

Firespell Study Guide

Firespell by Chloe Neill

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Plot Summary

Firespell tells the story of 16-year-old Lily Parker's move to an elite Chicago boarding school, her encounter with the magical teenagers who keep the city safe, and her realization that she may be one of them.

At the opening of the novel, Lily Parker learns that her parents are sending her to an elite boarding school in Chicago while they take over research positions in Munich, Germany. Lily isn't excited about leaving her hometown of Sagamore, New York, but her parents assure her that St. Sophia's will be the best place for her while she's away. The school itself is ominously gothic, filled with spoiled girls whose parents have funded their every whim. Lily is sure she won't fit in until she meets her suitemate, Scout Green. With her bleached blonde bob and silver nose ring, Scout doesn't look like the average St. Sophia's girl, but the pair hit it off immediately, bonding over their mutual dislike for the "Brat Pack," a group of popular, spoiled snobs who mercilessly tease and torment the rest of the school body. On her first night at St. Sophia's, Lily witnesses Scout receive a mysterious phone call and then disappear into the night. When she returns to the dorms in the early morning hours, she's visibly exhausted and covered with bruises, yet she won't reveal what she had been doing.

As the days pass, barely a night goes by that Scout doesn't receive a mysterious phone call in the night. Tired of waiting for her new best friend to fill her in, a worried Lily decides to follow Scout, wherever she's going. She reaches a dead end the first time that Lily follows her, coming up to a massive iron door too heavy to open on her own, which means that when Scout left the school grounds, she had help from the outside. The second time, Lily witnesses Scout racing down the limestone hallways being chased by mysterious hooded figures. Scout warns Lily to get away, but Lily isn't able to before the hooded figures catch up to her. One of the figures, a dark-haired teenage boy, unleashes a green fireball from his hands that knocks Lily to the ground, unconscious. Lily wakes the next morning in the hospital, surrounded by her friends: Scout, Michael, and Jason. The threesome finally tells Lily the secret they've been hiding: they're all Adepts, magical teenagers with special powers. When Adepts turn 25, their magical powers begin to fade, and the only way to keep their strength is to suck the souls from weak humans, becoming "Reapers." Scout, Michael, and Jason are all part of an enclave of Adepts fighting against Reapers because they believe it is inhumane to kill innocent humans just so magical people can keep their powers. The hooded figures chasing them down the hallway, a pair of Reapers, are fighting back from the protective spells Scout and her friends place over their potential victims. Lily, caught in the crossfire, has been hit with a firespell, which permanently marked her in the Reapers' books.

Overwhelmed by this new information, Scout decides to befriend the Brat Pack and live like a normal teenager rather than live her life in the battle between good and evil, Adepts and Reapers. All goes well until Lily suddenly realizes that she has the power to control the brightness of the lights in rooms. Lights dim when Lily is relaxed and brighten when she feels upset, keeping perfect time with her heartbeat. At that moment,



Lily knows she cannot ignore what she is: Adept. When Scout mysteriously disappears, her room ransacked, Lily knows that she is the only one who can help save her. She convinces the rest of the Adepts in Scout's enclave to band together to fight against the gang of Reapers that kidnapped her best friend. Working together, the Adepts manage to track down the Reaper enclave, locate Scout within the barracks, and free her. Before they escape to safety, however, a battle between Adepts and Reapers shakes the walls, and Lily realizes that, like the Reaper who first struck her down, she has the power of firespell as well. The novel ends with Scout safely returned to her dorm room, the Reapers temporarily halted, and Lily coming into her own as a magical teenager. The novel is open-ended, thus providing a perfect segway into the rest of the books in the series.



Chapters 1 & 2

Chapters 1 & 2 Summary

The novel opens with a scene of sixteen-year-old protagonist Lily Parker sitting through the interview process for St. Sophia's School for Girls in Chicago. Even though Lily and her parents live in New York, her parents have decided that St. Sophia's will be the perfect boarding school for their daughter as they travel to Munich, Germany for a twenty-four month research fellowship. The women in the interview constantly remind Lily what a wonderful opportunity St. Sophia's provides, and that she should feel grateful to even have been given an interview. Because she felt somewhat disinterested, Lily is genuinely surprised when she receives her acceptance letter. A few days later, she's at the airport saying goodbye to her parents, preparing to create a new life for herself in Illinois. She notices that her parents don't seem thrilled about leaving for Germany, but that could be down to the stress of the move. When she arrives at St. Sophia's, Lily can't help but marvel at the ancient stonework, the winding limestone walls, stone towers, and painted arches. She meets the school's headmistress, Marceline Foley, and is given her debilitating school schedule. When the headmistress walks Lily to her new suite, Lily tries to make eye contact with some of the other female students and gets the impression that they're cold. In her room, she breaks down crying, weeping into her pillow when she discovers that one of her suitemates, Scout Green, has been standing in the doorway watching her.

Lily takes an immediate liking to Scout - perhaps it's her fluffy boots, blonde bob haircut, or the silver nose ring. Right away, Lily notices that Scout seems to be different from the other St. Sophia's girls. Unlike the others, Scout seems cool. They sit on Lily's bed for a while introducing themselves and making fun Mrs. Foley, the school rules, and the ancient building. Scout gives Lily a rundown of "The Brat Pack," a group of popular girls who treat everyone not in their circle like dirt. The clique is headed up by Veronica Lively and maintained by Mary Katherine and Amie Cherry. As they're talking, Scout's cell phone goes off and she has to run. She doesn't explain where she's going other than to quip that she's going to exercise, at 7:00 at night with no work-out gear. With Scout gone, Lily awkwardly tries to engage the brat pack in a conversation and is shot down. At 1:15 in the morning, Lily awakens to hear Scout finally coming home. Lily feels unsettled knowing that her new friend has just lied to her - it's obvious that Scout hadn't been exercising - and she vows to get to the bottom of it.

Chapters 1 & 2 Analysis

From the onset, readers should notice a strange relationship between Lily and her parents. It's particularly interesting because throughout the narration, Lily insists (to herself and those around her) that she and her parents are very close and share no secrets. It seems strange then that Lily's parents communicate very little with her before their move, don't take her opinion into consideration when choosing a new school, and



seem distant at the airport. Keen readers might suspect that something is amiss, either in Lily's perception of her relationships, or with the information Lily's parents have chosen to share with her about their move. Either way, the opening section introduces the theme of truth and the understand that not everything Lily hears, even from the people she trusts the most, is gospel. The theme of truth and lies is continued when Lily meets Scout, a seemingly trustworthy new friend, who has obviously lied to Lily about her nighttime excursions. Already it's clear that many people have secrets, and they all seem to be hiding them from Lily.

The setting of St. Sophia's School for Girls creates a magical, gothic feel perfect for the introduction of werewolves, vampires, and other magical creatures. It's interesting to note that Neill maintains strictly realistic narration for the first half of the novel, but when the magical elements are introduced, readers aren't jarred by them. This is likely because details, like the school setting, subconsciously prepare the readers for the fantasy-elements introduced as the progresses. As soon as Lily arrives at St. Sophia's, the lines between good and bad, friendly and wicked, are drawn. Scout is good; the Brat Pack is bad, etc. Neill clearly defines her characters and rarely challenges initial impressions leaving critics to complain about her simplified characters. Readers should be encouraged to search out tiny conflicts within the unique characters to keep the reading interesting or the seemingly stock characters will distract from the novel's suspense.



Chapters 3 & 4

Chapters 3 & 4 Summary

The next morning, Lily's alarm wakes her up to start her first day of classes. Scout is already awake in the common room, and brushes off Lily's questions of where she was the night before, simply saying that whatever she was doing, it was important. Scout takes Lily to the cafeteria for breakfast, warning that if they don't get there early, they'll be left with the slurry - all the leftover bits mixed together in a single pan. As they eat, the Brat Pack approaches them and Veronica tries to get a rise out of Scout by saying that she's interested in Scout's friend Michael Garcia. Veronica takes the entire conversation in stride, saying that if Veronica's really interested, she should give Michael a call. When Veronica walks away in a huff - disappointed that she couldn't rile Scout - Scout tells Lily that she and Michael are just friends, but Lily can see that Scout is hiding something from her. During Lily's first class, she is unexpectedly called on to answer a question when she hadn't done the reading the night before. She answers off the cuff and impresses the teacher (as well as the other students).

After class, Scout takes Lily on a short tour of the neighborhood around the school. She shows her the Portman Electric Company Building, which was built in the 1940's and which is almost entirely secluded by the St. Sophia walls. They slip into the shadows to find two boys - Michael Garcia and Jason Shepherd - waiting for them. Lily is surprised by how good looking both boys are, especially Jason Shepherd. Yet she decides then and there that if Scout is going to try to convince her that she and Michael Garcia are just friends, she'll call her out on the lie. They look at each other with such romance in their eyes that it almost makes Lily uncomfortable. Suddenly, Jason notices another teen staring at them from the shadows. The girl is thin and pale, with a hood pulled up to cover her blonde hair. Immediately, Lily feels that there's something "different" about this girl, something unsettling. Scout whispers to Michael Garcia, "In the middle of the day? ... And here? She's blocks away from the nearest enclave. From her enclave" (Page 49). When Lily starts to ask questions, Scout grabs her by the shoulder and pulls her back to school. All Scout says is that she and her friends "pick up litter" around town as a community service project. Lily can tell from the way Scout says "pick up litter" that she's speaking symbolically.

