobbed for a moment and sank.

## Analysis

With the introduction of the hand of fate, symbolized by the discovery of a real life Pearl waiting at the dock, the three friends find renewed energy to continue their quest to get Eleanor to her destination. Zach is able to forget about the Questions list, and whatever secrets Alice and Poppy are keeping from him, for the moment content to be the captain of a real ship under a perfect blue sky.

Reality overlaps harshly once again when Poppy brings up the subject of the Pearl's real owners and how they will feel about their missing sailboat. Zach is uncomfortable thinking about it. Playing the game they'd never had to consider the consequences of robbing people, imagining that they deserved it in some way. Slowly, this quest is changing Zach's perception of William and despite Zach's desire to continue playing the game (which he surely would have done had his father not thrown out his action figures), the realities of life continue to intrude making it harder for him to go on as the child who played with no thought to the consequences of his behavior.

The ever popular theme of encroaching adulthood inserts itself again as Zach is now forced to consider danger and risk and balance them against the responsibility he feels to keep the girls safe; and he has to resolve their need to finish this quest as it stacks up against how he feels about their honesty and integrity. He decides they'll call the



sailboat's owners once docked in East Liverpool which is a direct conflict with his childhood-like desire to live as the pirate William the Blade whose excuses for stealing now sound hollow and lame to him somehow.

For a little while, they are almost okay again, but when they capsize and end up in the water Alice really explodes and throws the Queen as far as she can into the river, hoping to put an end to the entire quest. Alice is tired of trying to see how real it all is.

## **Discussion Question 1**

How does this quest compare to the quests that William the Blade has been on? Does Zach prefer the pretend quests or the real one and why?

## **Discussion Question 2**

What conflicts arise in Zach's mind at this stage as a result of going on this quest?

## **Discussion Question 3**

How have the dynamics between the three friends changed in this segment and why?

## **Vocabulary**

capsized, propelled, grudgingly, punctuated, exhilarating, careened



# Chapter 12

## Summary

Zach dives into the water, just managing to get the Queen before she sinks out of reach. In the meantime, the Pearl has run aground, and the girls are wading to shore, still arguing. He swims until he reaches the shore, barely able to get himself out of the water. Poppy and Alice are both freezing as well. Their packs are gone, dumped when they capsized. Alice asks Zach what time it is, and when she learns it is 3:20, she gets to her feet insisting they have to go.

Poppy takes the Queen from Zach and they follow Alice until almost 3:40 at which point Alice begins to cry. Fifteen minutes later when the bus is gone for sure, Alice turns on Poppy, and for the next few moments they shout back and forth at each other, revealing some of the secrets they'd kept from each other and from Zach.

Zach tries to fix things, going after Alice when she runs off embarrassed. He finally finds her sitting against a tree. He avoids the real issues, complimenting her sailing instead, and eventually gets a smile from her. Then he apologizes for not going back like he promised, but Alice isn't only mad about that. She asks Zach if he really believes that a ghost is talking to Poppy, and Zach has to admit his dream now. Alice isn't happy to hear that Eleanor is talking to both Poppy and Zach, but it isn't jealousy that is the problem. Alice can't believe that a ghost would haunt Poppy and Zach, but her own dead parents wouldn't come to her even once to haunt her. If they bury Eleanor and she is gone, then it was all real and her parents didn't care enough about her to even say goodbye to her. Zach feels helpless. He suggests that maybe the dead aren't given those choices. Then Poppy arrives to say she thinks she knows how to get to town.

## Analysis

In this segment, the author finally reveals why Alice is so reluctant to believe that Eleanor is talking to Poppy through the Queen and in her dreams – a situation that Alice is sure will be resolved so long as there is no doll. She throws it into the river, sure that once the Queen is gone their quest will be over. She doesn't expect Zach to retrieve the doll, but she also has no reason to suspect that Eleanor has also communicated with Zach. All of this is revealed as their collective friendships are tested once again.

This stage is pivotal for the three young friends as in anger the two girls turn on each other and reveal each other's secrets. In their anger, they both say things that they wouldn't or shouldn't have under normal circumstances. The only one still harboring a secret now is Zach and his is the largest of the three. With each additional setback, he feels increasingly responsible for being the catalyst of all of their problems. He realizes that had he told the truth about his father throwing away his action figures, they would still likely be at home; the Queen would be in her cabinet; Alice and Poppy wouldn't be



mad at each other; and none of them would be in any trouble. The weight of his guilt is enormous. He'd thought that Alice and Poppy were such close friends that they would simply continue the game by themselves. It never occurred to him that by quitting, he'd be dismantling everything. In fact, he'd always thought that once things cooled down again, he'd be able to go back and continue the friendship where they'd left off. He'd counted on the fact that they would still be there.

The revelations made by Poppy confuse Zach. Although Zach is entering puberty, he hasn't yet given much thought to dating, or even thinking about girls in a romantic way. Since girls usually mature faster than boys, the author lends credibility to the story by revealing Alice is feeling this way although Zach hasn't given it much thought yet. Zach wants to know if everything Poppy said was true, and if Alice really liked him. In his mind, it is a compliment, and in truth, though Zach hadn't really thought about asking any girl out, considering it now, he realizes that if he were going to ask someone, he would want that person to be just like Alice.

The themes of death and loss are focused on in this segment as Zach goes after Alice, feeling responsible for everything that's gone wrong. When he finds her, she reveals a deeper truth that goes to the heart of her feelings where the Queen is concerned. When Zach admits that he's dreamed about Eleanor as well, she is crushed. She didn't want to believe any of it was true because to do so would be to admit that her parents didn't care enough about her to communicate with her after their deaths. Zach feels like an idiot for not realizing she might feel this way, and can't think of how to fix it. Finally, he suggests that perhaps they don't have a choice, and maybe being a ghost sucks, which makes her smile.

## Discussion Question 1

What are the secrets that Poppy and Alice reveal in their anger and what effect does the new information have on their three way friendship?

## Discussion Question 2

What is the truth behind how Alice really feels about the Queen being Eleanor and why?

## Discussion Question 3

What are the biggest issues facing the three friends now?

## Vocabulary

bedraggled, sloughed, disintegrate, apocalypse, defensively, awkwardness





# Chapter 13

## Summary

Zach, Alice and Poppy slish their way down Main Street to an open diner where they pool their resources. Inside, a woman sends them to clean up before sitting down and then offers them a table for four. Alice corrects her, confused, but Poppy insists four is fine. The waitress who serves them calls the Queen 'superscary', and Alice agrees. Zach is just grateful that she saw the Queen as a doll unlike Tinsloe Jones, the doughnut maker and the woman up front who all seemed to see her as a person.

With just less than \$13, they have limited options, finally settling on chili and fries. When Alice gets up to find ketchup and hot sauce, Poppy asks Zach why he refused to play the game even just once more, and why he filled out the Questions, but lied to her about it. He is about to tell her when Alice returns. She had asked about the bus, learning that the next one was the following day and Zach can't help but wonder if this is all happening exactly the way the Queen wanted it to. They are all tired after eating and when Alice gasps, and Zach sees that the Queen is looking out the window with exactly the same expression as Poppy is. Zach tells her to stop fooling around, but Poppy seems to have no idea what he is talking about.

They pay, and leave the restaurant completely broke but for bus fare home. Alice notices a tourist map that shows the Carnegie Library, and they decide to go there but find that the library is closed until Monday. Alice breaks into the building through a window, dropping down onto a desk - something Lady Jaye would have done Zach tells her. From inside, she calls to 'William', using a voice that is an eerie blend of her own and her character in the game. He can't help but grin. Lights come on, and Zach hops down, taking the Queen so that Poppy can follow. Zach teases Alice about looting the place and she plays along, but Poppy follows silently, knowing that if she joins in, the game will end.

They explore each level, play games involving monsters and chase each other around until they are tired. Poppy chooses then to remind them that they can't afford to get comfortable and in that instant, the fun is over and the feud starts anew. Zach tries to talk Alice into fixing things with Poppy, but she isn't willing to make the first move. Poppy finds a map to the cemetery and Zach dozes off, listening to the girls talk quietly. He dreams that he is on a lawn and his legs won't work. He looks up at a big house, and his vision darkens at the edges. Remains of porcelain dolls are all around him and he hears Eleanor's father comment that she looks just like one of them. He wakes to find a woman standing over him, and screams before she does.



