

Akata Witch



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF NNEDI OKORAFOR

Okorafor's parents immigrated to the United States both for their education and to escape the Nigerian Civil War. They took Okorafor to visit Nigeria often throughout her childhood and adolescence, though Okorafor was considered "too American" in Nigeria and "too Black" at home in the U.S. She spent her teenage years as a track and tennis star and also loved math and science, but a scoliosis diagnosis put her involvement in sports to an end. She underwent surgery for her scoliosis at age 19, became briefly paralyzed from the waist down, and began writing short stories during her time in the hospital.

Throughout her time as a student, during which she earned a master's in journalism and English and a PhD in English, her professors discouraged her from writing science fiction. But eventually, she began writing science fiction and fantasy anyway. She began winning awards for her short stories in 2001, and since then, her stories and novels have won various awards including Nebulas, Hugos, and the Wole Soyinka Prize for Literature in Africa. *Akata Witch* has been named an ALA Best Fiction Book for Young Adults, was nominated for a Nebula, and was an Amazon.com Best Book of the Year. Okorafor lives in Arizona with her daughter.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Okorafor draws heavily on traditional West African religions, history, and culture to create the magical Leopard world of *Akata Witch*. The Leopard People in *Akata Witch* are inspired by Ekpe Leopard Societies, which were Efik secret groups that practiced magic and sometimes played law enforcement roles in the wider community in what are now Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Côte D'Ivoire, and Liberia. The Ekpe groups developed Nsibidi, a pictographic writing system used by people who speak various languages, including Igbo and Efik. Many of the spirits Okorafor mentions, such as Ekwensu, figure prominently in Igbo, Yoruba, and Efik belief systems, and many West African cultures feature masquerades. Masquerades in the real world represent spirits, sometimes of ancestors, and they entail men and boys dressing in elaborate costumes (sometimes with ceremonial masks) and dancing. More broadly, it's possible to trace the success of *Akata Witch* in particular, and Okorafor's work more generally, to increasing demand for literature and other media that's more diverse.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Akata Witch is the first in the *Nsibidi Scripts* series. It's followed by *Akata Warrior* and *Akata Woman*, and Okorafor has said she

plans to continue adding to the series. Okorafor characterizes the series (and her other fantasy work) as Africanjujism, a subgenre of fantasy that she coined and, per her website, that "respectfully acknowledges the seamless blend of true existing African spiritualities and cosmologies with the imaginative." Other books that approach fantasy similarly, and that other writers familiar with the subgenre suggest are part of it, include *The Palmwine Drinkard* by Amos Tutuola, *The Famished Road* by Ben Okri, and even Marlon James's *Black Leopard Red Wolf*. (James isn't African, but his novel draws heavily on African mythology.) *The Nsibidi Scripts* series has often been heralded as the Nigerian version of J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, but it's also part of a recent push to diversify the fantasy genre, particularly for young readers. Other fantasy novels by non-white authors include the *Legacy of Orisha* series by Tomi Adeyemi, *The Gilded Ones* by Namina Forna, and *The Wrath & the Dawn* by Renée Ahdieh. Okorafor has written several issues for the Marvel comic *Black Panther*, including a spinoff series that focuses on Shuri, the Black Panther's little sister. She took over writing *Black Panther* from journalist and author Ta-Nehesi Coates ([Between the World and Me](#); [The Water Dancer](#)). She is open about her love for graphic novels, especially Craig Thompson's *Blankets* and *Habibi*. Within *Akata Witch*, Sunny and her friends mention several books including Roald Dahl's children's classic *The Witches* and Percy Amaury Talbot's 1912 nonfiction book *In the Shadow of the Bush*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Akata Witch* (also published as *What Sunny Saw in the Flames*)
- **When Written:** 2010
- **Where Written:** Buffalo, New York
- **When Published:** 2011
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Young Adult Novel, Fantasy, Africanjujism
- **Setting:** Contemporary Nigeria
- **Climax:** Sunny sends Ekwensu back to the wilderness.
- **Antagonist:** Black Hat Otokoto and Ekwensu
- **Point of View:** Third Person, First Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Runs in the Family. Okorafor acknowledges in her author's note that she's not a soccer fan like Sunny and Sunny's friends, but she does come from an extremely athletic family. Her mother made the Nigerian javelin team, and her father ran hurdles at the national level.



PLOT SUMMARY

Twelve-year-old Sunny Nwazue confuses people. She's Nigerian but was born in the United States and now lives in Nigeria, and she's Black but is **albino**. She doesn't feel like she fits in anywhere. But she does know one thing for sure, since she saw a vision in a candle flame last night: the end of the world is coming. As she watched the world end in the candle, the flame caught her hair on fire, and now she has a short, blond Afro.

School is awful for Sunny after she has to cut her hair. Her classmates dislike and tease her anyway, but now everyone calls her ugly. To make things worse, she's the only one who scores highly on a writing assignment, and the teacher tells Sunny to lash her classmates' hands to punish them for their poor writing. Sunny refuses to hit her classmates, but after school, a girl named Jibaku leads several kids to beat Sunny up. A boy named Orlu rescues Sunny, and they walk home together when they realize they have a lot in common. They begin walking together regularly, and Sunny gets to know Orlu's other friend, a girl named Chichi who doesn't attend school. Sunny feels like she has friends again, and she feels safer walking with Orlu—a ritual killer named Black Hat Otokoto is on the loose, and his victims are all children.

A few months after Sunny begins walking with Orlu, Orlu has to go somewhere after school. Chichi still meets Sunny and invites her to her house, which is a crude mud hut next door to Orlu's house. Chichi cryptically says that she believes there's more to Sunny than meets the eye. When Orlu gets home and joins the girls, he shocks Sunny by performing juju to create a "trust knot." Sunny can't physically tell anyone what Orlu and Chichi tell her: that they're magical Leopard People, that Orlu can undo bad juju instinctively, and that Chichi remembers everything she sees.

The next day, Saturday, Chichi and Orlu take Sunny to meet a man named Anatov. He pulls out a big knife and draws a symbol in the air with it. Sunny is instantly pulled into the earth, and she emerges back in Anatov's hut a moment later dressed in a raffia dress. Metal things—chittim, or Leopard currency—fall around Sunny. She's now been inducted into Leopard society as a free agent, or a person without a Leopard parent—though Anatov suggests that Sunny's mysterious maternal grandmother may have been a Leopard Person. After Anatov introduces the three kids to Sasha, an American boy who's going to be living with Orlu, he sends the four to Leopard Knocks, the nearby Leopard settlement, to "explain things" to Sunny. To cross into Leopard Knocks, one must cross a rushing river via a slippery bridge that exists in the spirit world, and this requires a person to call forth their spirit face, which looks like a ceremonial mask. Chichi helps Sunny do this, but she explains that one's spirit face is private: it's like being naked. Sunny gets most of the way across before she slips and almost falls. In Leopard Knocks, Chichi

buys Sunny a book called *Fast Facts for Free Agents*.

Anatov expects Sunny to return to his hut with Chichi, Orlu, and Sasha in two weeks for lessons. After studying *Fast Facts for Free Agents*, Sunny learns how to sneak out of her house: she'll have to work a juju that requires a special kind of sheep's head—an *ebett*—but Sunny can't find one at the market, so she makes do with a normal sheep head. At the lesson, Anatov explains that Sunny made the juju work without the *ebett*'s head because she's albino. Being albino means that she already has one foot in the wilderness (the spirit world), so she should naturally be able to make herself invisible, manipulate time, and receive premonitions. Anatov then sends the four to visit a scholar named Kehinde, who lives in the dangerous Night Runner Forest. By working together, the four kids make it there alive.

At their next lesson, Anatov sends the four to visit another scholar named Taiwo. He also instructs them to purchase books at the Leopard Knocks bookstore. Sunny chooses a book written in a pictographic language called Nsibidi, which she can see wiggling—this means she can learn to read it. At Taiwo's hut, the four must show respect to Taiwo's Miri Bird, Nancy, who only then carries them to Taiwo's hut perched high in a palm tree. Then, Taiwo informs the four that they're an Oha coven, and that in three months, it'll be their job to take on Black Hat Otokoto.

Over the next few months, Sunny studies hard and is relatively happy. But one day, after getting the news that Otokoto horrifically mutilated a young boy, Sunny loses her temper with Jibaku after school. Sunny shows Jibaku her spirit face to terrify her—and minutes later, a car arrives to take Sunny to Sugar Cream, the Head Librarian of the Obi Library who also oversees punishments. Sunny is angry and upset, but she's not sorry. Sugar Cream warns her not to misbehave again and shares that she was considering taking Sunny on as a mentor. However, after Sunny's bad behavior, she insists she'll need to think about it. Sugar Cream also mentions that Sunny's grandmother, Ozoemena, was Black Hat Otokoto's mentor. He killed her to steal her powers.

After his next lesson with the four kids, Anatov announces that he's going to take them all to the Zuma festival in a few weeks. Sunny and Chichi lie to Sunny's mother that they'll be having a sleepover at Chichi's house, so on the day of the trip, Sunny boards a funky train with her friends. The first place Anatov takes them in Abuja is to Junk Man's market stall, where Sunny purchases her juju knife. They then attend the wrestling finals. The fight is bloody—and the loser, Miknikstic, dies and becomes a guardian angel. Sunny and Sasha later play in the student soccer match, and though their team loses, the players earn more *chittim* than those on the winning team do—presumably for working so well as a team.

The student social takes place later that night. Sunny and Orlu

have noticed Chichi and Sasha acting weird and exchanging insults with a boy named Yao all day, but the feud comes to a head at the social. Yao and Chichi exchange some juju charms, and then Yao agrees to not challenge Chichi again if Chichi can call a masquerade. Chichi calls the masquerade, which drops its cloth wrappings as it dances to reveal a body of stinging insects. Orlu convinces the masquerade to stop stinging the terrified students and to return to the wilderness. Anatov is enraged when he finds out what Chichi did. As soon as the group returns to Leopard Knocks, he takes Chichi to Sugar Cream to be caned. The Leopard Knocks newspaper also reports that Otokoto stole an important book from the Obi Library while the festival was taking place.

The dry season arrives, but the weather is unusual: it rains heavily for six days straight, closing schools and workplaces. On the seventh day of rain, Sunny comes downstairs for breakfast to discover Anatov in the kitchen with her mother. Sunny's mother cries and runs out of the room, and Anatov tells Sunny to get her things: it's time to take on Black Hat Otokoto. He drops Sunny on the steps of the Obi Library with Sasha, Orlu, and Chichi, and soon after, the four appear in front of several scholars. The scholars explain that Otokoto is corrupt and greedy, and he plans to bring the evil masquerade Ekwensu from the wilderness to bring about the end of the world. This, Sunny learns, is what she saw in the candle. It's the four kids' job to stop Otokoto and to rescue the two toddlers he kidnapped.

Sunny, Orlu, Sasha, and Chichi approach a gas station that Otokoto owns. After Orlu battles some invisible beings guarding the place, an unusual *obi* (thatched building) appears, with Otokoto and two lifeless toddlers inside. As Chichi and Sasha battle Otokoto and some nefarious bush souls, Sunny and Orlu carry the toddlers out of the *obi*. Orlu insists he can heal the toddlers and sends Sunny back into the fray. Sunny doesn't know what to do as Sasha passes out and as Chichi's attempts to beat Otokoto fail. Finally, Otokoto slits his own throat—the final sacrifice to bring Ekwensu through. Ekwensu emerges through a termite mound to stand 100 feet tall and 50 feet wide. She's made of palm leaves, and as she dances and spins, she laughs and tears up trees and mud. Sunny calls forth her spirit face and suddenly realizes who she is—and how powerful she is. In a language she doesn't even know, she tells Ekwensu to go away. Orlu is also able to bring the toddlers back to life.