When she gets back to school, Lily phones her parents and has a brief conversation with them about their activities in Germany. Lily's dad seems a bit down, so Lily assures him that he'll get used to the culture change with a bit of time. After the phone call, Lily meets Leslie, the fourth student housed in her quad. Leslie is an avid cello player who rarely leaves her room and is very strange socially. As Lily tries to keep a conversation with Leslie, Scout's phone rings, and once again she leaves to "exercise." Rather than waiting for Scout's return, Lily decides to follow her.



Chapters 3 & 4 Analysis

The scene in the cafeteria shows readers the Brat Pack's insipid desire to tease Scout simply for their own amusement. The Brat Pack is categorically "bad," a perfect example of the oversimplified characters discussed earlier. They have no redeeming qualities and reflect characteristics found in bullies, cheerleaders, and snobs across the United States, leaving much to be desired. Based on the mentality of the St. Sophia's staff, regardless of the bullying, the Brat Pack are fine examples of their school's success. The girls come from well-to-do families, are beautiful, fit perfectly into the school mold, and will likely go on to bright futures in positions of power, expanding the school's network. In this way, Neill seems to be commenting on the unjust reality of the adage, "It's not what you know, it's who you know that matters." Once again, Veronica's teasing highlights the fact that Scout is hiding something from Lily, and when she meets Michael, Lily assumes Scout is hiding a crush. The only clue she has about Scout's secret life is the mysterious blonde lurking outside the meeting. It's interesting to note that even though Scout, Michael, and Jason are obviously hiding something from Lily, they openly discuss that secret, using words like "enclave" around her, which suggests that they trust her. Despite this trust, Lily decides to follow Scout during her next nighttime excursion, which suggests that she doesn't trust her new friends. Lily is a somewhat meddling character who automatically assumes that whatever Scout is doing is bad. Her decision to follow Scout is completely unwarranted and out-of-line, which may cause some readers to dislike her as a narrator, but her obvious intelligence and quick-thinking displays the potential to win back skeptical readers.



Chapters 5 & 6

Chapters 5 & 6 Summary

Lily follows Scout down the stairs, through the library, and down into a labyrinth of limestone hallways without being detected. She's far enough behind that Scout can't hear her, but when she hears metal grating against metal, Lily throws caution to the wind and shouts, "Scout, are you okay?" When there's no response, Lily sprints down the hallway to find a huge metal doorway too heavy for her to open on her own. It's obvious that Scout somehow managed to get through the door, but Lily cannot figure out how. She decides that the best she can do is sit and wait for Scout to return and offer any help she can then. She isn't sure when she falls asleep, but sometime later, Lily wakes to the sound of footsteps racing toward the other side of the door. Whoever is running toward her is being chased, fast. Scout pushes through a crack in the door and shouts for Lily to help her shut it again. When the door slams shut, Lily hears a crash on the other side, strong enough to shake the door's giant brass hinges. Scout turns her energy on Lily, demanding to know what she's doing here, especially after she explicitly asked Lily to trust her. They walk back to their dorm room together in silence, with Lily running through the possibilities of what could have been on the other side of that door in her mind: Zombies? Mental institution escapees? A robot overlord? All Scout tells her is that she belongs to a club of gifted kids, but for Lily's safety, that's all she can say.

Days pass and Lily notices dark circles beginning to form under Scout's eyes. She doesn't know how her new friend manages the responsibilities of her "club" on top of their extreme school expectations. If Scout won't come clean about what she's up to, Lily feels she has no choice but to continue her investigation. One great skill that she has: she's patient. One afternoon, Mary Katherine - the snottiest member of the Brat Pack - calls Lily out of class for a private meeting with headmistress Foley. Lily spots a folder with her name on it on Foley's desk, but doesn't have time to skim through it before Foley joins her in the room. She claims that the meeting is simply to check in on Lily's adjustment at the new school, but Lily doesn't think Foley is the type of headmistress who really cares. Suddenly, she asks Lily if she knew that her parents were good friends of hers. Lily had no idea that Foley and her parents had ever met, let alone that they were "good friends." Foley claims that she and Lily's parents had similar research interests, but when Lily mentions their philosophy work, Foley gives her a quizzical look: "They never mentioned their genetic research?" (Page 77). Lily is dumbfounded and insists that Foley must have her mistaken for another student. Her parents are philosophy teachers at a university. She grew up in their offices. They've never discussed genetic work, nor would they be interested in it. Frustrated, Lily storms out of Foley's office and sends her parents a text message in Germany. Their response about the awesome library archives settles Lily's stomach: Foley must have been confused. When she turns around, a note slides under her door that says, "I saw you and Scout, and I wasn't the only one. Watch your back" (Page 80).



Chapters 5 & 6 Analysis

This section provides the first hint of supernatural happenings in the novel. Scout is clearly being pursued by a large beast strong enough to shake the limestone walls and corrugated iron doors. How Scout manages to outrun such a creature is still unexplained. It's also clear that however Scout got outside the school walls, she had help from the outside, which suggests that underground hallways link St. Sophia's to the outside world. When Scout maintains her refusal to share information, Lily decides to get aggressive with her investigation. This decision further isolates readers who already view Lily as meddlesome, but is integral to ensuring the progression of the plot. Without a meddlesome narrator, however annoying, the strong bond between Lily and Scout may never form. For this reason, readers should be encouraged to forgive the negative qualities of Lily's character and momentarily suspend their annoyance with her actions.

This section also introduces two key subplots that keep the novel interesting. First, headmistress Foley suggests that she knows Lily's parents and that Lily's parents are not who they say they are. Lily is understandably frustrated with Foley's assertions: why should this strange woman claim to know more about Lily's parents than she does herself, but it maintains the important theme of truth and lies. In coming-of-age novels like this, it is important for the protagonist to have something important taken from them - in this case, it is Lily's sense of security - in order to transform. Lily's journey into adulthood happens both emotionally and physically as she must come to terms with her parents' lies and her physical transition into an Adept (which will be explained later).



Chapters 7 & 8

Chapters 7 & 8 Summary

As soon as Scout returns from class, Lily tells her about the note. Scout blanches and demands to know who followed Lily that night, but Lily has no idea. Scout also seems surprised that Foley took a particular interest in Lily because she never has with new students in the past. Lily tells her about Foley's insistence that she knows Lily's parents, even though she doesn't seem to know anything about them, which also piques Scout's interest. A few moments later, Leslie, the strange fourth suitemate, shows up and says that she's the one who delivered the note. She says she's bored at school and wants "in" on whatever exciting thing is happening. Even though Scout promises to keep Leslie abreast of their adventures she, obviously, does not. Soon after, Scout's cell phone buzzes and she's off to another mysterious meeting. Because of all the trouble she caused the first time around, Lily decides to stay at home today and not follow Scout. As soon as Scout is gone, the brat pack comes knocking after hearing from Mary Katherine (MK) that Foley called Lily into her office for a private meeting. The brat pack pretends to be nice to Lily, but it's clear they're just trying to figure out what happened in Foley's "inner sanctum" in case there's any interesting gossip to be had. Claiming that they just want to be nice, the girls ask Lily if she can be trusted, and then promise to show her something amazing if she follows them (and promises not to tell ANYONE). Hesitantly, Lily follows the girls into Amie's bedroom where the brat pack uncovers a "secret box" of junk food. Lily is disappointed. She thought the secret would have been much juicier. A box of candy bars and soda is nothing to write home about. Veronica claims that they have a whole storeroom of treats downstairs, and if Lily wants to see it, they'll share some with her: "I would have been stupid not to be suspicious," Lily thinks to herself, "but they weren't the only ones with secret plans" (Page 93). Even though she doesn't trust them, Lily agrees to follow the brat pack into the basement. The pack leads Lily down the same labyrinth of hallways before opening a rickety door and telling her that the stash is inside. Predictably, the pack pushes Lily inside and slams shut the door, which locks from the outside. All Lily hears is the girls' laughter as they run away.

When Lily surveys the room for possible escape routes, she immediately notices a large-scale replica of the Chicago city skyline. Interestingly, two buildings are marked with an apple green circle emblazoned with the letter "Y." Upon closer inspection, Lily notices that the metal spires of the Sears tower are actually a metal key. Figuring that the model maker must have worked here in private, and would have needed a key to unlock the door, she surmises that this key will unlock the door from the inside. Gleefully, she opens the door and prepares to rub her success in the brat pack's face. Before she gets a chance to, Lily hears footsteps bounding toward her, and the floor begins to shake. Suddenly, Lily sees Scout and Jason sprinting down the hallway with someone, or something, following close behind them. As they get closer, Lily realizes the person following them is the eerie blonde they saw outside the pillar garden. Lily turns to run, but stumbles over her feet. She sees the blonde conjure something that looks like fire in her hands and shoot it at Scout and Jason. They dodge the flame,



which shakes the walls and floor. Still scrabbling to her feet, Lily is frozen in fear when another hooded figure joins the blonde and sends his own fireball their way. This one makes contact, with Lily. A wave of hot air slams Lily to the ground with the force of a freight train. The last thing she sees before she stands up is Jason leaning over her, lifting her into his arms. Before she passes out, Lily swears she hears a ferocious growl escape Jason's lips.