## Analysis

In this segment, the author begins by describing East Liverpool, similar to almost any small town in America where Main Street is full of shops that stand empty and the few that still remain survive by having permanent 'Final Sale' sales. Even the flyers for Pants Unlimited indicate a business on its last legs for years.

The weight of Zach's secret, and the lie he told the girls about wanting to quit the game still plague him. The tension between the two girls continues and although they are no longer fighting or arguing, the silence that drags beyond necessary communication is excruciating to Zach. The combination of his feelings of responsibility and the weight of the secret he still carries is almost paralyzing.

Now that Zach knows how Alice feels about him, he can't think about anything else. The fact that Alice likes him is great, but the idea of asking her out on a date is terrifying to him. The knowledge that she feels that way about him somehow changes their dynamics, and he isn't sure what he should do now, and he goes over and over his options.

The disparity between make-believe adventures and real life quests continues as they find a restaurant for food and try to decide how best to utilize their dwindling resources.

In this segment, the author introduces yet another person who sees the Queen and treats her as an equal member of their party, offering them a table for four although there are clearly only three of them there. The lines between reality and quest continue to blur as Alice and Zach both notice as the Queen imitates Poppy's look and mannerisms, and frightened, they tell Poppy to stop fooling around. Poppy insists she has no idea what they are talking about.

Breaking into the library is another way in which the author reveals how the young friends are changing. Just two days earlier, none of them would have considered this to be a viable option, but now it seems only logical. Inside, Zach is able to call the marina and leave a message about the Pearl, absolving himself of a little of his guilt by taking some responsibility for the initial theft.

The importance of truth is discussed here again as Zach still tries to cope with his feelings of responsibility for the tensions between the girls. In his mind, he traces each argument back to the beginning when he told them he didn't want to play the game anymore. He isn't sure now why he didn't just tell them the truth. Zach wants Alice and Poppy to be friends again, and he talks to Alice about it, but Alice feels as though the only thing that matters to Poppy is the Queen, and in her mind, Poppy is so obsessed with the quest that she can't or won't see anything else. Everyone around her is either with her or against her, and Alice decides that if Poppy still wants their friendship, she can say so.

The library provides a warm and comfortable place where they can safely unwind for a while, and the fact that they are still young in heart and mind is shown as they pass the



time play games, involving make-believe (but not the game of course). Poppy finds and copies a map to the cemetery, and then tired they all doze off. Zach dreams another memory of Eleanor's, seeing what he thinks is the end of her life. He wakes on Sunday morning to discover the librarian standing over him.

## **Discussion Question 1**

In which events in this segment does the author attribute life to the Queen, and when has this happened previous to this, if at all?

## **Discussion Question 2**

What two primary feelings does Zach have about the quest and his friends and why?

## **Discussion Question 3**

How does Zach show that he is still willing and able to pretend?

## **Vocabulary**

paralyzing, skeptically, banquette, administrative, exhilarating, philanthropist, rotunda



# Chapter 14

## Summary

Zach wakes to find himself staring into the eyes of the librarian of the Carnegie Library early on Sunday morning. Poppy and Alice are on the couch, just waking up. When she gets over her surprise at finding them there, she ushers them to the break room where she insists they will sort things out, including calling their parents. Zach might have considered running, but he realizes that Poppy isn't holding the Queen anymore. He looks around then, half expecting to see the kind of damage they woke to in the forest the morning before, but nothing seems out of place. Then Poppy realizes she doesn't have the Queen either and panics. Zach describes the Queen to the librarian as Poppy insists she had her when she went to sleep. The librarian doesn't care and ushers them into the break room, insisting the doll isn't going anywhere, but Zach isn't sure of that.

Once they get seated, the librarian puts on the kettle and puts some Fig Newtons in front of them before she finally introduces herself as Katherine Rausse – Miss Katherine to them. Poppy takes the initiative and introduces the three of them to her. The water boils and she makes them tea and then locks them in the room so that she can go and call her boss. When Miss Katherine returns, Alice volunteers to call home first. When she comes back, Poppy goes. While Poppy is gone, Zach summons his nerve and asks Alice to go out with him. She agrees, feeling somewhat awkward. Poppy returns, and Zach leaves and walking to the office he realizes that he wants to finish what they'd started.

In the office, Miss Katherine again explains how she'd found Zach asleep in the library and where they were. After dispensing directions, she gives the phone to Zach who is surprised to find his father on the line and even more surprised when his father begins by apologizing to him for making him feel like he had to leave. Zach explains the truth of their adventure and his father asks if they finished the quest. He admits they haven't, but his father tells them he has two and a half hours before they get there, and Zach isn't sure that is enough time either, but agrees he'll see them then. His father takes the opportunity to really talk to Zach then about what he intended and wishes him luck with the quest before hanging up. Something on a grand scale had shifted and Zack stands there for a minute, letting it settle in him.

## Analysis

Reality and responsibility intrude on the quest once again when the librarian discovers Zach, Alice and Poppy sleeping in the library the following morning and it appears that any hopes they had of completing the quest are over. Zach considers running, but he feeling of responsibility for the girls is so strong that he won't leave them behind. Offered the choice of either having the librarian call their parents, or call the police, the



decision is an easy one. Zach, Alice and Poppy don't want to explain the situation to the authorities who would only inevitably see them home anyway.

The librarian tries to determine why the youngsters are so far from home on their own, but despite her unusual manner of dress which symbolizes a youthful outlook if nothing else, Zach, Poppy and Alice still don't trust her enough to reveal the truth of their quest to put Eleanor to rest.

The Queen isn't with them when the librarian takes them to the break room, and Poppy is surprised and panicked to realize she is gone. Again the author attributes an otherworldly consciousness to the Queen, seemingly giving her the ability to move about on her own and strengthening Zach's suspicions that there is more to the doll than he originally believed.

This segment is filled with revelations and insights. Poppy begins by revealing the reasons she involved them in the quest. She felt as though they were leaving her behind and what most people simply referred to as growing up felt more like dying to her. Poppy believed that her friends were forgetting who they were, and thought that a real quest would remind them again. In many ways, her assessment was and is correct. Alice had spoken with her about her increasing feelings for Zach; and Zach had begun playing sports and expressing embarrassment whenever his peers caught him playing with her and Alice. She feared that they would soon leave her behind, much as Zach had already announced he had. Poppy hadn't lost her desire to play, and the stories they created together were the only continuity she felt she had in her life. To have her friends leave that part of their lives behind without seeming to feel the loss was unthinkable to her, and she is angry with them for being able to leave her so easily.

Another revelation comes when Miss Katherine offers to call social services for them and none of them step forward, despite each of them expressing how little they liked their home lives. Alice felt smothered by her grandmother; Zach wished his father would go away again and both he and Alice envied Poppy's freedom; and Poppy secretly wanted nothing more than to be part of a family, using her relationship with Alice and Zach as her surrogate family in the story they all create together.

Instead, one at a time they call home to discover something other than what they expect. Alice hears her grandmother's age for the first time, bringing her a new realization and perhaps appreciation of the effort put into raising her; Poppy discovers her family cares more than they let on, and were worried and angrier with her than she expected; and Zach talks to his father who stuns him by first apologizing for his part in the way Zach felt, for throwing his figures away, for pushing too hard, and telling Zach that he only wanted to help him to stand up for himself but didn't want him to grow up to be mean like him. Zach is stunned by the admission, and even more so when his father seems to be giving him permission to continue their quest at least until he and Zach's mother get there. Somehow, a great shift of perspectives has occurred and each of them tries to adjust to their new insights of their families.



## **Discussion Question 1**

What shift in perspective occurs where the Queen is concerned and why?

## **Discussion Question 2**

What realization does Zach come to and what prompts him to get to that realization?

## **Discussion Question 3**

What is the real reason that Poppy involved Alice and Zach in this quest?

## **Vocabulary**

vandalized, adrenaline, impressive, melodic, inevitable, mannerisms, seismic



# Chapter 15

## Summary

When Zach comes out of the office, he asks Miss Katherine if she'd found the doll, but she said there was nothing. Zach looks himself but can't find the Queen anywhere. He can't feel her anywhere either, which is odd because he always could before. Miss Katherine asks Zach what they were looking for, having seen the copy made of the Spring Grove Cemetery. She assures him that she'll understand, so he asks her if she'd ever heard of Eleanor Kercher, but the only Kercher she knows is a well-known potter whose work is displayed downstairs. She recalls that there was a grisly story of some sort.