When Sunny returns home, her father greets her at the door—and slaps her and accuses her of sleeping with lots of men, just like her grandmother did. Sunny's mother defends Sunny. In the kitchen, Sunny's mother explains that Ozoemena was odd and kept secrets, but that she wasn't seeing men when she went out at night. She encourages Sunny to see that her father is just sexist and doesn't understand. She also gives Sunny a box from Ozoemena. When Sunny opens the box in her

bedroom, she discovers a letter from her grandmother welcoming Sunny to the Leopard world, along with a photograph of her.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Sunny Nwazue – Sunny, the protagonist of the novel, is a 12-year-old Nigerian girl. However, Sunny doesn't feel secure in her identity as a Black Nigerian, as she was born in New York and is **albino**. In addition to making her so sensitive to the sun that she can't play soccer, her favorite sport, Sunny's albinism also makes her a target for bullying. Sunny's life changes the day she sees a vision of the end of the world in a candle flame. She meets Orlu and Chichi the next day after school, and they soon introduce her to Anatov, who inducts Sunny into Leopard (magical) society. Sunny learns that she's a Leopard free agent, and that her albinism is what makes her a powerful Leopard Person: it means that she already has one foot in the wilderness (the spirit world), so she should be able to make herself invisible, manipulate time, and receive premonitions from beings in the spirit world. As Sunny spends the next few months attending both Lamb (nonmagical) and Leopard school, she becomes happier and increasingly secure in who she is. However, though she suspects that her maternal grandmother was a Leopard Person, her mother remains unwilling to tell Sunny anything about her family history. At first, Sunny resents the Leopard philosophy that prioritizes education and the collective good over an individual person's safety, because it's scary for her to know that her teachers are willing to put her and her friends' lives at risk. But gradually, Sunny comes to see the value of prioritizing the collective good. She learns this when scholars reveal that Sunny and her friends are an Oha coven assembled to take down the ritual killer Black Hat Otokoto, who was Sunny's grandmother's mentee and killer. Sunny feels out of her depth as she and her friends fight with Otokoto and Ekwensu, the dangerous masquerade he brings to the physical world. But as she connects to her spirit identity, Anyanwu, she suddenly feels secure and at peace. Sunny sends Ekwensu back to the wilderness, and after this, the esteemed scholar Sugar Cream agrees to take Sunny on as a mentee.

Orlu – Orlu is one of Sunny's classmates and eventually becomes one of her best friends and a romantic interest. He's about a year older, and Sunny knows him as a quiet kid who likes to repair things like radios. Orlu and Sunny become closer friends after Orlu stands up to Jibaku and other bullies for Sunny, and they begin walking home from school together. When his friend Chichi shares that Orlu can “undo things,” Orlu and Chichi tell Sunny the truth: that they're magical Leopard People and that they believe Sunny is a Leopard Person, too. Orlu's natural ability is to instinctively undo juju when he counters it. After Sunny is inducted into Leopard society, she

and Orlu become increasingly close. This is in part because Orlu is the only one of the group who also attends Lamb (nonmagical) school, so he gives Sunny tips on managing what's essentially a double course load. While Chichi and Sasha are brash, confident, and willing to take risks, Orlu is serious, calculating, and respectful of tradition and rules. He's enraged, for instance, when Chichi and Sasha experiment with calling masquerades. He's also very interested in animals and nature, so he's the one to lead the group through Night Runner Forest and eventually becomes Taiwo's mentee (she also loves nature and animals). Orlu makes it very clear to Sunny that Leopard society should value knowledge above all else. In that sense, it's nothing like Lamb society. In the final fight with Black Hat Otokoto and Ekwensu, Orlu instinctively knows how to bring the two toddlers that Otokoto kidnapped and murdered back to life.

Chichi – Chichi is first Orlu's friend and neighbor, but she soon becomes Sunny and Sasha's friends as well. She's brash, quick, and confident, and she's never clear about her age—she could be older or younger than Sunny's 12 years. Sunny initially finds Chichi grating and confusing, as Chichi insults Sunny for her **albinism** and shares that she doesn't attend normal (Lamb) school. But Chichi loves to take risks, so once she and Sunny know each other better, Chichi is the one to convince Orlu that they should get Sunny inducted into Leopard society. Anatov explains that Chichi remembers everything she sees, and that many adults would see Chichi as rude and too confident. She'd never make it in the Lamb world, where she'd likely be identified with learning disabilities and marked as a future criminal. But in the Leopard world, she's a valuable asset because of her memory and her willingness to try complex and advanced juju charms, such as the one she works to call a masquerade at the student social at the Zuma Festival. Chichi is also very sexually mature compared to Sunny: she enjoys getting older men to look at her and then scolding them for sexualizing a child, and she and Sasha begin a romantic relationship midway through the novel. Though Sunny continues to find Chichi a bit hard to deal with, even as they become friends, Chichi takes helping Sunny feel comfortable very seriously. She coaches Sunny through calling forth her spirit face and helps her understand several other aspects of Leopard culture. In the final fight with Black Hat Otokoto, Chichi works an advanced juju charm—a gift from Ozoemena and Chichi's mother—that brings Black Hat Otokoto's past sins to life and causes them to torment him.

Sasha – Sasha is a Black boy from Chicago who's been sent to Nigeria. Sunny identifies him as American from the moment she sets eyes on him based on his clothes and mannerisms. In Chicago, Sasha got in trouble because he's wildly intelligent, quick to anger, and fiercely loyal to his family members and to other African Americans—so it was maddening for him when his parents moved to an all-white, all-Lamb (nonmagical) neighborhood. He used his Leopard powers to manipulate

police officers' minds and called a masquerade to get revenge on people who were cruel or racist to him and his sisters. In Nigeria, Sasha moves in with Orlu's family. He and Orlu don't always get along, since Orlu is quiet and levelheaded. But soon, Sasha becomes close friends with Orlu, Sunny, and Chichi. He and Chichi even become romantically involved toward the end of the novel. Being in Nigeria, however, doesn't stop Sasha from getting in trouble and testing boundaries. After purchasing *Udide's Book of Shadows*, he calls a dangerous water masquerade and helps Chichi call a masquerade at the student social during the Zuma Festival. He prides himself on being able to work juju far above the Ekpiri level, and he resents that most scholars encourage young students to follow the rules and not take risks. The scholar Kehinde sees Sasha's willingness to take risks as an asset, so he takes Sasha on as a mentee. Sasha suspects from the beginning that he, Orlu, Sunny, and Chichi are an Oha coven, and his suspicions are confirmed on the day that the scholars send the four to take down Black Hat Otokoto and the masquerade Ekwensu. During the battle with Otokoto, Sasha battles bush spirits and uses advanced juju to try to take down the older Leopard.

Black Hat Otokoto – The antagonist of the novel, Black Hat Otokoto is a magical Leopard Person and a ritual killer. His victims are all children, and he mutilates them and draws a line drawing of a hat on them. A few survive, but most don't. A few months after Sunny is initiated into Leopard society, she learns that Otokoto is a Leopard Person, and that her grandmother was Otokoto's mentor. She mentored him through passing the fourth level, but he murdered her to steal her powers sometime after he passed. According to Sugar Cream, Otokoto somehow became corrupt: he's always been greedy for chittim, and he also made a fortune in the Lamb (nonmagical) world in the oil industry. Sunny, Sasha, Chichi, and Orlu are an Oha coven assembled to take on Black Hat Otokoto on the day that Otokoto plans to bring a dangerous masquerade called Ekwensu through—Ekwensu will bring about the end of the world. Because Otokoto is so conceited, he underestimates the teenagers' power and doesn't try very hard to fight them. Ultimately, he slits his own throat and becomes the final sacrifice to bring Ekwensu through, but Sunny is then able to send Ekwensu back to the wilderness.

Ekwensu – Ekwensu is a dangerous, powerful, evil masquerade. Black Hat Otokoto plans to bring her from the wilderness to the physical world, where she'll bring about the end of the world. He succeeds—so Sunny and her friends must battle a hundred-foot-tall, 50-foot-wide masquerade made of brittle palm leaves. Sunny manages to send Ekwensu back to the wilderness, however, averting disaster for the time being.

Sugar Cream – Sugar Cream is one of the most respected figures in Leopard Knocks. She's a fourth-level scholar and is the Head Librarian of the Obi Library, a great honor. Sugar Cream is an elderly woman with severe scoliosis, and her

natural ability is to transform into a snake. As she explains to Sunny, she got her name as a toddler, when the man who ultimately raised her lured her out of the forest with milky, sugary tea. In addition to running the library and punishing misbehaving students, Sugar Cream is also a skilled Nsibidi reader and author who wrote the Nsibidi book that Sunny purchases and learns to read. Sunny learns when she gets in trouble that Sugar Cream is considering mentoring her. But because Sugar Cream prizes intelligence and sensibility (and because she sees Sunny's choice to terrify a Lamb classmate with her spirit face as neither intelligent nor sensible), Sugar Cream holds out on making her decision to mentor Sunny until the end of the novel.

Anatov – Anatov is a Leopard scholar who lives just outside Leopard Knocks, and he's Sunny, Sasha, Orlu, and Chichi's primary Leopard teacher. His full title is Anatov, Defender of Frogs and All Things Natural—Sunny learns that Anatov is a staunch vegetarian and believes that frogs are the first species to exhibit signs of climate change, and so are very important. As a teacher Anatov is demanding, with a wry sense of humor and no time for questions he deems silly or ignorant. But Sunny gradually comes to see that Anatov cares deeply for his students, despite the fact that he sends them on various dangerous and potentially deadly tasks as part of their education. He takes Chichi on as a mentee, which means she attends private lessons with Anatov.

Sunny's Mother – Sunny's mother is a doctor who also takes on most of the housework to care for her husband, Sunny's father, and her three children (Sunny, Ugonna, and Chukwu). Sunny thinks of her mother as a mostly neutral presence when the novel begins. But as Sunny undergoes her initiation into Leopard society and gets home late after spending time with her Leopard friends, her mother becomes a close ally. Though Sunny's mother is a Lamb and doesn't know what exactly is going on with Sunny, she recognizes that Sunny is, like her mother Ozoemena, a Leopard Person—and that the rules necessarily need to be different for Sunny. So, she stands up to her husband when he becomes violent and cruel to Sunny, and she assures Sunny that she trusts her and won't ask questions about what Sunny is up to. She also hands over a box that her mother left for Sunny containing information about Ozoemena and her abilities.

Sunny's Father – Sunny's father is a stern, traditional Nigerian man. Though he loves his wife, Sunny's mother, and his two sons Ugonna and Chukwu, Sunny believes her father hates her: he never wanted a daughter, and he, like many other Nigerians, thinks Sunny is unattractive and lesser because of her **albinism**. He's also more violent than his wife when Sunny misbehaves. Sunny's mother assures Sunny that her dad loves her, but that he's just sexist in a way that's all too common among Nigerian men of his generation. For instance, Sunny's mother insists that it's this sexism that causes her husband to resent Ozoemena

(his mother-in-law). She thinks it's also why he has always disliked Sunny, as he believes she was more likely to be "different" (that is, a Leopard Person) than a son—when in fact, this isn't true. He did, however, move back to Nigeria at his wife's request to keep Sunny safe.