Chapters 7 & 8 Analysis

Leslie is one of the few ambiguously motivated characters in the novel. Her initial letter to Lily, ominously slipped under the door, suggests a menacing interest in Scout's comings and goings. When she discusses the note with the girls, however, she claims that, "things are dull around here. I thought I'd spice things up" (Page 86). Leslie appears to suffer from some form of Autism - perhaps Aspergers' Syndrome - which not only causes her to obsess over her studies, but also stunts her social abilities. She claims to "want in" on whatever is going on late at night, suggesting that, like Scout and Lily, she is lonely. Leslie's desire to fit in carries on through the novel, but is never fully addressed, leaving readers to question whether or not Leslie will have a more important role to play later in the series. Conveniently, Leslie's strange behaviors perfectly lend themselves to suspicion when someone within the school begins creating problems for Lily and Scout. Keen readers will remember Leslie's pride in being able to silently stalk prey, and may wonder if she was somehow involved in Scout's troubles. These mysteries aren't specifically addressed in Firespell, but may carry on to the rest of the novels in the series.

When the Brat Pack lure Lily from her room into the basement, Lily knows it's a trap yet she blindly follows the girls as if she trusts them. Throughout the novel, Lily flip-flops on her feelings toward the Brat Pack. Even though they're obviously terrible, she feels a draw to them almost as if she subconsciously desires to be part of them. This could suggest one of two things: first, it may suggest that Lily is not an entirely reliable narrator, that she may edit out some of her thoughts in the story's retelling. Whenever the reader understands more about a character or her surroundings than the narrator does, reliability is called into question. Lily may not want to admit that she is drawn to the Brat Pack, but to the outside eye, it seems clear that she is. It might also suggest that Lily is naturally drawn to "bad" rather than "good," which becomes significant later in the novel.

Finally, this section fully introduces its fantasy elements, complete with fire, magic spells, and a possible werewolf. Readers can expect a sharp shift in narration, tone, and content in the upcoming chapters as this shift from realism to fantasy is explained.



Chapters 9 & 10

Chapters 9 & 10 Summary

Lily awakens at the LaSalle street clinic, feeling like she was hit by a bus. Scout is by her bedside, ready to bring Lily whatever she needs. Before Scout can question why Lily was following her again, Lily announces that the brat pack lured her into the basement and locked her down there, which is how she happened across Scout and Jason, not because she was following them. Now that she has been attacked by one of Scout's enemies, Lily demands to know what's going on. She deserves at least that much. Scout takes a deep breath, but agrees. Lily was hit by a firespell, but she doesn't go into much more detail because Lily's parents phoned desperately from Germany. Lily quickly tells her parents that she's all right and then demands to know whether or not they know Foley. The line goes bad, but before it cuts out, Lily hears her mother say, "Yes, we know Marceline" (Page 110). Again, Lily barely has time to process her thoughts because Michael and Jason arrive with a bouquet of flowers for her. Michael, Jason, and Scout all decide that Lily deserves to know the truth, so they start to tell her what happened: Jason explains that there are people in the world who are gifted with magic. There are many different classes of powers - Scout, Jason, and Michael each have their own - that don't come into fruition until the gifted person reaches maturity. The catch is that magic isn't eternal. Teenagers have particularly strong powers, but as they age, their powers weaken. The only way to keep that power strong is to feed on the souls of immortals. Like vampires, "Reapers" find a vulnerable victim and slowly suck the life out of them to maintain their own strength. Scout, Michael, and Jason have all decided that the cost of maintaining their powers is too great and that they'd rather the magic leave them. Before they lose their power completely, however, they are using what strength they have to fight against the Reapers. They discovered a list of names - souls vulnerable to be sucked, and have set about protecting them. The blonde, and the hooded guy who attacked Lily, are Reapers who risk losing their prey. Scout and her friends also find teenagers with magic and convince them that it's better for the universe if they don't engage in their powers - so they won't risk being convinced by the Reapers to join the army of soul-suckers. They also say that the model city Lily found is a map of the enclaves where the Reapers bait their minions. St. Sophia's is Enclave 3.

The room is quiet for a few hours after Scout, Michael, and Jason leave, but soon there is another knock at the door. Lily is surprised to see that Foley has come to visit her, another out of character action singling Lily out from the rest of the student body. Interestingly, Foley comes to say that perhaps she was mistaken about Lily's parents - perhaps she had them confused with another student's parents. The next morning, Lily is released from the hospital and returns to St. Sophia's. Scout has been spending more time with Leslie, and the brat pack have been anxiously awaiting Lily's return. Amie has the most remorse on her face when Lily walks through the doors, but the other girls eye her suspiciously, obviously waiting to see if Lily will turn them in. Lily makes a snide remark about how she was kept so long at the hospital because her LAWYER had many questions, which sends the brat pack scrambling. Laughing to herself, Lily walks



to her bedroom to take a shower. As she undresses, she inspects the variety of bruises and scrapes on her body. She stops short and nearly loses her breath when she sees a small, apple green mark on the small of her back. The spot is perfectly shaped, accented with ornamental lines throughout the circle. Immediately, Lily sees that she hasn't been bruised: she's been marked.

Chapters 9 & 10 Analysis

Perhaps the most important section of the novel, these chapters explain the main conflict of the entire series: the battle between good and evil, Adepts and Reapers. In short, the battle between Adepts and Reapers is over innocent human souls. A small percentage of the human population is gifted with magical powers which become apparent when the individual reaches puberty. These powers only last until the individual is 25, when they are given back to the universe. Should an individual want to keep their magical powers, they must turn to the dark side, sucking the souls of innocent human beings to maintain their magical strength. The Adepts are the group of magical teenagers who have decided to give their powers back to the universe, and use what little magical time they have left to protect the Reapers' victims, and attempt to convert the Reapers back to good. Reapers, on the other hand, believe that they are an evolved species with every right to suck human souls. Teenaged Reapers, like the blonde in the attack, don't yet need the power of human souls to survive and choose to suck power and gift it to older Reapers, called elders. In a clever twist, Scout describes Reaper victims as depressed teenagers: "Have you ever seen people who you thought seemed drained of energy? Depressed? Like, kids who are sleeping in class all the time, dragging around, that kind of thing" (Page 118). Most readers will recognize this description of their peers, which makes the imagination of Adepts and Reapers all the more realistic.

Also in this section, Lily hears first-hand that her parents personally know Foley, which suggests that Foley's earlier suggestions about Lily's parents might be true. It is interesting, then, that Foley makes a special trip to the hospital claiming that she was mistaken. Clearly Foley is hiding something from Lily, which further adds to the novel's intrigue. Given the sudden appearance of magical teenagers, keen readers may wonder how all this is tied back to the genetic research Foley mentioned during her office meeting with Lily.



Chapters 11 & 12

Chapters 11 & 12 Summary

Overwhelmed with the realization that the Reapers have marked her - whatever that means - Lily refuses to show anyone the "new tattoo" on her back. Scout tries to speak with Lily multiple times, but Lily ignores her, afraid of what Scout will tell her if she admits the truth. When Amie stops by to see if Lily would like to join the brat pack for an afternoon of shopping and junk food, Lily leaps at the opportunity to act like a normal teenager again. Even though she knows the brat pack are playing nice so Lily won't press charges against them, she embraces the afternoon of sunshine on Michigan Avenue. When the brat pack ask her why she ended up in the hospital, Lily claims that she tripped on the limestone stairs and knocked herself out. It's a weak excuse, but the brat pack believe her. The shopping experience shows Lily just how different her upbringing is from the rest of the rich, spoiled girls who buy everything they see in the stores, regardless of price. Only Veronica and Amie showed up to do the shopping, and Lily is pleased to note that away from MK, these members of the brat pack are almost pleasant. She enjoys herself until unexpectedly running into Jason Shepherd also out shopping with a friend. Lily tries to avert her eyes and ignore Jason, but Veronica knows his friend and calls them over. Lily doesn't acknowledge Jason and it's clear that it hurts his feelings. When Lily and the brat pack return to school, Scout and Leslie are in the common room playing cards. When Scout sees Lily returning, laughing, with the brat pack, there's a fury in her eyes. Before the brat pack leaves, Veronica warns that, "if you're not friends with the right people, the fact that you went to St. Sophia's won't make a damn bit of difference" (Page 155).