Zach is about to go down and look himself when she stops him, herding him back to the break room. She opens the door with the key still sticking in the lock, and leaves to call the director again with an update. Afterward, she continues, saying she'll arrange for lunch. They thank her, but as soon as she leaves Zach talks about escaping. Poppy and Alice are both reluctant at first, but Zach convinces them that they'll find the Queen and get out. Poppy seems to be deflated, and he prods her again hoping she'll remember something that will help them find her again. Alice wonders aloud if the Queen was somehow controlling Poppy's behavior and Poppy is less than impressed with her sudden decision to believe a ghost might exist now. Zach assures them again that they'll find her, and tries to think of a way to get out.

Alice looks up and without a word, climbs onto the table and pushes a ceiling tile. It moves and Alice explains her theory that she can get to the outside of the door through the ceiling. Zach is impressed and after a few minutes, they hear her drop to the floor outside. The door opens and they split up to look for the Queen, Zach taking the downstairs. They hurry away. Zach finds the cabinet, and turns on the light to look at the porcelain inside. Each piece is perfect, and in the center is a plaque with a man's picture and a brief commentary. Zach reads the plaque, thinking about his dream and Eleanor's aunt causing her to fall from the roof.

Zach quickly searches the rooms in the basement with no success, finally going into the girls' bathroom. There, he discovers the Queen in the garbage can. Startled, he looks in the mirror and sees a face created from cracked china instead of his own. His eyes are black holes and he opens his mouth to scream, but his reflection doesn't change. He blinks, and the vision is gone, but his heart is racing as he tries to come up with a way that might have gotten the Queen to where he'd found her. He holds her to his chest and hurries out of the library to meet Alice and Poppy.



## Analysis

In this segment, Miss Katherine the librarian reveals there was a grisly story attached to the Kerchner family name some time ago, although she doesn't recognize the name Eleanor at all. Despite revealing initial interest in what they were looking for at the cemetery, Miss Katherine drops the subject before she gets any real answers from Zach, and ushers him back to the break room. As soon as she leaves them alone, Zach begins to plot their escape, firmly convinced that they can get out, and fueled by a need to finish the quest, supported by his father's backhanded encouragement.

Poppy seems deflated, and displays little interest in completing the quest just as was foreshadowed by her singular determination earlier and her assertions that 'growing up did not affect her as it had the others'. It is clear when she makes this admission that Poppy would be 'growing up' and that it was simply a matter of time. Now, when she takes a purely adult look at the quest and her reasoning for involving Alice and Zach, Poppy is able to analyze her behavior on that level and rationalize her actions. This is purely an adult reaction and deduction which reveals that just as Zach and Alice occasionally revealed more adult-like behavior of late, Poppy is beginning to as well.

Despite support from both Zach and Alice now, Poppy has lost motivation. When Alice broaches the issue of possible possession by Eleanor based on Poppy's inexplicable need to be in constant contact with the doll, Poppy snaps at her, their roles now firmly reversed. The admissions and revelations that occur in this segment have put their three-way friendship on fragile ground. Despite Poppy's current state of mind, Alice finds the determination that Poppy seems to have lost and is responsible for securing their freedom from the break room. The author's addition of a display case of Orchid Ware and its accompanying plaque provides the first tangible link between the Queen, the Kerchner family and the town of East Liverpool, revealing how distraught Lukas was about the 'disappearance' of his daughter. What convinces Zach however is likely the fact that Lukas insisted he did not kill Eleanor, but actually gave her new life calling her 'his most perfect creation'. His conviction and execution for Eleanor's murder is enough to reasonably justify her inability to rest in peace.

Zach discovers the Queen in a garbage can in the ladies washroom, and how she got there is a mystery the author chooses not to reveal. It is unlikely that Poppy put her there, her attachment to the Queen unwavering throughout their ordeal, and Zach would not have thrown her in the ladies washroom if he had been the one to take her. Alice doesn't seem to have any knowledge as to where the Queen is either, and if she had, she likely would have revealed it after freeing them from the break room, knowing that finding the Queen is the only thing that stops them from leaving the library before they are caught again. As such, the reader is left to wonder if Eleanor is somehow in more control of the Queen than initially imagined.





## Discussion Question 1

What revelations occur in this segment where Poppy, Zach and Alice are concerned, and how does this affect their actions, if at all?

## Discussion Question 2

What changes occur in Poppy's behavior, and what is the likeliest cause?

## Discussion Question 3

What information does Zach glean from the plague in the display case, and what event or occurrence does it seem to corroborate?

## Vocabulary

translucent, filigree, quatrefoil, integrity, influences, discerning, hypothesized



# Chapter 16

## Summary

Alice is already waiting outside when Zach arrives, and Poppy follows with Miss Katherine in her wake. They run and after a few blocks, she is no longer behind them. Poppy smiles with real warmth when she sees that Zach has the Queen, and Alice suggests they keep moving in case Miss Katherine calls the police. Poppy takes the reins again, running to a gaming store where several bicycles rest outside. Two bikes are unlocked and Poppy rides the handlebars on one with Alice peddling while Zach rides the other.

Zach is beginning to feel like they might be able to finish the quest after all, and thinking about it, he feels something move in his shirt where he'd tucked the Queen. He almost crashes in surprise, telling the Queen to stop. He tells her that he knows she is excited, and knows that they are close, but crashing him on the bike will not get her there. The doll doesn't move, and Zach isn't sure if his comments stopped her, or if her squirming was just his imagination.

Zach follows Alice and Poppy into the cemetery and is relieved to give the Queen back to Poppy, now a believer that she truly was made from the bones of a young girl. Touching the doll makes him feel like shuddering, and he doesn't care when Poppy teases him about it. They hunt for the weeping willow tree, but don't find it and Alice wonders if they are in the right cemetery. After a while, even Poppy loses faith. She finally admits that perhaps she was wrong about everything. Alice doesn't want to believe it, but Poppy is confused. It had all seemed so real to her at the time, and now she wonders if she convinced herself it was real. Alice is ready to believe that Poppy made it all up now, but not Zach.

Zach reminds them of Tinsloe Jones, the diner and even the doughnut man who all seemed to see more than what was there. Poppy explains it all away rationally. Alice asks about the mess at their camp, asking Poppy point blank if she did it, but Poppy is honestly shocked by the suggestion. Alice admits that she didn't want to believe at first, but too many things have happened since they set out. Zach finally has a chance to tell them about the exhibition at the library and how he interpreted what he read. He also admits the truth about his dream to Poppy for the first time but now she doesn't believe him.

Alice hugs Poppy and tries to make her feel better, telling her that either way, they'd had one last game together and the words hit Zach hard. Before they go back, he has to be honest. He tells them the truth behind the reason he'd quit playing with them, apologizing for not telling them earlier. Tears sting his eyes and all of a sudden he feels stupid for caring so much. He tells them they should make one more sweep and leaves before either of them can say anything. He goes deep into the old part of the cemetery and finally collapses, sobbing. Now that he'd admitted it all out loud, it seemed more



final to him somehow. After a while, he hears Alice calling to Poppy that she'd found him. Again he apologizes feeling responsible for all of the arguing they've all done. Poppy admits she's angry that he kept it from them, but less than she had been when she thought he didn't care anymore.

Alice suddenly shouts at them to get up, pointing to the stone he'd been lying in front of. The headstone reads Kerchner and for a moment Zach could believe that all stories are real. The family plot is large, and they have one more thing to do before their quest is complete. Zach digs a grave, Alice finds wildflowers and Poppy prepares the Queen for burial. Then they each say what is in their hearts at that moment, and cover her with dirt. Saying goodbye, they walk back towards the road. They talk about how they are all changing and in the parking area they can see the two cars that have come for them. Poppy mentions that this is their last game, but Zach isn't so sure about that. With the absence of a Queen, the kingdoms will struggle and the throne will be up for grabs. The world will be in chaos. Alice grins and Poppy's eyes shine as she asks them if they want to play.