Sunny's Grandmother/Ozoemena – Sunny's maternal grandmother, Ozoemena, was an esteemed Leopard scholar; she's deceased in the novel's present. Sunny grows up knowing little about her grandmother except that she was "strange," and may have been mentally ill. However, as Sunny is inducted into Leopard society, she discovers that her grandmother was, like Sunny, unable to tell her Lamb (nonmagical) family members about being a Leopard Person due to laws forbidding Leopards from telling the truth. Through speaking with Sugar Cream, Sunny learns that Ozoemena was Black Hat Otokoto's mentor, and that Otokoto killed her to make himself powerful. At the end of the novel, Sunny receives a box from her mother containing a letter from her grandmother and a photograph. Though Sunny looks nothing like Ozoemena—Ozoemena had dark skin—Sunny still feels connected to her grandmother.

Chichi's Mother – Chichi lives with her mother in a mud hut next door to Orlu's house. Many people in the neighborhood think Chichi's mother is a witch, but Chichi's mother is actually a magical Leopard Person and a Nimm princess (a Leopard Person who cannot marry and is spiritually bound to a goddess called Nimm). She spends most of her time reading and studying to pass her next level, and her hut is filled almost entirely with books.

Udide – Udide, who never appears in person in the novel, is a giant spider and the "ultimate artist." Depending on her mood, she switches between masculine and feminine pronouns (though *Akata Witch* almost exclusively uses feminine pronouns to refer to her). Udide is best known for the book *Udide's Book of Shadows*, which contains Udide's own stories, recipes, and juju charms. The book has only been copied three times and is considered extremely dangerous. Sasha purchases a copy in Leopard Knocks, and he and Chichi use what they've learned from the book to call a masquerade at the student social at the Zuma Festival.

Miknikstic/The Man – Miknikstic is one of the wrestlers who competes in the Zuma Wrestling Finals. He's an extremely tall man, standing over seven feet tall, and his ability allows him to see a few seconds into the future—so he knows what his opponent is going to do before he does it. Sunny meets Miknikstic before the match, before she knows who he is, and she's struck by his kindness and the fact that he stops at all to try to help her feel better (he encounters her sobbing). Miknikstic loses the wrestling match and dies as a result of his injuries, but he becomes a guardian angel after he dies.

Kehinde – Kehinde is Taiwo's twin and is one of the scholars who lives in the Leopard Knocks area. He's considered a

recluse, as he lives deep in the Night Runner Forest and seldom leaves his hut. When Anatov sends Sunny, Chichi, Orlu, and Sasha to visit Kehinde, the trip teaches the four how to work together—and because Kehinde is so impressed with Sasha, he agrees to become Sasha’s mentor.

Taiwo – Taiwo is Kehinde’s twin and is one of the scholars in Leopard Knocks. She lives high in a tree, which she and visitors access with help of a Miri Bird named Nancy. Taiwo takes Orlu on as her mentee, as they both love animals and nature. When Anatov sends Sunny, Sasha, Orlu, and Chichi to visit Taiwo, she teaches them to always be humble.

Madame Koto – Madame Koto is one of the fourth level scholars who lives in Zuma Ajasco. As Anatov explains, she’s extremely knowledgeable—but she is, perhaps, corrupt. She’s wealthy in the Lamb and Leopard worlds, and it’s possible she’s involved in the oil industry. In addition, she eats elaborate multi-course meals many times per day, and she’s always surrounded by attractive men whom Anatov implies are sex partners. She’s extremely tall as well as very wide.

Ibrahim Ahmed – Ibrahim Ahmed is one of the fourth level scholars who lives in Zuma Ajasco. Though Anatov notes that he’s extremely knowledgeable, he also suggests that Ibrahim might be corrupt—Ibrahim is wealthy in both the Lamb and Leopard worlds, as he’s involved in the oil industry. He’s over 100 years old, has 15 wives, and owns a mansion that moves regularly of its own accord.

Isong Abong Effiong Isong – The author of *Fast Facts for Free Agents*, Isong never appears in person in the novel. According to Anatov, she’s extremely intelligent and highly educated (she passed the fourth level). But she’s also pretentious and prejudiced against free agents and African Americans due to the fact that she was educated in Europe and the United States. However, Anatov also insists that she deserves some credit, as she’s the only person who ever took the time to write a book for free agents.

Godwin – Godwin is the captain of the green soccer team that plays at the Zuma festival. Sunny thinks he’s cute from the moment she sets eyes on him on the funky train to the festival. Though Godwin is initially unwilling to let Sunny play on the grounds that she’s female and girls can’t play, he ultimately gives in. He prioritizes giving everyone on his team a fair shot to play, so while he’s initially annoyed that his brother invited small, inexperienced boys to join the team, he tries to ensure that everyone has fun and can feel successful.

Ibou – Ibou is the captain of the Zuma festival soccer match’s white team. He prioritizes brawn and skill over teamwork and having a good time, so although his team wins, he and his teammates aren’t happy about their win and don’t earn much chittim. He also cruelly taunts Sunny for being female and **albino**, and he joins Yao in feuding with Chichi and Sasha.

Miss Tate – Miss Tate is Sunny and Orlu’s English teacher. She’s

a white woman and, until the novel begins, she’s Sunny’s favorite teacher. This changes, though, when Miss Tate becomes so enraged with her class’s poor writing in English that she tells Sunny—who scored high on the latest essay—to whip each of her classmates on the hand.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Chukwu Nwazue – Chukwu is Sunny’s oldest brother. He’s a ladies’ man who tries to flirt with Chichi the one time Chichi visits Sunny’s house.

Ugonna Nwazue – Ugonna is Sunny’s older brother. He’s the middle child between Sunny and Chukwu.

Jibaku – Jibaku is a bully in Sunny and Orlu’s class. She leads several other kids in beating Sunny up on several occasions, though she leaves Sunny alone after Sunny calls forth her spirit face and terrifies Jibaku.

Periwinkle – Periwinkle is one of Sunny and Orlu’s classmates. He’s a bully who follows Jibaku in tormenting Sunny.

Nyanga Tolotolo – Tolotolo is Chichi’s father, and he’s Sunny’s father’s favorite musician. He never appears in the novel—indeed, Chichi barely knows him.

Mohammed – Mohammed owns the bookstore in Leopard Knocks.

The Miri Bird/Nancy – Taiwo’s Miri Bird, Nancy, is a giant bird that ferries people to and from Taiwo’s hut, which is hundreds of feet in the air in a palm tree. Nancy will only help people who treat her like a person, not just a dirty animal.

Junk Man – Junk Man runs a stall in the Zuma Lamb market, but he sells Leopard items. His stall is the go-to place to buy juju knives in Nigeria.

Jesus’s General – Jesus’s General drives the funky train to and from the Zuma Festival.

Yao – Yao is a boy Sunny meets at the Zuma Festival. He and Chichi have been feuding for a year, and though they profess to hate each other, Yao also seems to have a crush on Chichi. He encourages her to call a masquerade at the student social.

Mballa – Mballa is the commentator for the Zuma Wrestling Finals.

Sayé – Sayé is the winner of the Zuma Wrestling Finals. He lost his arm when he was younger, and this allowed him to discover his ability: his missing arm is now a ghostly arm that can transform into a variety of different shapes.

Kadiatou – Kadiatou is Miknikstic’s wife. A tall, dignified woman, she blesses Sunny when Sunny shares her experience with Miknikstic’s kindness and generosity.

Agaja – Agaja is one of the biggest, oldest, and most experienced players on the green team at the Zuma festival soccer match.

Ousman – Ousman plays on the green team at the Zuma festival soccer match.

Auntie Chinwe – Auntie Chinwe is Sunny's mother's sister; she lives in Atlanta with her husband and children. A free spirit, she studied dance. Sunny asks Chinwe to tell her about her grandmother, but Chinwe refuses to say much.

Della – Della is Sunny's wasp artist. Sunny uses the pronoun "it" to refer to Della, rather than masculine or feminine pronouns.

Abok – Abok is an elderly blind scholar who sends Sunny, Sasha, Chichi, and Orlu to fight Black Hat Otokoto and Ekwensu. She knew Ozoemena.

Samya – Samya is a student studying at the Obi Library.

TERMS

Akata – *Akata* literally translates to "bush animal," but it's used as a slur to refer to Black people born outside of Africa.

Chittim – *Chittim* is Leopard currency. They're curved metal bars in varying sizes, from the size of an orange to tiny pieces the size of a fingernail. Copper *chittim* are the most valuable, while gold *chittim* are the least valuable.

Ekpiri – *Ekpiri* is the first level of education that Leopard People attain, as soon as they've gone through their initiation.

Free Agent – Free agents like **Sunny** are Leopard People who don't have a parent who's also a Leopard Person. They're at a disadvantage in Leopard society, as they often don't learn they're Leopard People until they're young teenagers and struggle to find people to mentor them.

Juju – Juju is magic; it can be good, bad, or neutral. Most Leopard People control it using special juju knives, juju powders, or other aids.

Lamb – Lamb is the word Leopard People use to refer to non-magical people. It's always capitalized.

Leopard Knocks – Leopard Knocks is the Leopard settlement closest to where **Sunny**, **Sasha**, **Orlu**, and **Chichi** live; it's the West African headquarters for Leopard People. Juju protects it from curious Lambs.

Leopard Person – Magical people are referred to as Leopard People in the novel. In this context, "Leopard" is always capitalized.

Masquerade – Masquerades are spirits that usually live in the wilderness, but Leopard People can summon them to the physical world. They look like Lamb masquerades, which are men dressed in beaded or raffia costumes with ceremonial masks—but real masquerades can be any size (from a foot tall to hundreds) and tend to have something unpleasant, like stinging insects, at the core instead of a person. They enter the physical world through termite mounds, are extremely powerful, and are always dangerous.

Mbawkwa – *Mbawkwa* is the second level of education for a Leopard Person to attain. Teenagers usually go through *Mbawkwa* in their late teens.

Ndibu – *Ndibu* is the third level of education for a Leopard Person to attain. It's the equivalent of getting a Ph.D.

Nsibidi – *Nsibidi* is a pictorial writing system that only a few Leopard People can read. The symbols wiggle, and if a person can see Nsibidi symbols moving, they can learn to read it.

Oha Coven – An *Oha* coven is a group of four Leopard People with specific characteristics (such as there being two male and two female members, one outsider, and one who is somehow inside-out), who work together to do away with something nefarious. **Sunny**, **Orlu**, **Chichi**, and **Sasha** are an *Oha* coven.

Oku Akama – *Oku Akama* is the fourth and final level of education that a Leopard Person can attain. Only a handful of Nigerian Leopard People have achieved it.

Tungwa – Tungwas are soccer ball-sized orbs that float around in Leopard Knocks and other all-Leopard settlements—and explode when they feel like it, splattering bits of meat, hair, bone, and teeth everywhere when they do. Nobody knows exactly what they are, but they're considered harmless nuisances.

Vévé – A *vévé* is a magical drawing done with chalk powder.

Wilderness – The wilderness is the spirit realm.



THEMES

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



IDENTITY AND BELONGING

Twelve-year-old Sunny has never felt like she fits in anywhere. Though she, her parents, and her brothers are Nigerian, Sunny was born in the United States—so she feels out of place in the novel's present in Nigeria, and she never felt at home in New York, either. To make things more difficult, Sunny is **albino**, something that her family and peers think makes her ugly and that, in Nigeria, means she attracts snide comments about being a ghost. However, *Akata Witch* suggests that Sunny's belief that she doesn't belong is, essentially, a matter of being ignorant about who and what, exactly, she is: a Leopard Person (a person with magical abilities) and the granddaughter of a late, renowned Leopard scholar, Ozoemena. But her transition into Leopard society isn't easy: though she befriends fellow Leopard kids Chichi, Sasha, and Orlu, she still feels out of place because, unlike her, her friends were *born* knowing that they were Leopard People.