Chapters 11 & 12 Analysis

Once again, Lily chooses to spend time with the Brat Pack rather than spend time with Scout. This may simply suggest that Lily is desperate to forget what she saw in the catacombs and return to her "easy" teenage life: "The opportunity to pretend to be an It Girl for a little while, in a world with much simpler rules, where what you wore meant more than how many Reapers you thwarted, how much firespell you could take down. Call it a weak moment, a moment of denial. Either way, I said yes" (Page 145). However, Neill is drawing an obvious parallel between the Reapers and the Brat Pack, particularly in regards to their evil soul-sucking (one group literally sucks the souls of teenagers while the other group symbolically sucks their souls), and readers should remember Lily's eagerness to join the Brat Pack even though she knows they are "evil." Later in the novel, when it is revealed that Lily has been gifted with firespell, the Adepts inform her that those with Firespell are more easily swayed by evil than other Adepts. Lily's shocking statement that Veronica and Amie are "actually pleasant" - even after Veronica led the plot to lock Lily in the basement - highlights her strange draw to the Brat Pack and the possible reflection of her natural tendencies toward "bad" rather than "good."



Chapters 13 & 14

Chapters 13 & 14 Summary

Lily pounds on Scout's door for what feels like hours before she finally answers. Scout is angry that Lily is wasting her time with the brat pack, and clearly afraid that Lily is freaked out about the magic - she fears Lily has ditched her to hang out with "normal" teenagers - a problem that has plagued Scout her whole life. She demonstrates her magic to Lily by blowing into an origami paper house; with Scout's breath, the inside of the house begins to glow. As soon as her parents realized that she was different, Scout was sent to expensive boarding schools all around the country because her parents were too freaked out to deal with her. Feeling the trust forming between them, Lily admits that she's been avoiding Scout because she's afraid of the mark. Scout gasps at the sight of the "darkening" and whispers that, "this isn't supposed to happen" (Page 160). She demands to know if Lily has ever had magical powers, now or before the firespell, thinking all the way back to her childhood: did she ever feel different? When Lily swears that she has never had magical ability, Scout decides that she'll have to call an emergency meeting with the rest of her enclave to see if this has ever happened before. She lifts her shirt and shows a matching mark on her own back. For some reason, Lily is now one of them.

Forty minutes later, Lily is sprinting after Scout on their way to the emergency meeting. Lily is a JV member of the enclave, meaning that there are elder (varsity) members with more history of their group than she has. Lily hopes that these members will be able to shed some light on Lily's darkening. The group is outraged to see that Scout has brought a "regular" to the meeting until they see the marking on her back. Again, the demand to know if Lily has ever had magical powers. When Lily again denies the magic, the leader of the group, a varsity member named Smith, says that there isn't enough evidence to include Lily in the group. All they have proof of is that Lily has been marked, not what it means: "I'm sorry, Scout ... she's not like us. She wasn't made the way we were. She wasn't born with power, and the only reason she has a mark is because she got hit" (Page 174). Outraged, Scout walks Lily back to the dormitory and apologizes for wasting her time. Even though she doesn't want to have magical powers, Lily can't help but feel rejected by the enclave.

Chapters 13 & 14 Analysis

Scout's past history with friends abandoning her when they learn of her magical abilities explains her strong reaction to Scout's decision to spend time with the Brat Pack. Even though Scout seems like the perfect heroine, she, too, is flawed. While explaining her past to Lily, Scout demonstrates her magic for the first time. Scout, who collects a variety of spell books, is a classic witch with the ability to bind words together into magical form; in this case, breathing life into the paper house. Each Adept has their own magical powers: Scout is a witch, Michael is a reader, and Jason, it seems, is a

werewolf. One never knows how the magic will form in their system, which is what makes the experience particularly intriguing, and unique, to readers.

The appearance of the darkening is a turning point in Lily's life. It's clear that something has changed in her. Scout believes that Lily is now magical even though she hasn't yet portrayed any ability. It is interesting to note that, despite the darkening, the Varsity members of the enclave are skeptical about including Lily in their group. Smith's strict adherence to enclave policies, as well as his superiority complex as enclave leader, will come back to haunt him later in the novel.



Chapters 15 & 16

Chapters 15 & 16 Summary

Scout and Lily wake frantically the next morning, late for their classes as usual. On their way, MK ruefully mocks Lily for "falling down the stairs" saying, "How lame are you when you can't walk up a flight of stairs without falling down" (Page 180). Rather than engage with MK's childish taunting, Lily and Scout ignore her and continue on their way. During lunch break, Scout takes Lily on another tour of the city. She explains that there are lots of people who live in Chicago, not just the spoiled, rich kids of St. Sophia's. She looks around at the old architecture and people bustling down the street with such a love in her eyes, it's almost contagious. She announces that she'd like to run for City Council someday, which greatly surprises Lily. Later, she takes Lily to a snack bodega where a handsome kid named Derek works. When they leave, strawberry sodas in hand, Scout explains that Derek used to be targeted by the Reapers until Scout and her team swooped in to protect him. Now, he's a happy, normal teenager whose soul is protected from the suckers. Derek is one of the few members of "the community" - a group of "Regulars" who know about the Adepts' skills. As they walk back to class, they run into Jason, who asks for a private word with Lily. Lily feels the nervous energy building under her skin as Jason brushes against her arm. He apologizes for his seemingly gruff attitude during the enclave meeting. He explains that it was nothing personal, he just doesn't like the idea of Lily joining forces against the Reapers, especially when she doesn't have any magic to protect her. Scout can't be around all the time, and Jason is worried that Lily might get hurt. He also admits to Lily that he's a werewolf, which makes him different from the rest of the Adepts.

That evening, when Scout and Lily return to their room after dinner, Veronica, Amie, and MK sit cross-legged in the common room, giggling over Lily's personal file, which they've stolen from Foley's office. When they see Lily out of the corner of their eye, they loudly question, "Interesting, isn't it, that her parents left her? That they didn't take her with them? I mean, it's not like there aren't English-speaking private schools in Germany. She's not even from Chicago" (Page 195). After a harsh back-and-forth, Scout manages to snatch the file from Veronica's grasp and hand it to Lily. In the privacy of her bedroom, Lily immediately opens the file and begins searching it for information about her parents. She finds a handwritten note from her father to Foley asking her to be "circumspect" about the information she gives about his present research. The letter is printed on Sterling Research Foundation (SRF) letterhead - the research lab next door to St. Sophia's. Lily can't understand why her parents - philosophy teachers - would have access to the letterhead of a Chicago-based research lab. She decides that the only thing to do, if she wants to get to the bottom of the truth, is to break into Foley's office to see what other information she can find.



Chapters 15 & 16 Analysis

Derek is the perfect example of why Adepts need to fight against the Reapers for control of human souls. Derek would have been a lost life, with most "Regulars" believing that he died

from a form of depression, as Reapers methodically sucked the life out of him simply to keep their magical powers (which never seem to be used outside of battling with the Adepts). Putting a (handsome) face to the cause gives Lily even more determination to help the Adepts succeed in their mission, even though she doesn't yet know how to contribute. Derek's story also convinces readers that Scout and her friends are doing the right thing. As the novel, and the series, continues, Reapers will make convincing arguments about their way of life, but through Derek's story, Neill ensures that readers have a firm definition of which team is good and which team is evil.

Meanwhile, the budding romance between Lily and Jason continues to sizzle. It's interesting to note that Scout isn't fully supportive of the relationship, stating that Jason is a werewolf and therefore different than the rest of the adepts. This difference isn't further addressed in the novel, so readers can expect the conflict of his character to influence later novels in the series.



Chapters 17 & 18

Chapters 17 & 18 Summary

When Lily and Scout arrive outside Foley's office, they see that the lights are out and that there's no one around. Quietly, they push open the office door and begin searching for clues. First, they return Lily's file to the cabinet and search for files with her parents' names on them. They don't find any until Lily searches under Sterling Research, and finds a letter from a man named William, addressed to her father. The letter states that Germany is not the safest place for Lily and that she should be housed at St. Sophia's until her parents return. The letter also says, "It would be unwise for her to accompany you to Germany or for you to inform her about the precise nature of your work. Doing so would put you all in danger. That you are taking sabbatical, hardly a lie, should be the extent of her understanding of your current situation" (Page 307). The letter, which was forwarded from Lily's father to Foley, arrived the day after Lily was admitted into the hospital, which explains Foley's sudden backtracking during her visit. A new rage fills Lily's heart as she realizes her parents lied to her. She wonders what else they lied about - how many of her sixteen-years were filled with fantasies. As her emotion grows, Scout notices a strange effect: the lights in the room are flickering in time with Lily's heartbeat. She asks Lily to try to focus her rage, and when she does, the fluorescent light grows so bright it almost explodes. Scout realizes that Lily has magic; perhaps she's an Adept after all.

The next day passes like a haze for Lily, who spends the entire morning questioning who she really is: does she have magic or doesn't she? Have her parents lied to her or haven't they? She barely notices when Scout's cell phone rings during lunch with a new text message. She's confused because the Adepts never ring her during school, so this message is out of the ordinary. It simply says that an emergency meeting has been called because one of their team members is in trouble. Scout rushes to her bedroom and promises to meet back up with Lily later. Only Scout never comes back. At the end of the day, Lily trudges back to her room hoping to find Scout waiting for her there. What she finds is shocking: Scout's door is open, her room in complete disarray, and her messenger bag lying open on the floor. Scout is nowhere to be found, and Lily knows she would never go anywhere without her bag. Out of nowhere, Foley appears and starts demanding to know what happened to Scout. Lily can't answer her questions and fears giving away too much of Scout's true identity. Foley shocks Lily by announcing that she knows the truth, and that Scout isn't the only Adept at the school. She knows all about the enclave and Scout's missions, yet she is still a Regular. She tells Lily that the only people who can find Scout know are the rest of the Adepts, and it's Lily's job to make them see that, too.