## Analysis

The three friends have endured much since their quest began and they are still not done. Alice and Zach, now firm believers, take the reins when Poppy seems reluctant to continue. Channeling Lady Jaye, Alice helps her friends escape confinement, but without the Queen they cannot continue. Somehow, Zach is sure that the display Miss Katherine told him about is the key to everything. Reading it, he realizes that everything Poppy had told them was true. The three friends continue to support each other, rallying off each other's strengths as they make their way to the cemetery in a final effort to complete their quest. Zach is beginning to believe that they are the kinds of people who complete quests, not the kind that give up on them.

The cemetery is the next site for revelation and explanations. Once they've gone through the cemetery without finding the Kerchner grave site, Poppy loses all hope. She begins to doubt that any of what she believed was true. How could it be? In a moment of adult rationalization, she tells them both that perhaps she just wanted it to be true. Zach argues, insisting she explain the inconsistencies that have occurred, but still can't change Poppy's mood or mind.

Since leaving the library, they'd managed to regain some of the friendships that had been threatened since Zach's father threw away his figures. Even though they are all aware that their lives are changing and they are growing up, Zach isn't ready to be an adult yet. When he tells Alice and Poppy about the plague, his dream, and then reveals the truth about quitting the game to begin with, Poppy is angry all over again, and for a moment he wonders if he's really messed it all up. Not wanting to hear the recriminations that surely will follow, he leaves them there, saying they should look one more time, but in truth he just doesn't want them to see him cry. He doesn't like how vulnerable he feels, and wants to be alone. As soon as he has some distance from them, he comes apart, the truth of his loss finally hitting him full force. He sobs until



there is nothing left, and then just lies there until his friends find him. It can only be coincidence that he is lying in front of the Kerchner gravestone, can't it? Ghosts aren't real, but there is no way that anyone could convince the trio of that now.

They finish their quest, burying Eleanor in the ground beneath her family headstone and leave feeling a sense of true accomplishment. The overall feeling of something ending pervades as they set out for the parking lot where their rides await. They discuss how they are all changing, but the line between real and what is imagination has blurred considerably since the beginning of their quest. Zach realizes that their story isn't over, and sharing his thoughts with the girls is the crowning touch to this quest. He may have lost the characters he used in the game, but the game still existed. His mind is already turning to the issues of a kingdom without a Queen, and the chaos that would likely ensue. The theme of friendship is strong here, and for the moment at least, there are no obstacles that they cannot conquer together. Poppy and Alice join in, Poppy asking the question that just days ago Zach had dreaded hearing again... 'You want to play?'

## Discussion Question 1

What trials - both physical and mental - have Zach, Alice and Poppy had to overcome in order to complete their quest?

## Discussion Question 2

What incidents throughout the quest have occurred that attribute an otherworldly life force to the Queen?

## Discussion Question 3

What examples of emotional growth are shown as the three friends complete their quest, and what have each of them learned from the journey?

## Vocabulary

vigorously, speculatively, insurmountable, incredulity, shroud, manipulate



# Characters

## Zachary Barlow

Zach is 12 years old and attends Thomas Peebles Middle School with his best friends Poppy and Alice. Together, they have been playing an involved game of make-believe in which Zach currently operates a pirate figure named William the Blade. Zachary loves playing 'the game', often feeling as though he is able to channel another world of sorts that sometimes seems more real than the one they live in. He never wants to stop, regardless of how old they get and despite how hard it already is at times.

Zach has hair that is the same color as burnt toast, and eyes that are beach-glass blue, just like his father. Zach's father and mother have had their share of problems and separated for three years as a result of them. During that time, Zach had gotten used to living without his father, and even resented him to a degree, holding him responsible for breaking up their family. When Zach's father, Liam returns after a three year absence, Zach is resentful. He doesn't appreciate the fact that his father has returned and is trying to be the man of the house again. The problem is exacerbated when Liam throws Zach's characters away, telling him that he is too old to play with dolls, creating a rift between them that almost ruins his chances of having a normal relationship with his son. Only his sincere apologies and explanations earn him a reprieve of sorts.

Zach is a loyal friend, but the loss of his characters is too painful to share, even with his best friends. Instead, he shuts them out, beginning a cycle of hurt feelings and misinterpreted emotions. Despite that, his loyalty to his friends persists so that when they arrive with their plans for a real quest, he can't let them go off alone. Joining them, he is more than just a friend.

Zach joins Poppy and Alice on a quest to East Liverpool to return Eleanor to her final resting place so that she can be at peace. While the journey has several setbacks, Zach manages to keep his head throughout. He does what he can to protect the girls from strange people they meet along the way; and is even responsible for stealing the small craft called the Pearl which inevitably gets them to East Liverpool. By then, Zach has also dreamed of Eleanor, seeing the way that she died and by whose hand. By the time they have finally managed to put Eleanor to rest, the three friends have traveled far, and learned much. Zach learns that Alice likes him as more than just a friend, and before he loses his nerve, he asks her if she wants to go out with him sometime. She accepts. Zach hadn't thought much about dating before learning how Alice felt, but thinks of it as a compliment.

Zach finally admits to the girls that he stopped playing the game because his father threw away all of his action figures so he couldn't play, but the quest teaches him that the game is one in their imaginations, and with the Queen gone, there will be much to do. The game is resurrected.



## Poppy Bell

Poppy has copper colored red hair and enough freckles to be compared to the number of stars in the night sky. She is small but fearsome. She is creative and dramatic, able to inject a sense of that drama into the games they play. As a villain, she is believable and loves to be in charge of how the story develops. Poppy doesn't like it when Alice and Zach play without her (which they rarely did) or talk without her being a party to the conversation. Two of Poppy's brothers include the elder brother Tom and his younger brother Nate. Both have the same red hair as their sisters, but are unlike her in every other way. They and her older sister were often in trouble either cutting class, or smoking, and they were considered to have a reputation for being hoodlums in town. Alice and Zach often stay the night with Poppy and her family, enjoying and envying them the freedom they have. Poppy is terrific at improvisation.

Poppy is frustrated when Zach wants to quit the game without notice or reason that makes sense. She offers to bring the Queen out - something her mother would surely punish her for, but even that is not enough to change Zach's mind. When she takes the Queen out of her cabinet, she begins to have dreams about a young girl named Eleanor who tells Poppy that the Queen was made out of her bones and hair, and asks Poppy to return her to her final resting place so that she may have peace. Poppy manages to convince both Alice and Zach to go with her to East Liverpool to return the Queen to the cemetery there.

The trip is fraught with peril; and several people along the way seem to see the Queen as a little girl instead of a doll, offering her a doughnut in one place, and a seat in another. In one instance, a man insists she is mean and refuses to talk to her. When Poppy and the others are caught in the Carnegie Library by the librarian, Poppy seems to give up. This surprises Zach and Alice as just the night before Poppy had been adamant that she would complete this quest and not become just like most of the adults they knew - disappointed with the things they hadn't done. Alice manages to unlock the room they are held in, freeing them to continue. Although there is a great deal of tension throughout the journey, they manage to find the Kerchner headstone where Eleanor belongs, and bury her there. As they head to their respective rides home, now waiting in the parking lot, Zach rescinds his earlier statement that he was done with the game.

## Alice Magnaye

Alice has amber colored eyes and wears her long hair in braids. She lives with her grandmother, quietly resentful of her overprotective demeanor. As such, the character she plays, Lady Jaye, is everything but. Alice has noticed a change in the way boys treat her since she turned ten and began to develop breasts. Playing the character of Lady Jaye, Alice can explore options and behaviors that her real life doesn't afford her, such as the pursuit of romantic notions.

Alice likes Zach as more than just a friend and confides that to Poppy. When Poppy convinces her to help on the quest to find Eleanor's resting place, she agrees to go



providing that Zach is coming. They set out for East Liverpool by bus, but before they can reach their destination, a man named Tinsloe Jones on the bus is so creepy that they disembark two towns before East Liverpool. Alice is extremely anxious about getting back on time, and makes her friends promise that they will escort her home even if the quest is incomplete. They agree reluctantly, and continue on, but when the time comes to go, Zach and Poppy refuse. Alice threatens to tell Poppy the truth about why Zach quit the game unless he takes her home, and at first he agrees but Poppy has a mind of her own. She tells Zach that Alice really likes him and would like to have him as a boyfriend. Embarrassed, she runs into the woods, but Zach finds her again.