Whereas their initiation is the beginning of their education, Sunny feels that *her* initiation is also the beginning of a whole new identity.

But as Sunny learns more about herself, she gradually starts to feel more secure about who she is and her place in the world. She becomes more comfortable with her albinism when she learns that it gives her the natural ability to move back and forth between the wilderness (spirit world) and the physical world, allowing her to become invisible. Being initiated into Leopard society also causes Sunny to undergo a physical change that cures her sun sensitivity, giving her the newfound ability to go outside without getting a horrible sunburn. In this sense, Sunny discovers that the things that once held her back in the Lamb world, such as her albinism, are actually the things that make her special and powerful in the Leopard world. And while the novel ends with Sunny only just beginning to learn who she is and what she's capable of, it suggests that learning the truth about who and what she is sets Sunny up to continue this journey and grow increasingly secure in her identity as she does so.



THE INDIVIDUAL VS. THE COLLECTIVE

Being introduced to Leopard (magical) society introduces 12-year-old Sunny to a totally new way of thinking about the value of her own life versus

the value of society as a whole. Sunny has grown up in the Lamb (nonmagical) world, so she's been taught that her life is inherently valuable and expects authority figures to keep her safe. So it's a shock for Sunny to be inducted into Leopard society and discover that Leopard People value hard-earned education and the collective's well-being over any one person's safety. It feels wrong to Sunny when Anatov sends Sunny and her friends into the dangerous Night Runner Forest, where they could easily die. At first, Sunny sees the possibility that adults could be perfectly okay with her potential death as fatalistic and disturbing. But as the stakes increase over the course of the novel, and as Sunny and her friends learn that they'll be the ones to take on the ritual killer Black Hat Otokoto (who, in addition to brutally murdering children, plans to bring a dangerous masquerade named Ekwensu from the spirit world to bring about the end of the physical world), they come to see the wisdom of their elders' belief in valuing the collective more than individual lives. As Anatov explains, the world keeps spinning in part because the individual lives of humans, plants, and animals don't actually matter much on the grand scale of the universe—one being's death won't bring about the world's end. And therefore, Sunny and her adult mentors reason, a child's life is worth sacrificing if that child is able to thwart a person, like Black Hat Otokoto, whose selfish actions will end the world for everyone.

Ultimately, as Sunny and her friends defeat Black Hat Otokoto and send Ekwensu back to the spirit world, Sunny finds comfort

in the idea that the common good is more valuable than her life. It gives her the confidence she needs to put herself in danger to send Ekwensu away, and it helps Sunny decide that her new Leopard community is actually very supportive. Just as Sunny and her friends were willing to risk their lives to banish Black Hat Otokoto and Ekwensu to save the world, Sunny realizes that there are others willing to do the exact same thing and ensure that the world will keep turning—for everyone.



FRIENDSHIP AND TEAMWORK

At its heart, *Akata Witch* is a story about the power of friendship and teamwork—it suggests that learning to work with others as a team, and

learning to make friends, are some of the most important lessons for kids to learn as they grow. Anatov—who is Sunny, Orlu, Chichi, and Sasha's primary Leopard (magical) teacher—highlights how important friendship is when he sends his students out on a dangerous task during their first lesson together. He asks them to travel through the dangerous Night Runner Forest to visit another scholar—a trip that could easily turn deadly, if the four can't figure out how to work together and use one another's strengths to repel the various beings that try to kill them. Sunny and her friends work together to do all sorts of things, from calling and sending away a dangerous masquerade to ultimately defeating the ritual killer Black Hat Otokoto and one of the most dangerous masquerades, Ekwensu. And as they do, they earn much more *chittim* (Leopard currency that falls from the sky when a Leopard Person learns something) than they do when they perform tasks on their own. This suggests that the focus on friendship and teamwork is a feature of Leopard society: even the mysterious forces that control the Leopard world (like whatever causes *chittim* to fall and decides how much a person receives) seem to value teamwork more than individual pursuits.

Part of being a good teammate, the novel suggests, is being able to identify team members' strengths and support them in their weaknesses. The novel even goes so far as to imply that being a good teammate and being able to provide these checks and balances is more important than accomplishing whatever the team's goal might be, something that it highlights when Sunny and Sasha play in a soccer match for Leopard students at a festival. Sunny and Sasha are on a team that includes kids from age 11 to 18, all with a wide range of soccer skills. Their opponents, on the other hand, are all older, burlier boys who are extremely good players. Though the other team wins the match, Sunny's team's ability to work together and support every player earns them an entire storm of *chittim*—showing again that being a good friend and teammate is, in the world of the novel, far more important than winning.



EDUCATION, POWER, AND CORRUPTION

As 12-year-old Sunny discovers she's a Leopard Person with magical powers and is inducted into

Leopard society, she's struck by how much emphasis Leopard society places on the role of education. On the whole, *Akata Witch* explores how education can give a person power and push them to value selfless endeavors over selfish pursuits—and what the consequences of forsaking education can be. Within the Leopard world and the logic of the novel, knowledge and education are extremely important. Leopard currency, *chittim*, falls from the sky when people earn it, and they earn it through learning. Not all learning is created equal (Sunny and her friends, for instance, earn different amounts of *chittim* for mastering new juju charms, working together as a team, and uncovering new aspects of their identities), but the fact that Leopard People earn *chittim* for these very different kinds of lessons highlights the importance of being a lifelong learner. Indeed, Orlu explains to Sunny that the most powerful person in Nigerian Leopard society, Sugar Cream, is the elderly Head Librarian at the Obi Library—she's powerful because she's dedicated her life to learning and then to protecting the library, which contains the collective knowledge of West African Leopard People.

But while Leopard society frames acquiring knowledge as a noble endeavor, the novel also features several characters who use their status and education to selfishly enrich themselves. Two scholars, Madame Koto and Ibrahim Ahmed, immediately strike Sunny as corrupt: while they've both passed the fourth (most advanced) level of Leopard education, they're also both powerful in the Lamb (nonmagical) world and have made fortunes in the oil industry. As scholars, they're supposed to serve the Leopard community exclusively—but Sunny infers that their loyalty to Leopard society may be questionable, due to their dealings in oil. The novel's primary antagonist, Black Hat Otokoto, takes this idea one step further. Like Madame Koto and Ibrahim Ahmed, he passed the fourth level—but he's described as greedy, power-hungry, and downright evil. Black Hat Otokoto kidnaps children and mutilates them, the ultimate goal being to bring the dangerous and evil masquerade Ekwensu from the spirit world and allow her to destroy the physical world. Ultimately, though Otokoto does bring Ekwensu through, his power, education, and selfishness cause him to underestimate Sunny and her friends when they're sent to thwart him. The novel implies that the kids might not be as knowledgeable as Otokoto, but their commitment to using their education for good to help Leopard society allows them to triumph. Education, this shows, gives a person power—but each person must choose whether to use what they've learned to serve others or fall prey to corruption.



SYMBOLS

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



SUNNY'S ALBINISM

Sunny's albinism represents her identity—and, more broadly, her growing understanding that a person's supposed "bad qualities" can actually be the source of their greatest strengths. Sunny begins the novel ashamed of being albino, as the condition causes her to not fit in at school or at home. Her father never wanted a daughter in the first place, and her albinism makes her an even less desirable daughter in his eyes. And at school, kids taunt Sunny for being a ghost, for not actually being Black, and for being ugly. Sunny realizes at this point that albinism makes her different from her classmates, but she doesn't yet understand its full significance. When Sunny is inducted into Leopard (magical) society, she discovers that her albinism still makes her a target of jokes about being a ghost—but it also is what makes her naturally very powerful. Anatov explains to Sunny that because she's albino, there's some truth to the teasing that she's half-ghost: Sunny can step into the wilderness (the spirit world) naturally and easily, which means she can become invisible in the physical world. He also notes that she is able to manipulate time and is more likely than other people to receive premonitions from beings in the wilderness. These are all things, he explains, that advanced Leopard People can do with a lot of training, practice, and aids like juju powders. But because Sunny is albino, she should be able to do these things without aids and with only a little practice. Indeed, though Sunny struggles to feel at home in Leopard society and is far behind her classmates in terms of her education, she begins to feel far more secure as she discovers how easy it is to use the abilities connected to her albinism. In this sense, her albinism represents the idea that people's differences don't have to be weaknesses.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Speak edition of *Akata Witch* published in 2017.

Chapter 2 Quotes

☞ “But I can tell there’s more to you. I just know it.”



“What do you mean, more?”


Chichi smiled mysteriously. “People say stuff about people like you. That you’re all ghost, or a half and half, one foot in this world and one foot in another.” She paused. “That you can...see things.”

Sunny rolled her eyes. *Not this again*, she thought. *So cliché. Everyone thinks the old lady, the hunchback, the crazy man, and the albino have magical evil powers.* “Whatever,” she grumbled. She didn’t want to think about the candle.

Chichi laughed. “You’re right, those are silly stereotypes about albinos. But in your case, I think there’s something to it.”

Related Characters: Chichi, Sunny Nwazue (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 23

Explanation and Analysis

Sunny and Chichi are spending time together without Orlu for the first time, and Chichi is cryptically suggesting there’s more to Sunny because of her albinism. After a life spent being teased for her light skin, Sunny is used to this sort of thing—and it’s offensive. She believes she’s perfectly normal and at this point, she doesn’t believe in magic. So despite the fact that Sunny believes that she truly saw the end of the world in a candle flame weeks prior to this—something inarguably supernatural—Sunny remains insistent that it’s absurd and rude to look at someone with physical or mental differences and attribute those differences to magic. It’s also interesting to note that at this point, Sunny figures that people who think she’s magic think her magic is *evil*—this speaks to her Catholic upbringing, as Sunny says later that her mother, a staunch Catholic, would be beside herself if she knew that Sunny is a Leopard Person.

As it turns out, though, Chichi is right: Sunny is a magical Leopard Person, with one foot in the wilderness (the spirit world) and one foot in the physical world. She’s not a ghost in the classic sense of the term, but she can move back and forth between the spirit world and the physical world, which allows her to make herself invisible. And, as Sunny has already discovered when she saw the premonition about the end of the world in the candle, she can see the future if beings in the wilderness deign to show her. So though Sunny takes offense to Chichi suggesting she’s “more” or different

because of her albinism, in reality, Chichi is suggesting that what makes Sunny a bullying target in the Lamb world is what makes her special and extremely powerful in the Leopard world.

☞ Her father believed that all one needed to succeed in life was an education. He had gone to school for many years to become a barrister, and then gone on to be the most successful child in his family. Sunny’s mother was an MD, and often talked about how excelling in school had opened opportunities to her that girls only two decades before didn’t normally get. So Sunny believed in education, too. But here was Chichi’s mother, surrounded by the hundreds of books she’d read, living in a decrepit old mud hut with her daughter.

Related Characters: Sunny Nwazue, Sunny’s Mother, Sunny’s Father, Chichi’s Mother

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 28

Explanation and Analysis



Sunny has accompanied Chichi home after school and is now having tea with Chichi and her mother. As Chichi’s mother talks about spending her days reading, trading books back to the bookstore for more when she’s done with them, Sunny finds that she’s confused. Chichi’s mother is clearly educated, so why, Sunny wonders, is she living in such a crude hut instead of doing something with all her knowledge? Sunny feels this way at this point because she’s still fully immersed in the Lamb world; she doesn’t realize she’s a Leopard Person in the presence of other Leopard People. So she believes in her parents’ vision of education—that is, that a person should attend school and get an education so they can then go on to earn money in a high-powered profession. This establishes Sunny’s starting point as she enters the Leopard world, as she eventually evolves from this position to value education for education’s sake as the novel progresses.