Chapters 17 & 18 Analysis

In another turning point, Lily realizes two major things in this section: first, that her parents have definitely lied to her about their occupations, and that she's an Adept. It's interesting that both revelations take place within a short period of each other because it gives the effect that Lily has literally become a different person overnight, with a new history and a new future. Through Lily's experiences in Foley's office, the reader is given access into the great confusion of a new Adept, and the struggle to master new skills. It's a bumbling, charming process as Lily attempts to harness her ability to control light, but unsuccessful nonetheless. Lily's discovery that her parents are somehow involved with SRF, and likely genetic research, raises a slew of new questions about their involvement with the Adepts. Foley's strange admission that she knows about Scout's powers seem to suggest that she too knows more than Lily has given her credit for. Although it isn't addressed in this novel, there seem to be clues given that Foley and Lily's parents worked in genetic research, likely with Adepts, and now Foley runs a school to keep an eye on her past experiments (Scout). Foley even knows that Scout is a "Junior Varsity" member, which suggests an intimate knowledge of the enclave, although she assures Lily that while she is aware of the Adepts' existence, "I, like most Chicagoans, am not privy to the finer details of their existence" (Page 224). With the knowledge that Adepts give their powers back to the universe when they are twenty-five years old, it is possible that Foley had been an Adept before retiring her magic. St. Sophia's could be a safe haven for teens like she once was. It is also possible that Lily's parents were once Adepts, which would explain not only how they know Foley, but also how Lily came to have magical powers. Lily learns that magic is not transferred through spells, so the firespell that struck her down could not have transferred magical powers to her. Instead, it must have come genetically, although this too is not explored in the text. The true nature of Lily's magical origins will be further explained in later novels.

As the novel reaches its climax, the battle between good and evil, Scout goes missing in an obvious kidnapping. Foley insists that Lily engage the help of the Adepts to find Scout, as they will certainly be more successful than the police. Readers will remember the enclave's initial reaction to Lily's appearance at the meeting and can expect a bit of resistance to Lily's plan of attack. Readers will also remember Lily's fierce determination and loyalty. No matter what obstacles she faces, readers can be certain that Lily won't give up until her friend has been returned to safety.



Chapters 19 & 20

Chapters 19 & 20 Summary

Taking the route the enclave that she and Scout had taken a few days before, Lily sneaks through the limestone hallways and into the dark, musty underground catacombs that will lead her to the secret meeting room. She follows different graffiti tags to help her find her way through the labyrinth of hallways, before mustering up the courage to knock on the enclave's door. The Adepts answer, greeting her with glares and suspicious looks. Getting straight to the point, Lily holds out Scout's messenger bag and announces that Scout is missing. She tells the Adepts all about the text message and the trashed room, before demanded that they join her in the fight to bring Scout back, wherever she may be. Some of the JV Adepts, like Michael and Jason, look like they want to join Scout, but the Varsity leaders, Smith and Katie, are dubious. They don't want to make any big decisions without consulting with the higher-ups. Smith says that one of the dangers of fighting against the Reapers is that you could always be captured and sacrificed. Scout, he said, knew that risk and wouldn't want the rest of the Adepts risking capture to save her. Lily is outraged that Scout's "friends" aren't rushing to save her. When the Varsity leaders try to silence Lily because she isn't an Adept, Lily shouts that she might be. She tells them about her power to control the light. She says that she's an Adept, whether Smith likes it or not, but she's not a member of his enclave, so she doesn't have to maintain his carefully-constructed hierarchy. She turns her gaze specifically to Michael and Jason, Scout's closest friends, and asks them to join her. This time, they agree, bringing twins Jamie and Jill, and another JV Adept, Paul, with them.

Sprinting through the catacombs, Michael makes his way straight toward the sanctuary where he knows the Reapers house their victims. Michael's power is that he's able to read the emotion of a room by placing his hands on the walls, so he can feel which rooms are empty and which are not. Once they reach the Reapers' part of town, it only takes him a few moments to locate the room where Scout is being held. The team devises a quick plan: Jason, Jill, and Paul will distract the Reapers, luring out the front of the room, while Lily, Michael, and Jamie sneak into the room through the back and free Scout. The plan works beautifully, and Lily races to Scout as soon as the Reapers are pulled from the room. Scout is tied to a cot, eyes glazed over, terribly pale. The Reapers have been sucking her soul because Adepts' energy is more valuable than "Regulars," which means that she's too weak to stand on her own. As Lily and Michael attempt to untangle the knots holding Scout to the cot, two Reapers, Alex (the bringer of earthquakes) and Sebastian (the boy with the firespell that marked Lily) reappear. They call for the Adepts to stop what they're doing. Fearing that they'll start using their powers, the Adepts turn to face the Reapers. Alex and Sebastian part ways, making room for a third man in the room: their elder, Jeremiah. Jeremiah, whom Alex and Sebastian have been working for, looks at the Adepts with disgust. He takes a particular interest in Lily when he learns that she is the girl recently branded by Sebastian's firespell. He gives the Adepts a long speech about how beautiful and unique it is to be



gifted with magic. When Michael, Lily, and Jamie make it clear that they have no desire to join his minions, Jeremiah turns to the Reapers with loathing in his eyes and sneers, "Finish them" (Page 252).

Chapters 19 & 20 Analysis

When Lily was accidentally exposed to firespell, revealing her own magical powers, Scout was the perfect best friend to guide her through the transition, and Scout did everything she could to advocate for Lily within her enclave. When Lily is rejected from the group, Scout feels personally slighted, and her loyalty to Lily, as well as her belief in Lily's power, never waivers. To pay Scout back for her friendship, Lily acts bravely in the face of Scout's kidnapping, organizing the enclave to save her even though the Varsity members forbid it, bravely challenging their sense of order and power: "I can't believe you. I can't believe this. All that talk, and you bail when someone needs you. Trap or not, you make an effort. You make a plan. You try" (Page 235). Lily is loyal to Scout even in the face of danger and eminent death. It's unclear exactly why Smith and Katie are so deadset against rescuing Scout, but there are a few possibilities. First, the Varsity members might truly fear the wrath of the higher-ups should they step out of line. Indeed, at the end of the novel, the Adept elders sent a new "team leader" to unify the team after this incident tears them apart, making it clear that the higher-ups are involved in the everyday workings of the enclave. Secondly, their hesitance might suggest a more sinister involvement. Scout was lured into the trap by a member of her own enclave. While it's possible that the Reapers stole an enclave member's cell phone to send her the dishonest text message, but it's also possible that a member of Scout's enclave is playing double-agent, passing information to both sides. Judging by Neill's tendency to create two-dimensional, stock characters, it would be safe to assume that Smith is the turncoat based on his rude, smug personality.

Although it seems like the entire novel has been building toward this moment: the battle between Adepts and Reapers, it comes about quickly, and some critics say, rushed. It is only a matter of pages between Scout's disappearance and her rediscovery in the Reaper enclave. Neill fails to construct appropriate suspense or rising action before the climactic fight at the end of the novel. As a result, some readers might feel gyped: they've invested 240 pages and 20 chapters to this moment and it passes in the blink of an eye. One might expect that the Adepts face minor challenges and fights before the battle between good and evil, but Neill jumps right in and the fight is over in a matter of paragraphs. One interesting thing to note is that Sebastian, the boy who marked Lily with his firespell, seems to have a look of apology on his face when he meets Lily, as if he is sorry for causing her physical and emotional pain. Sebastian, a powerful Reaper, is perhaps the most interesting ambiguously motivated character. He is well respected within his enclave and possessed the most powerful magical ability (for evil), but he seems conflicted about his involvement. Readers can expect his character to return later in the series.

Jeremiah's speech about the value of Reapers is particularly interesting. He believes that Reapers are an evolved species, high above humans on the food chain: "[Adepts]



reject their power. They turn away from it, and they blame us for accepting it. For abiding by the natural order. They cast us as demons" (Page 250). Jeremiah is convinced that rather than helping the world, Adepts are actually causing strife within in because they would rather fight against the Reapers rather than live in solidarity with them. Like a cult leader, he manipulates and sermonizes, doing whatever he can to bring the rogues "back to the fold," but his efforts are in vain.