Together, the three friends manage to put Eleanor to rest. Zach asks Alice out on a date and she accepts, feeling as strange about it as he does. Going back to the vehicles to head home, Alice mentions that they are at least stopping the game after completing an important quest, and Zach again surprises her when he assures them both that he still wants to play.

## **Eleanor Kerchner**

Eleanor was a young girl who lived in East Liverpool, Ohio with her aunt and her father who worked as a china manufacturer, and designed and decorated pottery. Eleanor comes to Poppy in a dream, appearing as a blond whose hair was dirty and tangled. She sat at the end of Poppy's bed, and insisted that she would never be able to rest until her bones were put in her own grave. According to Eleanor (via Poppy) the clay used to make the Queen was made from human bones and the hair threaded into the doll's scalp was Eleanor's as well. The body of the Queen was filled with the ashes that were left over.

When Eleanor died, her father lost his mind. Unable to bear the thought of burying her, he took her body to work with him, and cremated her, using her remains to create the Queen. Eleanor comes to Poppy in her dreams, begging her to return her to her grave so that she can rest in peace.

## **Lukas Kerchner**

Lukas was a genius. His artistic ability allowed him to coax clay into beauty although it was rumored that he was slightly paranoid and difficult to work under. He had a steady hand and a great imagination which was accentuated by the myriad of influences in his life from Persian to Indian; Moorish to English or German and even Art Nouveau. Lukas is one of two men who form Orchid Ware which is highlighted at the World's Fair in Chicago and had won many awards.

In early autumn of 1895, Lukas's daughter went missing and later blood and hair was found in his office. Most believed he murdered her although he denied it, admitting only that he gave her new life. He broke down when questioned further.



According to what Poppy tells Zach and Alice, when Eleanor died Lukas lost himself. He took her body to work with him, unable to part with her, and cremated her there. Once he had reduced her to ash, he used her remains to cast the doll that Poppy, Zach and Alice come to call the Queen.

## **Tinshoe Jones**

This old man is on the bus that Zach, Poppy and Alice get on to go to East Liverpool. He has extremely bad breath and smells like moldy clothes left in the washer overnight. His hair is a mess of tangled curls that is partially gray as is his beard which hides half of his face. His fingers are pale and stained with nicotine and he is missing several of his bottom teeth. He approaches Poppy while Zach and Alice are sleeping, and assures her that the driver is as senile as a moose. He also is convinced that aliens occasionally meet with the driver and communicate with him, exchanging places with them at times. He also openly admires Poppy and Alice's hair, touching them in turn and giving their locks a gentle tug. Tinshoe Jones is the first person aside from Poppy or Alice who seems to see the Queen as a real person describing her as someone who would likely hurt you and enjoy doing it.

## **Katherine Rausse**

Katherine is the librarian in the Carnegie Library in East Liverpool. She has short and curly, bright-pink hair and she is the one who finds Zach, Alice and Poppy in the library on Sunday morning. She wears bright green glasses which she keeps on a chain around her neck when she is not wearing them, and is about the age of Zach's mother. Her bright pink hair is offset by her bright yellow shoes with bows.

## **Liam Barlow**

Liam is Zachary's father. He has only recently moved back in with Zach and his mother, after being separated from them for three years. Liam tries to reconnect with his son, treating him much the same as he had three years earlier half of the time and as though he is now an adult the other half and it is Liam's duty to force him into adulthood now.

## **Mrs. Magnaye**

Alice's grandmother, she is an older woman who is somewhat more paranoid with each passing year. She is losing her sight, and finds it difficult to drive at night. As such, she prefers Alice's activities to be concluded before dark as well. Mrs. Magnaye still wants to select the clothes Alice wears, wants to know where she is all of the time, and never stops complaining about her braids. In her opinion, Filipino teenagers were superior in that they worked hard, didn't use their bodies as canvas for self-expression and were polite. They didn't have career ideas that included Hollywood, or grow out of everything the way Alice did either.





## Leo

This character is introduced in the third chapter as one of the group of kids that walk part way home with Zach, Poppy and Alice. He is an intelligent and articulate young man, with a vocabulary that sometimes leaves his friends behind intellectually, but Zach is fairly sure that his broad knowledge of the English language is likely linked to the fact that his mother is a college teacher part time. Leo wears big glasses and typically says things that are unexpected such as the conversation he initiates about superstitions one afternoon.

## Brian

Poppy meets Brian at the marina when she, Alice and Zach are looking for a way to cross the river. His father has a dinghy for sale for \$25. His character is important to the story because without him, the three friends would never have gotten to East Liverpool.

## Aunt Linda

Alice's aunt Linda tried to get custody of Alice, creating an atmosphere of paranoia between her and Alice's grandmother ever since.

## The Party

This is the name of the black cat Zach and his family have.

## The Great Queen

The Great Queen is a bone china doll with yellow curls and skin as white as paper. Her eyes are closed, her lashes a fringe lying on her cheeks when she is in the cabinet, but that changes. She wears a long gown and gives the impression she can see you even with her eyes closed. Poppy's sister was terrified of the doll, even having had nightmares about her. After that, Zach, Alice and Poppy decided to add her to the game, creating a legend around her and the kingdom she ruled which included everything from the Silver Hills to the Gray Country and from the Land of Witches to the whole of the Blackest Sea. They imbued her with powers including the ability to mark any who disobeyed her wishes, turning their luck to misfortune until they managed to regain her favor, and knowledge such as information about William the Blade's father. The Queen could not escape however. Zach has seen the eyes open slightly, as if to watch and when Poppy brings her to Silver Hills, her eyes are wide open. She is made of porcelain; clay that was created from human bones, and the night Poppy removes the Queen from her cabinet, she sees the ghost of a girl who insists they bury her so that she can rest. She insists that the hair is her real hair and the dolls' body is filled with her



ashes. Inside the Queen is a burlap bag with East Liverpool written on it. The bag is full of bone ash.

## **William the Blade**

William is Zach's best character and the one around which their current story revolves. William is a fearless pirate.

## **Lady Jaye**

Lady Jaye, as represented by Alice, is a cut purse who was caught when trying to pick William the Blade's pocket. The G.I. Joe figure that represents Lady Jaye has traveled with William since.

## **Mermaids**

The mermaids are old dolls purchased from Goodwill that have large heads, varying colored tails and hair that is frizzy and out of control. They have plastic smiles but Zach has no trouble imagining their more dangerous intentions. The 'crew' of Neptune's Pearl know that mermaids eagerly wait to crash their ship against the shoals, and lure them into the sea to consume them with jagged, sharp teeth.

## **Duke of Deepwinter Barrow**

The Duke is a character from the game that has no doll to represent him as yet. He is trouble however, raising a zombie army of dolls that are broken, intending to take over the rest of the lands. His exploits included chopping off his enemies heads; and even the abduction of an evil priestess that he'd hoped would be his duchess. The Duke is important partially because he is an antagonist (and without them there would be no need for heroes) and also because Poppy speculates that he may be William's father.

## **Aragorn, Taran, and Percy**

These are characters from the game that Zach thinks about as he, Poppy and Alice walk towards East Liverpool, recalling how they'd never required sunblock although Zach was wishing now that he'd remembered to pack some.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## Queen's Quest

The quest, issued to William the Blade, involves crossing blades with the mermaid leader in order to discover the location of an underwater city full of secrets which includes the secret to lifting the curse on the Queen. The quest reveals that Zach, Alice and Poppy are still able to imagine and play games involving make-believe despite their upcoming puberty and adulthood.

## Treasure of the Shark Prince

This is a treasure of gold and jewels so vast that Lady Jaye has been seeking it since her days as an orphan beggar child. This is part of the complicated and involved back story that is part of the game played by Zach, Alice and Poppy.

## East Rochester

This is a place Zach remembers from a book he'd read and reveals that fantasies have always held his interest.

## Thomas Peebles Middle School

These are some of the threats or characters that roamed the lands of adventure in books Zach had read and form the basis for some of the challenges he faces while playing the game.

## Pearl

Pearl is the name of the small sailing vessel that Zach, Poppy and Alice pirate to take them down the Beaver River to East Liverpool. It is slim and low, just larger than a dingy but created from fiberglass. It has a black and white sail that is striped and has a sunfish on it. Two life jackets sit waiting in the cockpit.

## Orchid Ware

The result of the collaboration of Lukas Kerchner and Philip Dowling to make pottery that was thin yet still had structural integrity for commercial applications. By using a high percentage of bone ash from cattle, they could make porcelain that was solid.