Chapter 3 Quotes

☞ “If not for Sunny, we wouldn’t have come today.”

“Things have a way of working themselves out,” Anatov said. “It’s as I taught you: the world is bigger and more important than you.”

Related Characters: Chichi, Anatov (speaker), Sasha, Sunny Nwazue, Orlu, Black Hat Otokoto

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 54

Explanation and Analysis

Chichi and Orlu have brought Sunny to Anatov to be initiated into Leopard society. Once she's been initiated, Anatov shares that Sasha has just arrived—a coincidence that pleases Chichi especially. Anatov, however, seems to imply that this isn't really a coincidence. There are forces deciding who goes where, and when, that Chichi has no concept of—and those forces are what caused Chichi and Orlu to decide that today was a great day to introduce Chichi to Anatov.

The idea that the world is bigger than any single person is one that Anatov and other scholars repeat multiple times throughout the novel. It is, the scholars insist, important for young Leopard People to learn this, as accepting their own insignificance is how they develop humility, compassion, and a sense of responsibility to other people. Thinking one is above everyone else, on the other hand, is something the novel suggests leads to corruption and evil—as it did with Black Hat Otokoto.

☝☝ “Troublemaking black American,” Orlu spat. “Akata criminal.”



“Hey!” Sunny said.

“As if I don't know what that means,” Sasha said, looking mildly annoyed.

[...]

“So you know,” [Sunny] continued, “I was born in the States, too. I came back with my parents when I was nine. That's only three years ago.” She paused and looked meaningfully at Orlu. “I may not talk about it much, but most days I feel very much like an...akata.”

Related Characters: Orlu, Sasha, Sunny Nwazue (speaker), Chichi

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 58

Explanation and Analysis

Sunny has just been initiated into Leopard society and Anatov has introduced Sasha to Sunny, Orlu, and Chichi.

Sasha is supposed to live with Orlu, but Orlu knows of Sasha's reputation and insults him.

As Sunny explains earlier in the novel, *akata* literally translates to “bush animal,” but it's an insult that Black people born in Africa use against Black people born outside of Africa. As Orlu uses it in this passage, his tone adds layers of meaning to the insult. It's not just that Sasha doesn't fit in in Nigeria and supposedly isn't a “real” African; it's also that as an African American, he's associated with criminality and trouble. This is Orlu's way of making Sasha feel wholly unwelcome here in Nigeria, and showing Sasha that he (and possibly other African-born Black people like Orlu) will never accept Sasha.

However, as Orlu insults Sasha, he seemingly doesn't stop to think about how hurtful such a slur might be to someone he likes and considers a friend, Sunny. Sunny is, in many ways, just like Sasha, as she was born in America and has also had to adjust to living in Nigeria. Because of where she was born, she feels constantly like she doesn't fit in. She speaks the local language, Igbo, with an American accent, and she's more fluent in English than many of her classmates after spending years in school where English was the primary language. Sunny brings up her own feelings of not fitting in because she wants Orlu to see how hurtful his words are—and that people he might not expect or think about can be harmed by slurs like this. If he wants to continue being Sunny's friend, she implies, he'll need to banish this hurtful word from his vocabulary, even if he's speaking about someone other than Sunny.

Chapter 4 Quotes

☝☝ “But I've always known of my Leopard inheritance and I've always been able to do small things like make mosquitoes stay away, warm my bathwater, things like that. Initiation meant something different to me than to you. It's more a mark of beginning my life's journey. Yours was, too—but it was also the actual beginning of your *Self*.”

Related Characters: Chichi (speaker), Sunny Nwazue

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 64

Explanation and Analysis

Soon after Sunny's initiation, Chichi attempts to explain how she and Sunny differ in terms of how their initiations fit into their life journeys. Because Chichi has known her entire life

that she's a Leopard Person, being initiated simply allowed her to begin formal education. Sunny also can begin formal Leopard education—but more than that, discovering that she's a Leopard Person allows Sunny to finally discover who she actually is. This highlights that a person's inclusion in Leopard society is an integral part of their identity; the implication in this passage is that a Leopard Person who hasn't been inducted simply has no chance of ever discovering who they are. It's essential they learn what their true nature is if they want to be comfortable in their skin.

At this point, this seems like the answer to many of Sunny's problems: she doesn't feel like she fits in in Lamb society, so Leopard society steps in and seems to offer her a path forward. As Sunny discovers, it isn't quite so easy—she's still bullied for being albino, for instance, and being so naïve about the Leopard world creates its own challenges—but as the novel progresses, Sunny slowly begins to learn who she is, what she's capable of, and who she wants to be in the future.



education that then allows them to get a job and earn money by doing that job. This is what Sunny's parents have done; they're both highly educated as a lawyer and as a doctor, and in the novel's present, they earn enough money to keep the family comfortable. And while medicine and law are commonly thought of as powerful, high-earning, and well-respected professions in the Lamb world, Orlu makes it clear that some of the most powerful and respected jobs in Leopard society are those that require a person to dedicate their lives to learning and to teaching. This is why Sugar Cream, the Head Librarian at the Obi Library, is so powerful: she's one of the most highly educated people in Nigeria, and she continues to learn despite being an elderly woman.

Orlu's tone here is also very serious, highlighting how much he believes in this relationship between *chittim* and knowledge. This is in line with his character more broadly—he supports the Leopard systems in place and believes following the rules, whatever they may be, is very important.

☝ “Money and material things make you king or queen of the Lamb world. You can do no wrong, you can do anything.

“Leopard People are different. The only way you can earn *chittim* is by *learning*. The more you learn, the more *chittim* you earn. Knowledge is the center of all things. The Head Librarian of the Obi Library of Leopard Knocks is the keeper of the greatest stock of knowledge in West Africa.”

Related Characters: Orlu (speaker), Sunny Nwazue, Sugar Cream

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 82

Explanation and Analysis

After Sunny's initiation into Leopard society, Orlu explains to her the relationship between money (*chittim*) and knowledge in the Leopard world, which is very different from the relationship between these things in the Lamb world.

Orlu explains essentially that while money is most important in the Lamb world, knowledge is the most important thing in the Leopard world. The very forces that control the Leopard world (such as the mysterious forces that dispense *chittim* for various things) highlight how important learning and education are by paying people for learning new things. This differs greatly from the Lamb world, where it's more common for people to get an

Chapter 5 Quotes


☝ She closed her eyes and soaked in the warm light. She didn't need to stand in there for an hour to know—she knew deep in her skin. The sunshine felt like a warm friend, not an angry enemy. She didn't need her umbrella anymore.

“Oh my goodness,” she whispered. “I can play soccer!”

Realizing what she was was the beginning of something, all right...but it was also the end of something else.

Related Characters: Sunny Nwazue (speaker), Sunny's Father

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 94

Explanation and Analysis

The morning after Sunny's initiation into Leopard society, she wakes up after having fallen asleep on her windowsill. Before her initiation, this would've resulted in a painful sunburn—but now that Sunny's Leopard powers have been activated, she's no longer sensitive to the sun.

This is a huge change for Sunny, and one that she welcomes wholeheartedly. No longer seeing the sun as her “angry enemy” means that Sunny feels more generally like she belongs in the world—until now, it's felt as if the sun is out to get her and essentially keep her in hiding. So Sunny now



feels like she fits in in Leopard society, and in Lamb society too.

Even though Sunny is thrilled that she'll be able to play soccer and exist in the sunshine without fear, this moment isn't without some bittersweet undertones. Noting that this is "also the end of something else" could, simply, reference the fact that Sunny's life as she knows it is over. She's no longer just an albino girl; she's now a powerful Leopard Person, with more natural power than many other Leopard People. But as Sunny discovers over the course of the novel, being initiated into Leopard society does bring about the end of other things—such as her relatively peaceful relationship with her father, who thinks she's engaging in sex work or is otherwise up to something with men, of which he doesn't approve. So though there are many good things that happen to Sunny now that she knows who she is, she can't ignore that this transition also brings new challenges with it.

Chapter 6 Quotes

☞☞ "Knowledge does not always evolve into wisdom."

Related Characters: Anatov (speaker), Isong Abong Effiong Isong, Sunny Nwazue, Orlu, Chichi, Sasha

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 113

Explanation and Analysis

Anatov is telling his students about Isong Abong Effiong Isong, the author of *Fast Facts for Free Agents*. Isong, he explains, is highly educated—but she received her education in Europe and the U.S., so she looks down on free agents and on African Americans. Her education, in Anatov's opinion, blinds her to the fact that free agents and African Americans (which both Anatov and Sasha are) can be just as skilled and powerful as any other Leopard Person; these identity markers often have little bearing on what a Leopard Person from those backgrounds can do. But Isong simply chooses to look at only one aspect of those people's identities, and this clouds her judgment.

More broadly, Anatov's words here suggest that all his young students have a choice when it comes to their education and what they do with it. They can (and will be encouraged to) learn—but it's up to them whether their education "evolve[s] into wisdom," or whether, like Isong, they fall back on prejudice and preconceived notions about


the world and the people in it.

☞☞ "So because I'm a Leopard albino, I can—"

"Yes. Certain attributes tend to yield certain talents. [...] Abilities are things people are able to do without the use of a juju knife, powders, or other ingredients like the head of an *ebett*. They just come naturally."

Related Characters: Sunny Nwazue, Anatov (speaker), Orlu, Chichi, Sasha

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 117

Explanation and Analysis

During Sunny's first midnight lesson with Anatov, Anatov explains to her why she was able to work a juju charm that allowed her to slip through a keyhole without an *ebett*'s (a special kind of sheep) head: because she's albino, this is something she can naturally do.

This opens up a whole new world for Sunny. Up to this point, Sunny has been teased and bullied mercilessly for her pale skin; it's always been something that caused people to ostracize her and make her feel like she doesn't belong. Initially, it seemed like the same was going to be true in the Leopard world. But as Anatov explains that Sunny's albinism is actually what makes her special, this offers Sunny an opportunity to reconceptualize how she thinks about herself, and how she defines herself. Because of her albinism, Sunny now knows that she's very powerful—she can become invisible (which she did when she worked the charm with the sheep's head), she can go into the spirit world when she feels like it, and she can also receive premonitions from beings in the spirit world. Sunny's albinism is now what makes her special, not the thing that means she doesn't fit in.

Chapter 7 Quotes

☞☞ “If you’d have all perished, we’d have found you and your bodies would have been returned to your parents with...explanation,” Kehinde said.

Sunny’s mouth fell open. *What kind of barbaric coldhearted man was this?*

“Come now,” Kehinde said, pulling out a newspaper. He shook it at them. “Have you seen the news lately? If you haven’t noticed, a person’s life, especially a young person’s, isn’t worth much these days. The world is bigger than all of you. Chances have to be taken. *But thankfully, here you are.*”

Related Characters: Kehinde (speaker), Sunny Nwazue, Sasha, Chichi, Orlu, Black Hat Otokoto

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 132

Explanation and Analysis

Sunny, Sasha, Chichi, and Orlu have just arrived at the scholar Kehinde’s hut, which required traversing the dangerous Night Runner Forest to reach. Several beings almost killed the four on their journey, and Sunny is still reeling from the fear and adrenaline.