Chapters 21 & 22

Chapters 21 & 22 Summary

Alex turns with a glint of excitement in her eye, ready to kill off the Adepts, but before she can shake the earth, Jamie hurls a ball of fire in Alex's direction, giving the Adepts just enough time to leap behind a table before Sebastian unloads a massive firespell. Jamie manages to knit together a wall of fire, preventing the Reapers from reaching them while they unload Scout from the table. Through the wall of fire, Lily makes eye contact with Sebastian, and he looks at her with sympathy, even apology, in his eyes. Scout pulls Lily from the gaze by shouting for her to do something. Lily tries to summon her light-control power, but she hasn't yet mastered the technique. She tries to force the magic out of her body, but nothing happens. Scout tries to throw a spell of her own, but she's just too weak after the Reapers sucked part of her soul from her. When the wall of fire begins to unravel, Sebastian throws another firespell. While the Adepts manage to dodge the spell, it shatters the wall around them and a brick gashes open Jamie's forehead. Unable to cast any spells to save themselves, the Adepts watch with fear as the Reapers descend on them. As he walks toward Lily, Sebastian mouths the words, "Let go" (Page 259). Lily isn't sure how she knows what to do, but suddenly, she's filled with a new sense of confidence. Rather than trying to force the magic from her body, Lily simply lets it happen: "It wasn't that I'd suddenly learned how to do it, but more that my body had remembered how to do it" (Page 263). With a deafening force, Lily unleashes a beautiful green firespell that knocks down Sebastian and Alex, freeing up the door for the rest of the Adepts to escape. With a silent word of thanks to Sebastian, Lily follows her team.

In the hallway, they're reunited with the rest of the Adepts: Jason, Jill, and Paul are all anxious to hear how the team managed to get away. Lily and Michael eagerly tell them everything, including Lily's newfound magic, on their way back to the enclave. When they arrive, only Smith refuses to believe that Lily has suddenly realized her powers. He doesn't understand how the magic of Sebastian's firespell could have transferred to Lily because it's never happened that way before. Scout explains that some Adepts don't realize their magical powers until they are faced with trauma. The initial attack in the hallway, when Lily was struck by the firespell, was that trauma in Lily's life. Smith is also worried because there are no firespell Adepts. Historically, every teenager with firespell magic has joined the Reapers. A few days later, Lily sits in on her first official Adepts meeting at the enclave. Higher-ups have sent a new team leader, Daniel, to manage the enclave after tension surrounding Scout's rescue. Smith and Katie are still angry about being overpowered in the mission, and the JV members are still angry that they were met with resistance. Daniel is here to work as an intermediary to ensure the enclave continue to work together as a unified team, including their newest member, Lily. The meeting ends when their cell phones ring, signaling a new assignment.



Chapters 21 & 22 Analysis

In the final section of the novel, there are still many unanswered questions, a deliberate attempt by Neill to encourage readers to move on to the next book in her series. These open-ended conclusions may leave readers frustrated, as if they are no closer to discovering the truth than they had been on the novel's first pages.

In this section, Lily discovers that she, like Sebastian, has the power of firespell. This revelation comes in the middle of battle, and seemingly out of nowhere. Lily had previously been unable to harness the power of her magic, but suddenly, she knows exactly what to do. There is little explanation about Lily's turnaround, leaving critics to complain that her sudden change is random (plot driven) rather than organic (character driven). Readers are simply expected to accept that Lily is a master Adept out-of-the-blue and move on. Neill has always given space for character development in her pages, yet this section is starkly lacking. The most interesting character in this final section is not Lily, as it should be, but Sebastian, another ambiguously motivated character. Even though Sebastian fights for the Reapers, he clearly feels a connection to Lily, a need to protect and teach her, even at his own detriment. Generally speaking, readers are drawn to conflict over confidence, which is why most readers will be intrigued with Sebastian rather than Lily in the final pages.

It's interesting to note that at the novel's closing, Lily and Jason "almost" kiss. Again, without explanation, Lily forgives all of Jason's missteps (rejecting her at the initial enclave meeting, initially refusing to join her in the search for Scout) and once again considers him dreamy. While it highlights the passion (not rationality) of teenage romance, her constant flip-flopping leaves readers feeling somewhat annoyed and confused. When she leans in for the kiss, readers aren't sure whether they should feel happy for Lily or worried (keen readers will remember Scout's warning to hold Jason at arm's length). In a novel where the reader has been blissfully spoon-fed emotions, Neill is uncharacteristically ambiguous here.

The novel ends with the higher-ups sending a new team leader to take over Smith's position, Lily's admittance in the enclave (symbolizing her social fit in a previously isolated world), and the beginning of new mission. Each of these open-ended elements ensures that readers will pick up the next book in the series to discover more about the mysteries and adventures of Scout and Lily's lives.



Characters

Lily Parker

Lily Parker is the sixteen-year-old narrator and protagonist of the novel. At the opening of the novel, Lily is a well-adjusted teen living her life in Sagamore, New York. All this changes when her parents announce that they have accepted research positions in Munich, Germany, and that they plan to send Lily to an elite boarding school in Chicago. At St. Sophia's school, Lily sticks out like a sore thumb: she doesn't come from money, which means she isn't nearly as well-dressed, snobby, or spoiled as the rest of the student body. She feels utterly alone until she meets Scout Green, a fellow misfit who quickly becomes Lily's new best friend. Lily is a somewhat meddling, nosy character. When Scout asks her to mind her own business and trust her about her late night excursions, Lily doesn't take "no" for an answer. She follows Scout, even though Scout expressly forbade her to, and winds up getting involved in the battle between good and evil in a world of magical teenagers. After being hit by a firespell, Lily develops the strange ability to control light brightness, and eventually, of conjuring powerful firespells of her own. As a result, Lily becomes a member of the enclave of Adepts at St. Sophia's and officially finds her place in the community. Lily's magical powers are particularly interesting because, unlike the rest of the Adepts, she wasn't born with them. The powers lay latent in her body until a moment of extreme trauma - her first firespell attack - awakens the magic inside her. This experience shocks her. As a result, Lily is naive, clumsy, and awkward with her magic, leaving her plenty of growing room in the rest of the series. In *Firespell*, Lily portrays extreme loyalty in her willingness to put her life on the line to find Scout, as well as her stubborn nature, characteristics that will serve her well as a heroine in the rest of the series.

Millicent Carlisle Green / Scout

Millicent Carlisle Green / Scout is Lily's suitemate at St. Sophia's and instantaneous new best friend. Scout is unlike the rest of the St. Sophia's girls in that she wears her hair in a two-toned bob and sports a silver nose ring. She's clearly a social outcast at the school, but her personality is much more appealing to Lily than the spoiled Brat Pack's. On Lily's first night at St. Sophia's, Scout gets a mysterious phone call before disappearing into the night. She only tells Lily that she's going "exercising," but when she returns at 3:00 in the morning, visibly exhausted and covered in bruises, Lily knows her BFF is lying. As the novel progresses, it's revealed that Scout is an elite member of the Adepts, magical teenagers who battle against evil Reapers who suck souls from unsuspecting humans. Scout is a spellbinder (or witch) with the ability to cast magical spells. She belongs to a special group of Adepts who, as a splinter cell of the magical population, have chosen to use their powers for good rather than evil. Together with her team, Scout fights against the Reapers, who must suck the souls from unsuspecting humans in order to retain their magical power. Scout does her best to protect Lily from the truth of her existence, but when Lily is accidentally hit by a rogue firespell aimed at



Scout, Scout can deny the truth no longer. The climax of the novel comes when the Reapers kidnap Scout because her magic is particularly powerful. The Reapers begin to suck Scout's soul, but lose their prize victim when Lily arranges a rescue party of Adepts to save her.

Jason Shepherd

Jason Shepherd is a member of the Adepts and lives life as a werewolf, although he keeps this aspect of his personality hidden from the outside world. Jason is described as incredibly handsome, with shocking blue eyes that change to green when he is emotional. Although Jason clearly has romantic feelings for Lily, his first loyalty is to his enclave of Adepts, which means that he agrees with their decision to reject Lily from the group, and initially refuses to join Lily in her search for Scout based on the hierarchy of power.

Michael Garcia

Michael Garcia is an Adept, and Scout's love interest. Described as Hispanic (he curses in Spanish) with beautiful brown eyes and tan skin, Michael's magical skill is his ability to "read" architecture. By placing his hands on the walls, he can sense what emotion is held on the other side. When Scout is kidnapped by the Reapers, this skill is priceless in helping the Adepts locate Scout within the winding walls of the Reapers' enclave. Michael is desperately in love with Scout, but for now, that romance is one-sided. While Scout is clearly interested in Michael, she fears a romantic relationship would distract her from her duties.

Leslie Barnaby

Leslie Barnaby is the strange cello player who lives in Scout and Lily's dorm. She is generally reclusive, with few friends, and is rarely seen away from her books or cello. When Lily and Scout begin their secret missions, Leslie's interest is piqued and she suddenly wants to join them. Although Scout and Lily are unable to reveal the true nature of their missions, they do their best to make Leslie feel included, because they know how it feels to be left on the outside.

Marceline Foley

Marceline Foley is the all-business headmistress of St. Sophia's School for Girls. Interestingly, she takes a special interest in Lily when she arrives, much to the surprise of the rest of the students. Although Foley is clearly interested in Lily, she maintains her strictly professional, cold demeanor around her. As the novel progresses, it is revealed that Foley knows Lily's parents, and that she worked with them on some genetic research, the details of which remain a mystery in this book in the series.



Veronica Lively

Veronica Lively is the most popular girl at St. Sophia's and the ringleader of the Brat Pack. She is extremely beautiful, with her long blonde hair always secured behind a blue headband. Veronica's character is complex in that she seems evil on the outside, but when Lily gets to know her better, she sees that Veronica truly believes that she is better than the rest of the student body. She holds fast to the belief that it's not what you know, but who you know that is most important. She attempts to befriend Lily when she first arrives at St. Sophia's, but when Lily rejects her, Veronica unleashes all her evil torment to make Lily's life miserable.