## Neptune's Pearl

This is the ship, represented by a boat-shaped piece of paper that is weighted down with gravel to keep the wind from blowing it away.



# Settings

## Thomas Peebles Middle School

This is the school that Zach, Alice and Poppy attend, and where Zach plays basketball.

## East Rochester

This is two stops before East Liverpool on the bus line and is significant because it is the stop that Alice, Poppy and Zach end up getting off the bus when Tinshoe Jones harasses them.

## East Liverpool

The town in which Eleanor (the Queen) told Poppy in her dreams that she lived in and where her grave site is located. This becomes significant as it is the first real adventure Zach, Alice and Poppy have ever been on in their quest to return Eleanor's bones to her grave so that her spirit can rest.

## Main Street

This is the main road of the town that Zach, Poppy and Alice grew up in, sporting a church, a barbershop, a pizza place, a bus station, and a post office with a big graveyard on the hill.

## Ohio River

This is the first sign Alice sees that has Ohio on it, and she mistakes it temporarily for the county line. It is significant to the story because it is where Zach, Alice and Poppy spend the night and is where Zach first dreams of Eleanor (the Queen).

## Beaver River

This is a tributary that runs into the Ohio River, but cuts off foot traffic in the direction of East Liverpool. It is the river on which Zach finds the Pearl tied up and, together with Alice and Poppy, pirates her for transportation down river.

## Carnegie Library

This is the library that Zach, Alice and Poppy break into in East Liverpool to see if they can find a map that shows where the cemetery is. It is significant as it not only provides



the information for the cemetery, but also gives Zach information about Eleanor's father and the speculation surrounding Eleanor's death. It has a domed roof and has red stone making up the body of the building with white stone to trim the windows.

## **Pants Unlimited**

One of the few stores still open on Main Street in East Liverpool, Pants Unlimited is in a perpetual state of going out of business – a situation that is repeated in most small towns across America.

## **Spring Grove Cemetery**

A cemetery in East Liverpool, this is where Poppy believes Eleanor wants to be buried.

## **Blackest Sea**

The Blackest Sea is a stretch of paved roadway that Zachary, Poppy and Alice use to represent the body of water that their ship 'Neptune's Pearl' sails in. This sea is one of the settings used in the pirate style adventures they have created with each other and play together even after they are old enough to leave such fantasies in childhood.

## **Silverfall**

This is one of the imaginary destinations that Neptune's Pearl sails to in the continuing adventures in the Blackest Sea.

## **Gray Country**

This is part of the Great Queen's kingdom and is significant because Lady Jaye and William the Blade managed to come through it to the Blackest Sea before Zach's father took William the Blade and the rest of the figures away.

## **Silver Hills**

This is a metal junkyard about half a mile away from where Poppy, Alice and Zach live. This is one of the regions they consider to be part of the Queen's kingdom – a region that includes trolls, dwarves and even a princess doll painted silver by Poppy. An abandoned shed on the property was used as a clubhouse by them until Alice's grandmother had found out.

## Haven

The largest city in the entire kingdom, Haven is where Lady Jaye spent her youth as an orphan child.



# Themes and Motifs

## Growing Pains

The themes of friendship and the transition from childhood to adolescence is an ongoing theme throughout *Doll Bones*. Poppy, Zach and Alice have been friends for years, playing together for so long that they have created an entire make-believe world in which each of them manages several characters and their background stories. Called 'the game', the three friends play as often as possible, despite the fact that all three of them are reaching an age where playing games of make-believe are supplanted by school activities, group outings, dating and more adult activities.

Although Zach has begun playing basketball at school, and sometimes struggles to get himself into the frame of mind to play the game, he still feels as though he will play the game forever if possible, and Poppy and Alice both share his sentiments on that subject. Despite that, Alice has developed stronger feelings for Zach - a fact which she shares in confidence with Poppy.

When Zach's father Liam takes away his action figures and throws them into the garbage, Zach feels as though part of himself has been lost. He identified so strongly with one action figure in particular - William the Blade - that the thought of his fate in a garbage dump is almost more than he can bear. Devastated, he quits the game rather than admit the depth of his loss to his friends.

When Poppy tells Alice and Zach about the dream she had in which Eleanor Kerchner tells her that her father used her bones, ash, and hair to make the Queen and she wants to be returned to her grave site, Zach reluctantly agrees to help. On a real quest now, the three friends manage to travel to East Liverpool where they give Eleanor/The Queen a proper burial in the Kerchner plot so that she can rest in peace. This trip bridges the gap between their childhood imaginings and a more adult look at the world as they are forced to fend for themselves, travel to unknown areas in the dark of night, and deal with a variety of strange people and circumstances. In this way, their real life quest gives new life to the game, and at the end of their quest, they are all ready to play.

## Life After Death

There are many conflicting ideas surrounding what happens when we shuffle off this mortal realm to whatever comes next (if anything). Some are sure that when we draw our last breath, we are done. It is as final as an end can be. Others believe that death is merely a form of transition – that we travel from this mortal world to one that we can only guess at, but that is largely referred to as heaven by most. Of course, no one has any concrete idea what heaven is exactly either and the answers vary depending on who you ask. Still others wonder whether we may perhaps have some control over the situation. Despite the fact that some people have physically died and been brought back





to life after a short time, there is no way to know for sure, and their reports of what occurred during their transition vary. There are, however, enough similarities to make us question what comes next; pray to whoever we believe controls the great responsibility of life over death; or make deals with the devil or his ilk to buy more time. None of this answers the question of what happens after death of course.

In *Doll Bones*, Kathy Black examines the idea of death from an adolescent's perspective. Poppy manages to convince both Alice and Zach that the Queen – a doll made of porcelain – is actually made from the remains of a young girl named Eleanor Kerchner who disappeared under questionable circumstances and was presumed dead. According to Poppy, Eleanor had come to her in the night begging to be taken back to her family's plot where she could rest in peace, and resorting to some not so veiled threats if Poppy didn't help. Poppy manages to convince both Zach and Alice to come with her, despite some healthy skepticism from both, and they embark on a quest to put Eleanor's soul to rest. The quest is one that is frightening at times, exhilarating at others, and a challenge for three young adolescents to accomplish, but despite the obstacles thrown at them, they manage to return the Queen made of Eleanor's bones and ash to the Kerchner plot.

The story is not that simple however. Along the way, Poppy admits that she made most of it up to engage Zach in a quest and perhaps return him to the game again, but by the time she admits the truth of her actions, enough strangeness has surrounded the quest that no one is sure what to believe. First, on the bus they are approached by Tinshoe Jones who appears to see the Queen as a living, breathing child, if one to be ignored or avoided; then a doughnut shop worker appears to have a conversation with the doll and even brings it a doughnut; Zach dreams of Eleanor, seeing her death in that dream; and a waitress offers them a table for four people – one of those the doll as though she were as real as they were. On the last leg of their quest, Zach rescues the Queen (Eleanor) from a watery end in the river after Alice throws her overboard, and when they finally reach the cemetery, Zach is convinced that in excitement, Eleanor is squirming inside his shirt. Kathy Black does a tremendous job of addressing the touchy subject of life after death, without actually or definitively taking a stand and leaving the answers up to the interpretation of the reader.

## Friendship

The theme of friendship is prevalent throughout *Doll Bones*. Poppy, Alice and Zach have been friends for what seems like forever to them. They have played together for so long that they've created a complicated game of make-believe that encompasses a kingdom ruled by a Great Queen which spans leagues of townships and cities; is filled with champions and villains alike; and has evolved to become as much a part of their lives as the real world is. In the game, they are heroes of a sort sent out by the Queen on quests of great importance during which their characters routinely risk life and limb for the sake of their Queen.



The game is so much a part of their friendship that none of them can imagine giving it up, despite the negative influences from outside sources encouraging them to grow up and act their ages. Zach's father, having just returned from a three-year separation from his family, decides that Zach is too old to play with action figures, and in an effort to help him into adolescence, he throws the figures out. Zach is so devastated by the loss that he is unable to even reveal the truth to his friends, afraid to share just how deeply the loss impacted him. Instead, he tells them he's outgrown the game - a statement Poppy and Alice can't believe is true despite how often he assures them it is.