As far as Sunny is concerned, her potential death is a big deal. She doesn’t want to die, for her own sake and because she worries about her parents. So it’s a shock for her to have Kehinde speak so nonchalantly about her and her friends’ potential deaths. It makes her feel like she can’t trust her mentors to keep her safe, as they’re clearly very willing to put her in danger for the sake of her education. As the novel progresses, Sunny learns that this is mostly just Leopard philosophy, and it doesn’t actually mean that her mentors don’t care about her. Rather, they care about her and want her to learn, and the best way to learn, per those mentors, is to gain knowledge through practical experiences—some of which will naturally be dangerous or deadly.



Kehinde also implies that with Black Hat Otokoto (a serial killer who targets children) on the loose, it’s perhaps preferable for Sunny and her friends to face danger like they did moving through the Night Runner Forest—danger that was real, but was still more or less mediated by trustworthy adults. They care about her, unlike Black Hat Otokoto. And though Sunny doesn’t know it at this point, Kehinde saying that “Chances have to be taken” is a reference to the fact that Sunny and her friends are an *Oha* coven put together specifically to take down Black Hat Otokoto—so facing danger like this is preparation for the danger they’ll face

later in the novel. They survived this experience, which indicates that they’ll be ready to face Black Hat when the time comes.

Chapter 9 Quotes

☞☞ “Teamwork is the only reason you four lived to see Kehinde,” Anatov said. “There are seriously unsafe places in Leopard Knocks. Places where people try to steal *chittim* instead of earning it. Where they have forgotten *why* they receive *chittim* in the first place. Knowledge is more valuable than the *chittim* it earns.”

Related Characters: Anatov (speaker), Kehinde, Sunny Nwazue, Chichi, Orlu, Sasha, Black Hat Otokoto

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 148-149

Explanation and Analysis

When Sunny, Sasha, Orlu, and Chichi attend their next lesson with Anatov after he sends them to meet with a scholar named Kehinde, he explains what lesson he intended them to learn by making the journey: teamwork. Kehinde lives in a place called Night Runner Forest, which is filled with nefarious creatures and souls ready to maim or kill anyone who enters the forest unprepared. The four met several of these creatures on their journey, and they were only able to come out of the ordeal alive because they worked together. Working together, Kehinde makes clear, is the best and, perhaps, the only way for young people like his students to survive in the more dangerous places in Leopard Knocks—they all have different skills and backgrounds, and they can use these differing skills to their advantage if they essentially pool their resources.

Then, Anatov begins to speak out against corruption in the Leopard world. It seems likely that as he talks about those who have forgotten what *chittim* is for, he’s speaking about Black Hat Otokoto—a serial killer who is greedy and prioritizes enriching himself over learning or helping others. This starts to foreshadow that Sunny and her friends will eventually have to take on Black Hat Otokoto. But more broadly, Anatov also makes the point that every young Leopard Person has a choice to make as they grow and learn. Will they, as Anatov has done, continue to prioritize education and helping others (which he’s doing by acting as a teacher to young Leopard People), or will they follow in Black Hat’s footsteps and choose to think only of their own desires? The novel doesn’t answer this question, as it ends

well before Sunny and her friends reach adulthood. But it does give them more to think about as they continue to learn and earn *chittim* going forward.


“The second and third are the university, for true scholars. Third levelers, *Ndibus*, who want to keep evolving.”

“My mother goes there,” Chichi said proudly. “She’s one of the younger students, though.”

“Younger?” Chichi’s mother was about her mother’s age.

“It’s not like with Lambs,” Orlu said. “Age is one of the requirements to even *start* at the Obi University of Pre-Scholars. You have to be over forty-two.”

Related Characters: Orlu, Chichi, Sunny Nwazue (speaker), Sasha, Chichi’s Mother, Sunny’s Mother

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 159

Explanation and Analysis


As Sunny and her friends pass the Obi Library on their way to visit the scholar Taiwo, Chichi and Orlu explain to Sunny that in the Leopard world, people commonly continue their education throughout their entire lives. This, more than anything else in the novel, highlights how important education is to Leopard society—it’s worth dedicating one’s entire life to, even more so than a career, as Sunny’s mother has done. Sunny’s mother, for instance, is a doctor, so she’s spent a lot of time in school. But because she already has her medical license, there’s no reason, in the Lamb world, for her to continue focusing exclusively on her learning.

This opens up a whole new world for Sunny. Sunny has been raised to value education, but she’s been raised to value it because of what it can do for her: give her a high-powered career like it’s done for her parents. Now, she’s discovering the possibility that she can dedicate her life to learning, just for the sake of doing so.

“You expect *us* to capture this Black Hat, who is like you, one of these people who has passed the highest of the highest level of juju ability? That’s—I mean no disrespect—” She paused, the irritation that had been brewing in her for weeks suddenly flaring bright. She felt used. “That’s insane! And—and I’m beginning to know how you people think! You’ll just find some other kids to do it if we’re all murdered! And why am I included in this?! I don’t know anything!”

“This is bigger than you,” Taiwo said, turning very serious. “But you’re part of it, too. It would be unfair for me to expect you to understand this just yet, but you will.”

Related Characters: Sunny Nwazue, Taiwo (speaker), Black Hat Otokoto, Orlu, Chichi, Sasha

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 170

Explanation and Analysis



When Anatov sends Sunny, Chichi, Sasha, and Orlu to visit a scholar named Taiwo, Sunny is incensed to learn from her that she and her friends are Nigeria’s youngest *Oha* coven—and they’re supposed to take out Black Hat Otokoto, a ritual killer who’s been murdering small children. Sunny has spent weeks now reading about Black Hat’s gruesome murders in the paper; she’s terrified of him and doesn’t think it’s her responsibility, as a 12-year-old kid, to take on such a powerful villain.

Sunny’s perspective reflects her lack of understanding of how Leopard culture operates, and what it values. Leopard society values the collective good over that of individual people. So to the scholars who are keeping tabs on what’s going on with Black Hat Otokoto, it’s absolutely worth it to potentially sacrifice a few young people if it means that Black Hat won’t then be able to bring about the end of the world (which is what he plans to do). And though Sunny is right—scholars have sent other *Oha* covens, and will no doubt send more if Sunny and her friends aren’t successful—they genuinely do not see these sacrifices as senseless or cruel. Sunny is the one, within the logic of the Leopard world, who needs to rethink how she sees the world and her place in it. Everything she says here highlights that she exists at the center of her world; it seems absurd to her that her friends are somehow eligible to fight Black Hat, but what she really takes issue with is her own involvement.

Chapter 10 Quotes

☞ “Listen. It was your grandmother, Ozoemena, who taught Otokoto all he knows. She was *his* mentor. And it was Otokoto who killed your grandmother in a ritual to steal her abilities as he stole her life. You want to know why he is so powerful? All you need to look at is who your grandmother *was* and who Otokoto was before he became the infamous Black Hat.”

Related Characters: Sugar Cream (speaker), Sunny Nwazue, Sunny’s Grandmother/Ozoemena, Black Hat Otokoto

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 190-191

Explanation and Analysis

Sunny is meeting with Sugar Cream to be punished for showing her spirit face to a bully at school. Sugar Cream decides not to punish Sunny with a whipping or something more serious, and now she’s explaining to Sunny why Sunny has to be part of the *Oha* coven put together to defeat Black Hat Otokoto.

Sunny has felt totally out of her depth in Leopard society since she was initiated, and it hasn’t helped that she’s part of the *Oha* coven meant to take on Black Hat. Her involvement hasn’t made sense to her—she’s so new and uneducated, so why is she being asked to take on an extremely skilled and dangerous criminal? Learning that Otokoto was Ozoemena’s mentee, and that he killed her to take her powers, puts things in perspective somewhat for Sunny. First of all, it implies that Sunny is naturally very powerful; the novel has implied that the strength of a person’s power is related to where the spirit line that gave them their powers comes from. Then, it encourages Sunny to humanize Black Hat Otokoto a bit—he was at one point a kid in need of mentoring, just like Sunny is now. But where he made choices that led to his corruption and necessitated violence, the implication here is that Sunny has the power within herself to make different choices. For now, it’s not entirely clear to Sunny how any of this fits together—things don’t fall into place for her until she’s face to face with Ekwensu, an evil masquerade that Black Hat summoned. But now, she has a direction and knows what she must learn in order to figure out who she is, what her powers are, and why she’s a part of Leopard society.

Chapter 12 Quotes

☞ “Your parents born here?”

“Yeah,” she said.

“Then you from here *and* there. Dual thing, you know?”


She laughed. “If you say so.”

“I know so.”

“So what’s that make me, then?”

“Who cares?” he said. “You want a juju knife, right?”

Related Characters: Junk Man, Sunny Nwazue (speaker), Sunny’s Mother, Sunny’s Father

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 218

Explanation and Analysis

Sunny is preparing to pick out her juju knife from a box in Junk Man’s Abuja market stall; he is, seemingly without any reason, asking her about where she and her parents are from. (Sunny’s parents were born in Nigeria, as she says here, while she was born in New York.) As Junk Man responds to Sunny, he says two entirely different things: first, that Sunny has a “dual thing,” in that she’s both American and Nigerian; and then that it doesn’t matter. This represents a departure from how Sunny has thought of her heritage up to this point. Her being born in New York has been a reason for kids to bully her, as they see her as not African or Nigerian enough—and then also occasionally insist that she’s white due to Sunny’s albinism. Junk Man’s tone as he says that Sunny is both American and Nigerian suggests she should take pride in her “dual thing,” even as he goes on to insist it doesn’t really matter that much. By pivoting immediately to ask if Sunny wants a juju knife, he implies that what matters is that Sunny is a Leopard Person—and that’s something that is unchanged by Sunny’s birthplace, or which country issues her passport. Essentially, he encourages her to take pride in who she knows she is (a Leopard Person) and to perhaps not devalue or ignore where she’s from, but to realize that she’s part of a much larger group of magical people now.

Chapter 13 Quotes

☝ “You’re neck-deep in Leopard society right now. The good thing is that it doesn’t get any deeper than this. Sometimes it’s best to just jump in. Then, after that first shock, you can handle anything.”

“Yeah,” she said, wiping her eyes again. “I—I got my juju knife today, too.”

“That’s wonderful,” he said. He looked down at her. “Use it well and true. There are more valuable things in life than safety and comfort. *Learn*. You owe it to yourself. All this”—he motioned around them—“you’ll get used to in time.”

Related Characters: Miknikstic/The Man, Sunny Nwazue (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 228-229

Explanation and Analysis

When Sunny becomes overwhelmed at the Zuma Festival, she leaves her friends to cry alone in a field. A tall, kind man stops to comfort her—she doesn’t know at this point that the man is Miknikstic, one of the wrestlers in the upcoming wrestling finals.

Sunny is so overwhelmed in part because it’s inconceivable to her that she actually fits in in Leopard society. She’s only known she’s a Leopard Person for a few months now, and she’s never been around such a mass of humanity and juju as she’s experiencing at the festival. Miknikstic makes the point that this is a normal, expected reaction for someone in her position. He implies that Sunny does fit in and belong here—it’s just going to take her some time to get used to the idea.

Miknikstic also reinforces what other scholars have said about education: that education for education’s sake is what Sunny should prize as she moves deeper into Leopard society. So now that she has her juju knife, she’ll be able to learn and experience more (without a juju knife, Sunny has only been able to shadow her classmates in learning knife juju charms and movements). He also encourages Sunny to prioritize the collective good over her own selfish desires—this is what he means when he notes that there are things more important than safety and comfort. She should, he implies, be willing to protect others, even if doing so poses a risk to her.