Mary Katherine / MK

Mary Katherine / MK is a student at St. Sophia's and a proud member of the Brat Pack. Mary Katherine is one of the most evil characters in the novel, creating trouble for Scout and Lily simply because she enjoys it. Mary Katherine is ruthless in her bullying, orchestrating the plots to steal Lily's personal file from Foley's office, and to lock Lily in the custodian's office beneath St. Sophia's.

Jeremiah

Jeremiah is one of the Reaper elders, whom Lily becomes acquainted with during her quest to rescue Scout. Jeremiah is particularly interested in Lily because she has only just realized that she has magical powers. Jeremiah hopes to persuade Lily to join the Reapers where her powers can be utilized. Working like a cult leader, Jeremiah manipulates and controls the teenage Reapers to suck souls and give him the power.

Alex

Alex is one of the teenage Reapers who works for Jeremiah. She is a teenager, which means she doesn't yet need the power of sucked souls, with wavy blonde hair that she usually secures beneath the hood of a black sweatshirt. Alex is singularly evil, with a single-minded objective to harm the Adepts and steal as many souls as she can. Alex's power is the ability to create earthquakes.

Sebastian

Sebastian is one of the teenage Reapers who works for Jeremiah. His power is the ability to form firespell, one of which brands Lily. When Lily meets Sebastian at the battle over Scout, Lily is surprised to see that Sebastian looks apologetic, even remorseful, for his position within the Reaper enclave. It is Sebastian who teaches Lily how to harness the power of her firespell, even though he knows she will use it to

overpower him. At the end of the novel, it is unclear whether Sebastian is a good guy or a bad guy, a conflict that will surely be explored in the rest of the novels in this series.



Objects/Places

St. Sophia's School for Girls

St. Sophia's School for Girls is the gothic, private school in the heart of Chicago where Lily and Scout attend. St. Sophia's is an exclusive (and expensive) school with a proud record of successful graduates who go on to positions of power and financial success. The school itself is a creepy, old structure. A convent in its former life, Lily thinks it would be the perfect setting for a horror film when she lays eyes on it the first time: "Dismal, gray stone. Lots of tall, skinny windows, and one giant round one in the middle. Fanged, grinning gargoyles perched at each corner of the steep roof" (Pages 5-6). Inside the school, a labyrinth of limestone corridors connects the various halls and, once past the corrugated iron door, connects St. Sophia's with the rest of underground Chicago.

Sagamore, New York

Sagamore, New York is where Lily was born and raised. She leaves her hometown when her parents take a research sabbatical in Munich, and she never stops missing home.

Munich, Germany

Munich, Germany is where Lily's parents accept a two-year research sabbatical, forcing them to leave Lily at St. Sophia's School for Girls. When Lily discovers that her parents have lied to her about their occupations, she begins to doubt whether or not they are in Munich at all.

Chicago, Illinois

Chicago, Illinois is where St. Sophia's School for Girls is located, and where Lily lives throughout the "Dark Elite" series, including "Firespell." Because of the strict school rules, Lily rarely leaves St. Sophia's, but she is given the opportunity to explore Michigan Avenue while out shopping with the Brat Pack, and different areas of Wicker Park while touring with Scout. It is interesting to note that Scout feels a strong connection to Chicago and dreams of running for city council one day.

Adepts

Adepts are magical teenagers who have decided to use their powers for good rather than evil. A small percentage of the human population is gifted with magical powers which become apparent when the individual reaches puberty. These powers only last until the individual is 25, when they are given back to the universe. Should and



individual want to keep their magical powers, they must turn to the dark side, sucking the souls of innocent human beings to maintain their magical strength. The Adepts are the group of magical teenagers who have decided to give their powers back to the universe, and use what little magical time they have left to protect the Reapers' victims, and attempt to convert the Reapers back to good.

Reapers

Reapers are magical teenagers (and adults) who have decided to use their powers for evil rather than good. A small percentage of the human population is gifted with magical powers which become apparent when the individual reaches puberty. These powers only last until the individual is 25, when they are given back to the universe. Should an individual want to keep their magical powers, they must turn to the dark side, sucking the souls of innocent human beings to maintain their magical strength. The Reapers believe that they are an evolved species with every right to suck human souls to survive. Teenagers, who don't yet need the power of human souls to survive, will suck power and gift it to older Reapers, elders, like Jeremiah.

Darkening

A Darkening is a mark left on a magical teenager's body, like a tattoo, which marks their magical power. Lily is left with a darkening after she is hit by Sebastian's firespell, which is strange because, at the time, Lily had no magical powers.

Firespells

Firespells are strong and powerful magical spells that knock everyone in the room unconscious when emitted. Firespells are particularly coveted during the battle between Reapers and Adepts, but only Sebastian, and now Lily, have the power to produce them.

The Brat Pack

The Brat Pack is a group of horrible, spoiled, rich bullies who attend St. Sophia's. Veronica Lively is the ringleader of the brat pack, with Amie Cherry and Mary Katherine acting as the remaining members. The Brat Pack are behind the plots to steal Lily's personal file from Foley's office, and locking Lily in the custodian's office beneath St. Sophia's.

Sterling Research Foundation (SRF)

Sterling Research Foundation (SRF) is an old genetics laboratory next to St. Sophia's. As old as St. Sophia's, the two buildings share a fence protecting them from the busy



Chicago streets. When Lily investigates her personal files, she realizes that her parents and Foley met while performing medical research, and that they all have a connection to SRF.

Enclave

Enclaves are underground meeting rooms, or groups, that magical teenagers belong to. There are three enclaves of Adepts beneath Chicago, and an unknown number of Reaper enclaves nearby.



Themes

Friendship / Loyalty

As soon as Lily arrives at St. Sophia's, she recognizes that she is different from the rest of the girls. She doesn't come from money, isn't snotty or arrogant, and hasn't been handed the world on a silver platter. So when she meets Scout Green, a fellow misfit, the two strike up a strong and fulfilling friendship. Perhaps because both girls are so isolated at the school, their friendship becomes inseparable as the girls lean on each other for support during difficult times. Even though Lily claims to trust her new best friend, she knows Scout is keeping secrets from her and begins following Scout when she sneaks out at night. As a result, Lily unwittingly becomes embroiled in the battle between good and evil, Adepts and Reapers. When Lily accidentally becomes exposed to firespell, revealing her own magical powers, Scout is the perfect best friend to guide her through the transition, and Scout does everything she can to advocate for Lily within her enclave. When Lily is rejected from the group, Scout feels personally slighted, and her loyalty to Lily, as well as her belief in Lily's power, never waivers. To pay Scout back for her friendship, Lily acts bravely in the face of Scout's kidnap, organizing the enclave to save her even though the Varsity members forbid it, bravely challenging their sense of order and power: "I can't believe you. I can't believe this. All that talk, and you bail when someone needs you. Trap or not, you make an effort. You make a plan. You try" (Page 235). Lily is loyal to Scout even in the face of danger and eminent death. As a result of her loyalty, bravery, and friendship, Scout is saved and Lily is welcomed as a member of the Adept enclave, proving that love conquers all.

Truth

One of the major obstacles Lily overcomes throughout her quest in Firespell is her understanding of the truth. When she moves to St. Sophia's, Lily feels confident in the life she's leaving behind: her parents - philosophy teachers - love her; she had a loving, honest childhood and expects a bright, predictable future. The first person to challenge Lily's views of the truth is Scout, whose mysterious behaviors in the middle of the night cause Lily to question whether or not her new best friend is telling the truth. Despite Scout's express wishes that Lily "trust her" about the nighttime excursions, Lily follows Scout and becomes accidentally intertwined in the battle between good and evil. When Scout receives her darkening from Sebastian's firespell, the truth of who she is - a "regular" teenager - begins to unravel as Lily discovers her magical abilities. At the same time, questions surrounding her parents' work, and their relationship with headmistress Foley, further draw question to the truth of Lily's upbringing. Lily discovers handwritten letters and correspondences that lead her to believe that her parents have been lying to her. Perhaps they're not truly in Germany. Perhaps they're not researching. Perhaps they're not even philosophy teachers. Although these discoveries are shocking, and ultimately frightening, at Foley's advice, Lily chooses not to obsess over this new version of truth: "Now, however, is not the time to be distracted by the



nature of their work. And more important, you should put some faith in the possibility that your parents informed you of the things they believed you should know. The things they believed it was safest for you to know" (Page 223). At the end of the novel, Lily realizes that "truth" is subjective. It doesn't matter whether or not she's magical (or where that magic came from), nor does the true nature of her parents' work define the "truth" of her existence. What matters to Lily is being surrounded by supportive, loving friends and family whom she trusts to protect and care for her. In Lily's mind, if you have that, nothing else matters.