Their friendship is stronger than that however, and although their feelings are hurt at first, Poppy and Alice are determined to regain what they've lost. To accomplish this, Poppy creates a convoluted story about the Queen who she swears revealed herself to Poppy over a series of nights in her dreams. It creates a real life quest in which the girls manage to ensnare Zach's help. Together, they overcome countless obstacles, escape capture and discovery, avoid pitfalls and life threatening setbacks in order to help the Queen/Eleanor Kerchner get back to her family's grave site so that she can rest in peace.

The trials and tribulations of the journey have them at each other's throats more than once, but the strength of their collective friendships are enough to pull them back from permanent damage. By the time the quest is over, Zach has revealed his figures are gone; Alice has revealed her feelings for Zach go beyond friendship; and Poppy has admitted the quest was an effort to draw him back to the game. Despite the revelations, when the hurt feelings pass, the friendships still remain and at the end of it all, they are stronger friends than before - tested, tried and true.

## Lies Have Legs

An expression once used a great deal of the time, it was said when someone lied, and that lie had consequences that were at once far reaching and unstoppable. It refers to the fact that generally, when a lie is told, it doesn't simply fade into the past gently. More often than not, the lie will take a path of its own, traveling a great distance at times before resurfacing again where it is least expected. In this story, there are several examples in which it can be said that 'lies have legs'.

The first of these instances occurs when Zach tells Poppy and Alice that he doesn't want to play the game anymore. He insists that suddenly he is too old, has no time, and actually has outgrown the game. At the time he says it, Zach firmly believes that Poppy and Alice will go on without him, playing the game until some point in the future when he can rejoin them. Poppy and Alice are both stunned. They are in the middle of a complicated quest involving mermaids, underwater secrets, a curse on the Queen and the possibility of learning a clue to William the Blade's parents.

Zach's lie so unravels the girls that Poppy comes up with a complicated quest in reality, insisting that the Queen is actually created from the bones and ash of a girl named Eleanor Kerchner who begged Poppy to take her back to her family plot so that she can



finally rest in peace. She later admits that she lied about Eleanor haunting her to take her to East Liverpool, but by then they have left their homes in the middle of the night, traveled to another state where they stole a sailboat, broke into a library, escaped the librarian's custody, stole two bicycles and ended up in a cemetery in East Liverpool to lay a doll to rest. In this manner, lies have legs.

## Fear of the Unknown

In *Doll Bones*, Holly Black uses fear of the unknown to create an air of mystery and suspense surrounding subjects that we know little about and that cause us emotional discomfort. In this story, a fear of the unknown is first established when Poppy spins a yarn as they are walking past the graveyard, telling Alice and Zach that when you pass a cemetery you should hold your breath so that a spirit from someone recently deceased can't get into your body through your mouth or nose to possess you. As Poppy explains it, Zach can almost imagine how a ghost would taste and spits in the dirt to rid himself of the acrid mouthful of smoke he now has the taste of in his mouth. Their fear of the unknown is further exacerbated by the fact that Poppy doesn't reveal this information until after they'd already passed the graveyard. When Alice comments that she should have warned them earlier, Poppy suggests that perhaps she is no longer Poppy at all, but a disembodied spirit trying to warn them.

In another example Holly Black uses to create or use the fear of the unknown to enhance this story, the three friends get onto a bus in the evening to go to East Liverpool, and must deal with a variety of strange and unusual people, some of whom seem to be able to see the Queen as Eleanor as was the case with Tinshoe Jones, the baker at the doughnut shop, and the hostess at the restaurant. The fact that these people seemed able to see Eleanor gave Poppy's ghost story more credibility and made it more likely that despite their collective fear of being out so late at night without an adult, they would continue with the quest.

By using the fear of the unknown to drive the three friends forward, Holly Black is able to maintain an ongoing aura of suspense.

# Styles

## Point of View

Doll Bones by Holly Black is a fictional account told from the third person omniscient perspectives of the main characters, Zachary Barlow, Alice Magnaye and Poppy Bell. The narrative is reliable and consistent throughout as the three young friends set out on a real life quest to find the final resting place of Eleanor Kerchner. The perspective switches from one friend to another, often revealing insights or fears that are not shared with the other two. A good example of this stems from a series of secrets that they are keeping from each other.

Poppy and Alice have a discussion about Zach during which Alice reveals she has feelings that extend beyond friendship for him, but this is something Zach isn't told until Poppy becomes angry with Alice for throwing the Queen into the river. Zach keeps a major secret almost from the start in which he agonizes over the fact that his action figures were thrown out and he decides to tell Poppy and Alice that he no longer wants to play the game they have played for years instead. He finally reveals the truth to them in the final chapter. Alice also keeps this secret at least partially for a short time when she discovers the filled out Questions in Zach's pack. She doesn't understand the full impact of the secret she is keeping until she tells Poppy that she is sure Zach kept it from her because he no longer wants to play with her.

Despite the shifting narratives at times, the story is uncomplicated by either too much history or too much self examination.

## Language and Meaning

There are several points of interest where language and meaning are concerned in Doll Bones as Kathy Black weaves her story about three young adolescents who are struggling with the transition from childhood. One example exists from the very beginning as Zach, Alice and Poppy indulge in a regular game of make-believe in which they have created an entire kingdom that is set in times of pirates, cut purses, and even more fantastic creations like mermaids. This world is as detailed and complicated as the real one to them as they complete quests assigned by a Queen, and have adventures that involve multiple realms.

This is in direct contrast with their real quest in which they discover that reality consistently intrudes such as when Zach realizes that covering long distances by foot is boring, and that he should have included sunscreen - something books and stories never seem to do. It is also clear that their make-believe adventures leave a great deal out when they steal a sailboat to get to East Liverpool, and discover they feel guilty about doing it, much the same as when they feel forced to steal bicycles later on in the story.



Another obvious contrast is the small town environments they become aware of like the Pants Unlimited store whose 'Final Sale' never seems to become final. The poverty of small towns is touched on as they walk through East Liverpool noticing that most shops on the Main Street are closed due to financial hardship as had the pottery factory.

Despite these inconsistencies, the general meaning of the story is clear and the story line well told.

## Structure

Doll Bones by Holly Black is a fictional account that runs 139 pages, and gives the reader a glimpse into the lives of three young adolescent friends struggling with the transition out of childhood and into puberty. The story is distributed between 16 chapters that average nine pages each; the longest chapter coming in at 11 pages and the shortest at six.

In the first five chapters, Holly Black introduces the three main characters (Poppy, Alice and Zach), and gives an overview of the complexities of the game they've created and played together for years. She also gives the reader the first indication that puberty is on the horizon, foreshadowing the difficulties that could potentially arise as a result. The depth of thought that goes into their game is shown by the Questions that Poppy writes and passes to Zach to answer concerning the characters in the game and reveals how Zach's father brings an end to his ability to play by taking his action figures while he is in school, and throwing them away. When Zach comes home, he realizes they are gone. The anger that Zach displays as a result of this invasion of his space and privacy is clear, as is the depth of the loss he feels. In fact Zach blames both of his parents for the part they each played in it and is so upset that he is ready to leave home for good. Zach tells the initial lie regarding the game which sets the stage for Poppy's exceptional story telling ability.

In chapters six to ten, Tinshoe Jones is introduced who is the first person to see the Queen as something more than a doll and refuses to talk to her, insisting she is mean. The three friends leave the safety of the bus early, too afraid of Tinshoe to continue on to their destination. Poppy, Alice and Zach are forced to camp overnight in a small park where while they sleep, their campsite is ransacked - behavior that Zach attributes to the Queen. In this section, there are several comparisons between real and make-believe adventures as Zach observes that not only can quests be boring, but that in books the discomfort of the heroes or adventurers is seldom mentioned.

In chapters eleven to sixteen, Zach finds them a boat named Pearl to get them through the next leg. They reach East Liverpool after Zach is forced to jump into the river to retrieve the Queen who was thrown overboard by Alice in frustration. Poppy and Alice fight, each revealing each other's secrets. They break into the library to be warm for the night and to look up their next move, but the librarian finds them in the morning and forces them all to call home before they disappear again. Before parents can come for

them, the three friends escape the library and finally manage to return Eleanor to her final resting place.