☝ “Why didn’t they stop it?”

“Because life doesn’t work that way,” Anatov said. “When things get bad, they don’t stop until you stop the badness—or die.” He paused. “That’s an important lesson for *all* of you. This is why I brought you here. This is why you’re staying in that hotel. Look around, listen, and learn. This is *not* a holiday. In a month, you will all be facing something as ugly as what these two men faced this afternoon.”

Related Characters: Anatov, Sasha (speaker), Sunny Nwazue, Chichi, Orlu, Miknikstic/The Man, Sayé, Black Hat Otokoto

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 242

Explanation and Analysis



Anatov and his four students have just watched the Zuma Festival’s wrestling championships—which the kids were shocked to learn was a brutal, bloody fight to the death between the two competitors (Miknikstic died, but he became a guardian angel after his death). Sasha is the one who asks why nobody stopped the wrestling match. Anatov’s answer is another way of saying what he and other scholars have been telling the four kids throughout the novel: that one person’s life isn’t all that exceptional, and that this is a good thing—it means the world keeps turning when someone dies. Essentially, Anatov wants the kids to recognize that Miknikstic’s death is, in the grand scheme of the universe, not a big deal—and that they shouldn’t expect anyone to step up and stop someone from dying, even if that someone is as important and educated as Miknikstic was.


Anatov recognizes that this is a sobering lesson for his students, but he tries to get them to see the bigger picture here. The purpose of their trip to the Zuma festival, he insists, is that they learn how insignificant their own lives are—and that they become aware of the systems of power at work in their world. This is why they’re staying at a fancy Hilton hotel; Anatov wants them to recognize how privileged they are that, at this point, they’re being cared for. This isn’t something they can expect to continue, though, as the four are set to battle the ritual killer Black Hat Otokoto in about a month. In Anatov’s metaphor, Black Hat Otokoto is a type of “badness” that, in this case, the four kids—an *Oha* coven put together to deal with the ritual killer—are supposed to stop. Or, as Anatov acknowledges, the kids could easily die, and their deaths wouldn’t matter all that much. This is a difficult lesson for the kids to accept, but it’s part of Anatov’s project to get them to value the collective—in this case, the world and humanity as a whole—over their individual lives.

Chapter 14 Quotes

☝☝ One of the other boys in white laughed and said something in a language she didn't understand. Two other boys in white laughed hard, too. There was a rise in the chatter from the audience. She was used to ridicule, but this hurt more than usual. This wasn't just about her being albino, this was about her being a girl—an ugly girl. *Stupid boys. Stupid, blockhead, idiot boys*, she thought.

Related Characters: Sunny Nwazue, Godwin, Ibou

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 256

Explanation and Analysis

The Zuma Festival's student soccer match is about to begin. Sunny is the first female player ever, and she's being taunted for her albinism as well as for her sex. That Sunny is still being mocked for her albinism highlights something Anatov said earlier in the novel: that Leopard People's abilities might stem from the physical differences that set them apart, but this doesn't mean Leopard People are always confident in their own supposed imperfections or accepting of other people's differences. Just as she does in Lamb society, Sunny has to face that Leopard People may eventually have no choice but to acknowledge how powerful she is because of her albinism, but this doesn't mean they think she's beautiful, or that her albinism doesn't matter aesthetically. Essentially, not much changes—something that's unsettling for Sunny. Much the same thing goes for the sexist treatment Sunny picks up on here: Leopard society, she's finding, can be just as sexist and caught up in traditional gender roles as the Lamb society she left. Leopard society isn't a utopia—it too has issues and systemically discriminates against groups of people it deems inferior.

☝☝ “That was amazing, o!” Godwin exclaimed.

“Did you see her?” Kouty exclaimed.

“Like Pele!” Sasha shouted.

The French speakers were shouting in French.

And *chittim* rained on us all.

The white team looked half as happy, and less than half as much *chittim* fell around them. They gathered and calmly slapped hands, turning to look at the green team celebrating its loss.

Related Characters: Godwin, Sasha (speaker), Sunny Nwazue, Ibou

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 262

Explanation and Analysis

The student soccer match at the Zuma Festival has just concluded; Sunny and the green team have lost and are celebrating—while the winning white team isn't. The white team's players are, on the whole, big, burly boys with lots of soccer experience. In terms of their skills and their size, they're better players, so it's perhaps not surprising that they win the match. Their opponents, Sunny's green team, are at a disadvantage: many of the players are younger, smaller, and have less soccer experience—and the three French-speaking players understand little English. However, the green team was able to work together during the match to put up a good fight and come very close to winning. Each player worked hard to support the other players—and the older and better players, like Sunny, tried to protect the younger and frightened players from the white players' aggression. When the green team is then rewarded with far more *chittim* than the winning white team, it highlights what the Leopard world prioritizes most: teamwork, friendship, and working together. The green team is, in this sense, a better team, even if they lost the game. The white team didn't *have* to work as well together because of their superior skills. And because of this, the novel suggests, the white team really missed the point of the match—and they aren't rewarded as heavily as the close-knit green team.

Chapter 15 Quotes

☝☝ “How many *chittim* fell when it was over?”

“Seven coppers,” Orлу mumbled. “We could have gotten people killed and we got paid for it.”

“As a group you made a mistake and you learned you could also right it,” Anatov said.

Related Characters: Anatov, Orлу (speaker), Chichi, Sasha, Sunny Nwazue

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 283

Explanation and Analysis

Sunny, Sasha, Chichi, and Orлу have just met up with Anatov

after the student social—at which Chichi summoned a masquerade, which Orlu helped her send back to the wilderness. Orlu feels terrible about what happened; he tried to talk Chichi out of summoning the masquerade and was unsuccessful, and he alone seems willing to acknowledge how dangerous the masquerade could've been for everyone at the social. However, on a grander scale, this is another way the novel highlights how balanced the group of four kids is: while Chichi and Sasha are willing to take chances like this, Orlu (and Sunny, though she doesn't speak up here) are more cautious and willing to argue against doing things that are dangerous just for kicks. This balance helps the four operate as a team with members who can make up for one another's weaknesses.

The way that Anatov explains why the four kids “got paid” with *chittim* after summoning the masquerade suggests that he is, perhaps, more okay with what happened than Orlu seems to have expected. His tone throughout this passage is cold and angry; he's not pleased that Chichi summoned a masquerade, and he later makes no attempts to protect her from punishment. But he also makes sure that all four kids hear and internalize what they learned: that if they work together, they can tackle difficult and dangerous things like a masquerade. They can get in trouble, but if they call on one another and utilize each person's respective skills and interests, they can get themselves back out of trouble again.

enrages Sasha, who sees the Nigerian Leopard justice system as overly punitive and controlling. In his opinion, the Leopard scholars should be encouraging young Leopard People like Chichi to do difficult things, like call masquerades—even if it's dangerous to do so. With this, he takes Anatov's argument—that people learn best when they have practical lessons and actually get to do things, rather than just read about things in books or hear about new information in lectures—to a pretty extreme conclusion, per Orlu.

In Orlu's understanding, Chichi certainly deserves some credit for doing a hard thing successfully and surviving the ordeal (the consequence for improperly doing most things above one's level in Leopard society is death). However, he's far more content to act within the constraints of what Leopard scholars say is acceptable for kids at their level to do. This, he believes, is what keeps kids safe, and it keeps them from calling a potentially even more dangerous masquerade that they'd then be wholly unable to control.



More broadly, Sasha and Orlu's disagreement highlights the balance at work within the four friends' relationship. Sasha is ready to go out and take risky chances—and Orlu is around to clean up his messes and talk him down from making a mess in the first place. It's this balance among the four friends that makes them a successful *Oha* coven later in the novel.

Chapter 16 Quotes

☝☝ “No one is willing to push the envelope. So what if she called up a damn Mmuo Aku and it went wild! She still *did* it! She still performed the most sophisticated juju any of them had ever seen.”

“True, but you're wrong,” Orlu said. “We can't live in chaos. The ages are set for each level for a reason. You can be able to do something and not be mature enough to deal with the consequences.”

Related Characters: Sasha, Orlu (speaker), Chichi, Sunny Nwazue, Anatov

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 286

Explanation and Analysis

Anatov, Sunny, Sasha, Orlu, and Chichi have just returned from the Zuma Festival; Anatov is currently taking Chichi to the Obi Library for punishment after calling a dangerous masquerade during a student social at the festival. This

Chapter 18 Quotes



☝☝ “You've made good progress, Sunny,” Anatov said.

“Thanks.”

“What I'd like you to think about, though, is *who* you are. Because within that knowledge is the key to how much you can learn.”

She frowned, thinking about what had just happened with her mother. “Oga,” she whispered, “these days I don't really think I know who I am.” Anatov was silent. “What do you know of my grandmother? Who was she?”

Related Characters: Anatov, Sunny Nwazue (speaker), Sunny's Mother, Sunny's Grandmother/Ozoemena

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 299

Explanation and Analysis

Anatov has just picked up Sunny from her house and is escorting her to the Obi Library, where she and her friends

will be tasked with confronting Black Hat Otokoto. In this passage, he makes the case that all of Sunny's practical education when it comes to learning juju isn't going to be all that useful until Sunny is able to understand who she is and where her abilities come from. This reinforces how the mysterious forces that guide Leopard society prioritize self-knowledge above so much practical knowledge: Sunny and her friends tend to earn more *chittim* for making discoveries about themselves and their relationships to each other than they do for learning new juju. But as Anatov notes, these two types of knowledge are related: learning about oneself is, within the Leopard world, the key to learning more in terms of practical juju.

This poses a problem for Sunny, as her mother has spent Sunny's entire life refusing to speak about Ozoemena—Sunny begins the novel not even knowing her grandmother's name. So part of Sunny's journey of self-discovery, this suggests, is figuring out how she fits into her family, not just discovering how she fits into Leopard society.

☝ Sunny frowned. "You mean you've sent other groups like ours? And—"

"We have and will continue to until Black Hat is taken down," Yaboko said. "More is at stake than your lives."

"Black Hat is a shrewd sorcerer," Abok said. "He has protection, but we have watched for loopholes. The children that returned maimed but alive were all rescued by *Oha* covens."

"Did the rescuers escape, too?" she asked.

None of the scholars replied. That was answer enough.

Related Characters: Sunny Nwazue, Abok (speaker), Black Hat Otokoto, Sasha, Chichi, Orlu

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 310

Explanation and Analysis

Sunny, Sasha, Chichi, and Orlu are before a council of Leopard Knocks scholars, learning about their task to take down Black Hat Otokoto before he brings about the end of the world. The scholars are blunt about the fact that they absolutely plan to continue sending *Oha* covens to fight Black Hat Otokoto, even though this continues to prove deadly to those *Oha* covens. As far as Sunny is concerned, this is fatalistic and cruel—she doesn't want to die, and it doesn't sit well with her that so many others have died

doing the exact same thing that she's soon going to be doing. However, Sunny's outlook in this case reflects that she hasn't fully embraced the Leopard way of valuing the collective over the individual. As Yaboko makes clear in this passage, what Black Hat Otokoto plans to do is far more devastating than the loss of four more young lives would be: he plans to bring an evil masquerade named Ekwensu from the wilderness and allow her to end the world for everyone. So as the scholars see it, it's an easy choice to send four more kids who might well die, if it hinders Black Hat Otokoto and allows the world to keep going for everyone else.