Self Identity

When Lily moves to Chicago and enrolls in St. Sophia's School for Girls, for the first time in her life, she begins to question her self-identity. She had come from a comfortable position at her last school - she knew who her friends were and where she fit socially - but in Chicago, all that comfort is thrown out the window, leaving Lily feeling exposed, isolated, and vulnerable. Away from her family and friends, Lily questions who she really is and what is important to her. Forced to choose between the "regular" Brat Pack and the "misfit" Adepts, Lily digs deep to discover what makes her unique. While she desires to identify as an Adept, Lily is also attracted to the lifestyle of an average teenager: "The opportunity to pretend to be an It Girl for a little while, in a world with much simpler rules, where what you wore meant more than how many Reapers you thwarted, how much fire spell you could take down. Call it a weak moment, a moment of denial. Either way, I said yes" (Page 145). By the end of the novel, Lily learns (from Scout) that what's most important in one's self-identity is the ability to stand firm to your ideals. For Lily, the important ideals are loyalty, friendship, and bravery, three characteristics she portrays in during the battle to save Scout. When Lily fully embraces those ideals, she also comes fully into her own identity by conjuring of her own fire spell: "I knew exactly what I'd done, the sensation of doing it somehow as natural - as expected - as breathing. It wasn't that I'd suddenly learned how to do it, but more that my body had remembered how to do it" (Page 263). By the end of the Fire Spell, Lily has a much firmer grasp of her self-identity, which will give her strength to overcome the obstacles facing her in the rest of the series.

Style

Point of View

Firespell is recounted in the first-person and limited, omniscient perspective of Lily Parker. This means that the audience is held very close to Lily's thoughts and emotions throughout the novel. Through the point-of-view narration, the reader gains intimate access into Lily's longing for home, her desperation to save Scout, her fears in battle, and her struggles to understand her identity. This access is vital to the reader's understanding of Lily's character because she is extremely guarded on the outside, particularly upon arrival to St. Sophia's. Lily is also quite isolated in Chicago. Her parents are in Germany and has few friends at her new school, limiting her opportunities for dialogue. Because Lily begins to question the "truth" of her childhood, the point of view is important because it allows Lily to reflect back on years of history, emotion, and relationships, which create a complex world for the reader to inhabit alongside her. The story is told mostly through exposition, with scenes of dialogue. The story is completely filtered through the thoughts and emotions of Ellie, so the reader sees the world through her unique perspective. The novel is recounted in the past-tense with a seemingly older Lily occasionally interjecting and commenting on the past-tense action. This gives readers the impression that no matter what danger Lily faces, they know she will be all right. This assurance gives readers the security to bond with Lily throughout the series.

Setting

Firespell is set in modern-day Chicago, specifically St. Sophia's School for Girls, private school in the heart of Chicago where Lily and Scout attend. St. Sophia's is an exclusive (and expensive) school with a proud record of successful graduates who go on to positions of power and financial success. The school itself is a creepy, old structure. A convent in its former life, Lily thinks it would be the perfect setting for a horror film when she lays eyes on it the first time: "Dismal, gray stone. Lots of tall, skinny windows, and one giant round one in the middle. Fanged, grinning gargoyles perched at each corner of the steep roof" (p. 5-6). Inside the school, a labyrinth of limestone corridors connects the various halls and, once past the corrugated iron door, connects St. Sophia's with the rest of underground Chicago. The city of Chicago plays a background role in the novel's plot. Because of the strict school rules, Lily rarely leaves St. Sophia's, but she is given the opportunity to explore Michigan Avenue while out shopping with the Brat Pack, and different areas of Wicker Park while touring with Scout. It is interesting to note that Scout feels a strong connection to Chicago and dreams of running for city council one day. Readers can expect the cityscape to become more defined in the upcoming novels in this series.



Language and Meaning

As the novel is written for young readers, the language tends to be very conversational and easy to follow. The sentences are constructed in a way that is not only easy to follow, but also gain momentum as the reader reads on. The sentences are constructed to entice the reader to turn the next page, and often this structure works. The novel is clearly geared toward modern teenagers and is written in modern teen-speak. Adult readers may be confused by some of the teenaged vernacular, but are given ample contextual clues to understand its meaning. Because the novel relies on fantasy-elements, like the battle between good and evil, Neill has created an imaginative world of "Adepts" and "Reapers," as well as a colorful vocabulary of words and phrases unique to this world. Although sometimes confusing, this language, adds a depth to the novel that allows the reader a glimpse into a world that is made believable through the language used. The sentences are constructed to entice the reader to turn the next page by utilizing cliffhanger phrases, and often this structure works. Despite the fact that Firespell is written in past tense narration, the language used, particularly in the battle scenes, creates a strong sense of urgency most readers will be unable to ignore. It is also interesting to note that some of the language used by the characters, particularly references to modern-day bands, television shows, and films, firmly place the novel in modern time, that critics might say "date" the series. Without these clear timestamps, the novel might have a longer-lasting appeal.

Structure

Firespell consists of 22 short chapters averaging 12 pages in length. The chapters are simply numbered at the top of the page, without titles or headings to distract from the action of the story. The chapters tend to be short to engage the reader in the immediate suspense and action of the tale. To strengthen the novel's momentum, Neill creates small problems and resolutions - the conflicts with the Brat Pack, Lily's exclusion from the enclave, and the uncertainty of new romance - to maintain the novel's quick pace from beginning to end - adult readers should have no trouble finishing the book in one sitting, or a single afternoon.

While seemingly straight-forward, the plot of Firespell is actually quite complex as Neill creates a variety of mysteries to be solved throughout the series, not just in a single novel. Such foresight requires organization and intrigue, two characteristics Neill displays in spades. This particular novel follows Lily's transition to student life at St. Sophia's, her strong friendship with Scout, and her the discovery of her magical abilities. Readers can expect the mysteries of her parents' involvement with the SRF, their relationship with Foley, and the sudden onset of Lily's powers to be further investigated later in the series. Neill also creates a strong romantic link between Lily and Jason as well as Scout and Michael to propel romance-minded readers through the series.



Quotes

"You string some letters together, and you make a word. You string some words together, and you have a sentence, then a paragraph, then a chapter. Words have power" (Page 20).

"There are things going on at this school - just because things seem normal doesn't mean they are. Things are rarely what they seem" (Page 69).

"I realized I'd been given an opportunity to become part of a new kind of family; an opportunity to trust someone, to take a chance on someone. My parents may have been four thousand miles away, but I'd gained a new best friend. And that was something. That was the kind of thing you held on to" (Page 113).

"The opportunity to pretend to be an It Girl for a little while, in a world with much simpler rules, where what you wore meant more than how many Reapers you thwarted, how much firespell you could take down. Call it a weak moment, a moment of denial. Either way, I said yes" (Page 145).

"Most people are oblivious to the currents around them, to the hum and flow of the city. We're part of that hum and flow. Sometimes people say they love living in Chicago - the energy, the earthiness, the sense of being part of something bigger than you are" (Page 188).

"Now, however, is not the time to be distracted by the nature of their work. And more important, you should put some faith in the possibility that your parents informed you of the things they believed you should know. The things they believed it was safest for you to know" (Page 223).

"I knew exactly what I'd done, the sensation of doing it somehow as natural - as expected - as breathing. It wasn't that I'd suddenly learned how to do it, but more that my body had remembered how to do it" (Page 263).



Topics for Discussion

Describe Lily's relationship with Scout. Why do you think these two girls became misfits (and eventually best friends) rather than members of the Brat Pack? Where does Leslie Barnaby fit in these opposing social circles? Why do you think Scout chose Lily rather than Leslie as her most trusted friend? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

How does the setting of St. Sophia's School for Girls reflect the plot of the novel? How does the spooky, old school enhance the novel's themes? Why do you think Neill chose to set "Firespell" in a gothic school rather than a modern one? How might the story have changed if she set it differently? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

What parallels can be found between the Brat Pack and the Reapers? How do both groups prey on the vulnerable for their personal strength? Do you think the parallels between these two groups are accidental or intended? How can you tell? What message might Neill be sending about high school life through these characters? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

It is a common characteristic in YA fantasy novels that the protagonist's parents be dead or otherwise disposed, leaving the protagonist to navigate the world independently. What is gained from this literary choice? What is lost? How does the absence of her parents affect Lily's maturation, particularly when she discovers that she is an Adept? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Many of the characters in the novel have ambiguous motives, leaving the reader (and often the characters) to question whether they are the good guys or the bad guys. Choose two ambiguous characters in the novel and describe their struggles. What is the benefit of creating ambiguously motivated characters in a series like this? Which character's struggle is most interesting to you as a reader? Why? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

As soon as Lily arrives at St. Sophia's, she begins to question the "truth" of her identity and upbringing. What leads Lily to challenge her perception of truth? How might you react if you faced the uncertainty of Lily's life? Because so many of Lily's questions remain unanswered at the end of the novel, how do you think Neill will tackle these questions in later novels? What do you think is the real "truth" of Lily's existence? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Describe Foley's role as headmistress of St. Sophia's School for Girls. How would you describe her as a leader? Why does she take such a keen interest in Lily over the other students, including the Adepts? Why is it significant that Foley knows Lily's parents? What do you think is the true nature of their relationship? How might that relationship tie into Lily's newfound magical abilities? What clues can be found in the text to support your theories?