## Quotes

We're on a mission for the Great Queen and we won't be stopped.  
-- William the Blade (Chapter 1 paragraph 7)

**Importance:** This is one of the first examples of things Zach says as William the Blade that he doesn't intend to say, but like other comments made by him while playing, seems to channel directly from William the Blade himself. It is important because it reveals how involved in the game of make-believe with Alice and Poppy he is still able to become, despite his age of 12.

Does William ever have nightmares?  
-- Poppy (Chapter 2 paragraph 16)

**Importance:** This is one of many 'Questions' that Poppy or Alice have handed him, the answers meant only for the person who asked the question. It's importance lies in it's part in the game, private and complicated, in which the answers reveal important insights into the characters that often arrive in his mind unbidden after reading the question, as if the answers were just waiting there to be revealed.

I know that he did a stupid thing, but he honestly tried to fix it sweetheart.  
-- Mrs. Barlow (Chapter 3 paragraph 3)

**Importance:** This comment by Zach's mother is meant as consolation of sorts after Zach's father goes into his room while he is in school and taking his action figures, throws them in the trash. As his father has only been back for a short time after a three-year absence, his mother is trying to smooth the road to putting the family back together. Liam Barlow simply wanted his son to grow up, and thought taking the action figures from Zach would facilitate that, but Zach's reaction makes Liam realize that he's made a terrible mistake. Try as he might, however, Liam is unable to undo the damage he's done.

I don't want to play anymore.  
-- Zach (Chapter 4 paragraph 4)

**Importance:** This quote is important in that it is the first time that Zach lies to his friends about playing the game, telling them he no longer wants to instead of revealing the truth - that his father had thrown away his action figures and he was devastated by it. This lie leads to behavior and revelations by Alice and Poppy that likely would never have occurred had Zach simply admitted the truth.

She said she couldn't rest until her bones were in her own grave, and if I didn't help her, she would make me sorry.  
-- Poppy (Chapter 5 paragraph 39)

**Importance:** This quote is important because it forms the basis for the real life quest



that Poppy manages to convince Alice and Zach to help her with. It is an example of the limits she is willing to go to in order to remind Zach of who he is and who his friends are. Poppy is convinced that if she and Alice can just get Zach out and participating, he'll come back to them completely.

Well, i'm not gonna talk to the blonde, so you better forget that idea.  
-- Tinshoe Jones (Chapter 6 paragraph 55)

**Importance:** This quote reveals the first time that a total stranger seems to see the Queen as more than just a porcelain doll, attributing behavior or characteristics to her that would only be present in a living, breathing child. Tinshoe Jones has only just met Alice, Poppy and Zach on the bus that evening as they board on their way to East Liverpool with the Queen after Poppy insists she is a conglomerate of the remains of Eleanor Kerchner, and wants to rest in peace. Tinshoe Jones is the first of several people who will seemingly support Poppy's assertions that there is more than just a doll to the Queen.

If we don't keep going now, we'll never do it.  
-- Poppy (Chapter 7 paragraph 25)

**Importance:** This quote begins an explanation by Poppy who refuses to give up on the quest to lay Eleanor/the Queen to rest because she insists that if they don't continue and do it now, they won't ever return to do it. If they give up, they will become like all of the other adults they know who say they will do things that for some reason they don't, and never do. It is the beginning of a long life of disappointments, quests unfulfilled, and a life of regret. Of this she is certain, because she has seen it happen with her own parents, and it hits home with Zach as well, who remembers the dreams his parents used to have, but had long since given up on. This quote becomes a driving force off and on to finish the quest.

We're going to need a hammock or something.  
-- Poppy (Chapter 8 paragraph 3)

**Importance:** This is Poppy's first indication that they are woefully unprepared to take on a quest in real life of any kind. They have little food, less money, and almost no tangible supplies for sleeping in the woods or a park. She realizes the ground is damp, and the quest might not go as easily as she'd imagined it would, and it sets the stage for continuing difficulties that she, Alice and Zach will have before the quest is complete.

Maybe her spirit's angry that we aren't taking this quest seriously enough.  
-- Zach (Chapter 9 paragraph 15)

**Importance:** Zach wakes in the park with the girls in the morning to find their supplies shredded and tossed around them. He has just had a dream about Eleanor, and when he sees the mess, he assumes that the Queen is angry, and had done this to show her displeasure. In truth, Zach is enjoying this adventure, and admitting that ghosts aren't real would mean that there was likely no magic in the world either, and the idea of that is





intolerable to him. In his mind, if there is magic - even just bad magic - than maybe there is hope for him to become something other than his father, a bitter and disappointed adult. He thinks again about how Poppy said if they faltered, they would never return.

But even if his father is the king of the whole Gray Country, he's going to stay a pirate.  
-- Zach (Chapter 10 paragraph 12)

**Importance:** In this quote, Zach is talking about William the Blade, and his comments refer to William, but to himself as well. He is stating emphatically that regardless of who William's father is, William will continue to be the pirate that he is happy being. In a way, he is also saying that his father's identity is unimportant and will have no bearing on who or what William is. Part of Zach is hoping that is the case where he and his father are concerned as well. Zach refuses to become what his father wants him to simply because it is what his father wants.

Do you think the Pearl's owner has noticed their boat's gone?  
-- Poppy (Chapter 11 paragraph 30)

**Importance:** This question brings Zach back to examine the realities of their behavior. Until then, he'd been enjoying the fact that he was finally the captain of a real ship named the Pearl (just like William the Blade's ship was named in the game) and when Poppy reminds him of the fact that they'd stolen the boat and her owners will be missing her by now, the idea bothers him. Zach is an honest person, and he is quickly discovering that taking something that doesn't belong to you in the real world has consequences. Not only could they be charged and arrested, but he felt guilty - something his characters never seemed to have to deal with.

You promised, and then you broke your promises over and over again, and now my whole life is going to be ruined because of you!  
-- Alice (Chapter 12 paragraph 24)

**Importance:** This quote reveals the depth of Alice's anger and disappointment after Zach and Poppy promise that no matter what happens, they will make sure to be on the bus on time to return home. It is the one thing that Alice asked them to promise out of fear for her grandmother's reaction should she discover the truth of this quest. Alice is angry that the quest is more important than the trouble she will get into because of a doll. In a sense, it is the first indication that Alice has begun the transition from childhood to adolescent or young adult in which her responsibilities outweigh her desire to continue a quest that she equates to a game of sorts.

Because if there is, then some random dead girl wants to haunt Poppy, but my own dead parents can't be bothered to come back and haunt me.  
-- Alice (Chapter 12 paragraph 52)

**Importance:** Alice is referring to the reasons that she refuses to believe that ghosts are real. She can't accept the fact that an unrelated ghost is revealing herself to both Poppy



and Zach in their dreams while her own parents who died had not returned to her even once to say goodbye. If she believes in Poppy's ghost, she has to accept that on some level, her parents didn't care enough to make their way back to her even once.

Table for four?

-- Diner Hostess. (Chapter 13 paragraph 14)

**Importance:** This quote is important not only in that it is the second time that a random stranger has attributed life of some kind to a porcelain doll, but that it reinforces the possibility that their quest is real and so is Eleanor Kerchner. The hostess offers them a table with a seat for the Queen as though she is just another child like them.

It's either we call your parents, or we call the police.

-- Katherine Rausse (Chapter 14 paragraph 13)

**Importance:** This statement reveals exactly how much trouble Zach, Poppy and Alice are really in after they break into the library so that they can determine where the cemetery is, and to get out of the cold and dry off over night. Her demeanor is so final, and commanding that Poppy seems to simply give up.

I am not her killer, but I am the one who has given her new life.

-- Lukas Kerchner (Chapter 15 paragraph 58)

**Importance:** This is a quote that Zach reads in the display case in the basement of the library that reveals the details of Eleanor's disappearance and the investigation into her father afterwards. It confirms what Poppy told them about her, and Zach's own dreams about her in which he sees her death. This quote validates their entire quest.

But I don't have my helmet, and you're made of some superthin Orchid Ware, so if we crash, we're both going to break.

-- Zach (Chapter 16 paragraph 20)

**Importance:** Zach stops peddling one of the two bikes he and Poppy and Alice steal from outside a store so that they can get to the cemetery to finish their quest. The Queen is tucked into Zach's shirt, and the feeling of her squirming against him as they near the cemetery is causing him to ride erratically. He is afraid that the doll will cause him to crash, injuring them both - another nod to her other worldly life force - and tells her to calm down, which she seems to do.