Chapter 19 Quotes

☝ "You come any closer and you'll ruin what's already in motion. Then I'll have to slaughter you two instead of just these children. Get outside," Black Hat said. Then he seemed to be speaking to someone else. "You all may leave, too. These kids are harmless. Go watch for real threats," he said. All the commotion and squawking behind Sunny instantly stopped as the bush souls obeyed.

Related Characters: Black Hat Otokoto (speaker), Sunny Nwazue, Orlu, Chichi, Sasha

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 319

Explanation and Analysis

Black Hat Otokoto is addressing Sunny and Orlu as they rush into the *obi* (a thatched structure) to rescue the two seemingly dead children that Black Hat has abducted. He then addresses bush souls that are attacking Sasha and Chichi outside the *obi*.



Black Hat's level, careless tone highlights just how selfish and self-confident he is. He's so confident in his own abilities that he totally underestimates the power of the *Oha* coven that the Leopard Knocks scholars have sent to take him down: he doesn't value teamwork or friendship, so he sees only four inexperienced kids and doesn't consider that working together, they may be able to be far more effective than one might expect. This is exactly the kind of miscalculation that the scholars hoped Black Hat would make—and it ultimately allows the four to triumph. Though he's passed the highest level of Leopard education, he's totally given up on Leopard cultural beliefs that value education and the collective over the individual. This is why he warns Sunny and Orlu to get back or face their

deaths—he expects them to prioritize their own lives over those of the toddlers (and indeed, the lives of people worldwide). This is something the novel implies that Black Hat himself would do, and it's something that reinforces how corrupt he's become.

☛☛ On instinct, Sunny let her spirit face move forward. In that moment, her fear of everything left her—her fear of Ekwensu's evil, of being flayed alive by the monster's fronds, of her family learning of her death, of the world's end. It all evaporated. Sunny smiled. She knew how the world would end. She knew that someday she would die. She knew her family would live on if she died right now. And she realized that she knew Ekwensu.

And Sunny hated her.

Related Characters: Sunny Nwazue, Ekwensu, Black Hat Otokoto

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 326

Explanation and Analysis

Sunny is the last of her friends standing and able to face Ekwensu, and she suddenly feels confident in her ability to banish the dangerous masquerade. Allowing her spirit face and spirit identity to move forward in this moment represents Sunny's sudden comfort with her identity. Since learning she's a Leopard Person, Sunny has been struggling to figure out who she even is—but in this moment, all of that suddenly seems clear. And interestingly, part of this has to do with Sunny accepting her own Leopard power. When she trusts herself, essentially, Sunny is finally able to tap into the full extent of what she can do as a Leopard Person.


In this moment, Sunny also seems to accept the Leopard philosophy that values the collective good over individual lives. This is why Sunny suddenly doesn't fear her own death, her family's reaction, or Ekwensu—she accepts that she's pretty insignificant in the grand scheme of the universe. What's most important, then, is banishing Ekwensu from the physical world, which Sunny goes on to do right after this. Banishing Ekwensu, of course, means that Sunny is going to stay alive, but it also means that everyone else in the world is going to stay alive as well. Put another way, it's no longer important for Sunny to feel fear, something that's specific to her and not to the human race


as a whole. Letting go of her fear represents Sunny prioritizing everyone else over her own individual emotions.

Chapter 21 Quotes

☛☛ “Grandma,” she whispered. As the old blind woman at the council meeting had said, Sunny looked nothing like her. But what did that matter? She smiled to herself and carefully put the picture back in the box.

Related Characters: Sunny Nwazue (speaker), Sunny's Grandmother/Ozoemena, Abok

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 345

Explanation and Analysis

When Sunny returns home after defeating Black Hat Otokoto, her mother passes on a juju-charmed box of items from her mother Ozoemena, Sunny's grandmother. Inside is a letter and this photograph of Ozoemena. Sunny has spent much of the novel since she discovered she was a Leopard Person trying to figure out who her grandmother was—figuring that out, her mentors and friends have made clear, will be the key to Sunny discovering who she is.

The fact that Sunny and Ozoemena look nothing alike illustrates how Leopard abilities travel through “spirit lines,” rather than being something that's genetic. It's because of genes that Sunny and her grandmother don't resemble each other, but it's because they share a spirit line that they're both Leopard People and have (or had, in Ozoemena's case) some of the same abilities. Both have a foot in the wilderness and can make themselves invisible—and the novel has also implied that like Ozoemena, Sunny is naturally extremely powerful, though Sunny doesn't yet know how to tap into her power. When Sunny decides it doesn't matter that she doesn't look like her grandmother, it indicates that she's ready to accept that she doesn't need to look like her grandmother to feel a connection to her. She can connect to her grandmother's memory by learning everything she can about the Leopard world and her abilities, and this will, in turn, help Sunny discover more about who she is in future installments of the *Nsibidi Scripts* series.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

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

PROLOGUE

Sunny has always loved candles. In Chicago, the National Grid meant that there was always electricity and never a need for candles. But in Nigeria, the PHC—the Power Holding Company of Nigeria—takes the power every night. One night, she lights a thick candle after the power goes out and stares at the flame. The flickering flame is soothing until Sunny sees something “serious and big and scary.” She gets closer and closer to the flame until suddenly, the candle lights her hair on fire. Sunny’s mother rushes in to put the fire out with her *rapa* just as the lights come back on. Sunny’s mother cuts Sunny’s hair short, but the worst part of the ordeal is what Sunny saw in the candle: the end of the world. It’s coming.

Sunny Nwazue confuses people. Her parents and brothers were born in Nigeria, but her family moved to New York City and so Sunny was born there. The family returned to Nigeria when Sunny was nine. So Sunny confuses people because she’s ethnically Nigerian, was born in America, and is now Nigerian because of where she lives. Additionally, though Sunny has West African features, she’s **albino**. She gets sunburnt so badly that she can’t play soccer, even though she’s really good at it. She plays with her brothers after dark when they feel like it—and even if she could play in the sun, other boys who play probably wouldn’t let her anyway. But all of this changed after Sunny met Chichi and Orlu.

Sunny visited Nigeria when she was two and contracted a bad case of malaria. Despite being so young, she remembers being hot and ill for days—until a light like a tiny sun came to her. It floated above Sunny and zapped mosquitos, and Sunny recovered just after it left. That was the first strange thing that happened to Sunny. Then, as a kid, she was good at being quiet like a ghost. She’d sneak up on her father and wait for him to notice her, scaring him to death. She knew he wanted to hurt her in those moments, and so sometimes she hates him. Sunny can’t help that she’s not a boy or a pretty girl like her father wanted, and she can’t help what she saw in the candle—or what she eventually became.

The novel’s opening creates tension, as readers know from the very beginning that something bad is going to happen. That Sunny sees the end of the world in a candle—something that usually soothes her and makes her feel content—suggests that whatever’s coming is going to totally upend her life. Additionally, having to cut her hair off after it catches fire suggests that Sunny is beginning to undergo a change, potentially related to what she sees in the candle.



Sunny sees herself as a person who’s full of contradictions. The way she describes her Nigerian and American roots suggests that she doesn’t really see herself as being from either place; she’s both Nigerian and American. At this point, she sees her albinism as something that holds her back from the thing she loves most: soccer. Her fair skin also seems to keep her constrained, as the sun—and along with it, the outside world in general—is out to burn her. But she makes it clear that things will change once Chichi and Orlu enter the story.



This passage takes a turn in a different direction—one that seems somewhat supernatural. It’s impossible to tell, at this point, if Sunny’s fever caused her to hallucinate and see the light that protected her—but the novel has already suggested that the supernatural is part of Sunny’s world, given what she saw in the candle. Sunny also establishes that she and her father have a fraught relationship, and that she doesn’t fit in in her family. But noting that she can’t help what she “eventually became” again makes it clear that Sunny’s identity is soon going to begin changing.



CHAPTER 1

In an excerpt from *Fast Facts for Free Agents*, Isong Abong Effiong Ison explains what a Leopard Person is. The term comes from an Efik term, and all people “of mystical true ability” are Leopard People. Two thousand years ago, there was a great worldwide massacre of Leopard People, which began in the Middle East after Jesus’s murder. The massacre is known as the Great Attempt. These days, Leopard People are safe and have used strong juju to cover up that the Great Attempt happened.

People point and laugh as soon as Sunny walks into the schoolyard—Sunny’s long blond hair is gone, and it’s now a puffy Afro. Even Sunny’s friends (or now, former friends) laugh and say Sunny is ugly. Things get worse in literature and writing class, when Sunny is the only student to get a high score on an essay. Miss Tate, the teacher, shouts that the essay was supposed to be easy and fun. She calls Sunny to the front of the class, pulls out her switch, and then puts the switch in Sunny’s hand. Sunny, Miss Tate says, is going to give each student three lashes on the hand.

Sunny’s classmates are clearly livid as they line up in front of her. Orlu is the first in line; he’s a year older and likes to build things. Unlike everyone else, he just seems nervous. Sunny starts to cry and throws the switch to the ground. At this, Miss Tate pushes Sunny aside and hits each student on the hand herself. As they return to their seats, one kid kicks Sunny’s chair and calls her a “stupid pale-faced akata witch.” Sunny hates the word; it’s extremely rude.

After school, Sunny tries to escape—but three girls and four boys beat her, and nobody but Orlu steps in to stop it. Orlu suggests Sunny explain herself. The meanest girl, Jibaku, asks why Sunny didn’t hit them herself—she could’ve been gentle. Jibaku suggests Sunny likes seeing a white woman beat kids, since Sunny is white. Sunny snarls that she’s **albino**, not white, but a boy named Periwinkle says she’s ugly either way. Sunny snatches her umbrella off the ground (she uses it to protect herself from the sun) and says she couldn’t hit her classmates. Jibaku insults Sunny and leads the kids away.

These excerpts from Fast Facts for Free Agents give readers a heads-up as to how the novel’s magical world works. For her part, Sunny doesn’t seem to know yet what a Leopard Person is (since she made no mention of them in the prologue), which creates some dramatic irony: readers can infer that Sunny might be a Leopard Person, but Sunny isn’t aware of this yet.



At school, Sunny is totally alone and a bullying target, seemingly because of her looks. Keep in mind that since Sunny was born in New York, she went through many years of school in a primarily English-speaking country (it’s implied that a lot of Sunny’s conversations throughout the novel are conducted in Igbo, rather than English). She essentially has a head start on her classmates—but suddenly, when Miss Tate gives her the switch, this doesn’t seem like such a good thing. Asking Sunny to whip her own classmates also distances Sunny from her classmates further, creating even wider divisions between Sunny and any potential friends.



Orlu immediately differentiates himself from the others by not openly resenting Sunny. For her part, Sunny can’t bear to be made into her classmates’ enemy in such a brutal way—but even though she refuses to hit her classmates, she can’t win. Calling her an “akata witch” takes aim at Sunny’s birthplace (not Nigeria) and at her skin color (physical differences, including albinism, are often linked to witchcraft). Sunny can’t change either of these things about herself, so she seems destined to not fit in at school.



Jibaku, Periwinkle, and the other bullies see Sunny’s refusal to hit them herself as essentially a refusal to protect them. Jibaku is angry enough, though, that it seems unclear whether Sunny could’ve avoided this beating by doing as Miss Tate asked. Further, Jibaku continues to suggest that Sunny is an outsider who hates Black people, since Jibaku implies that she doesn’t see Sunny as Black. This highlights again how poorly Sunny fits in.



Orlu helps Sunny pick up her books and asks if she's okay. Sunny angrily says Orлу didn't help her, but Orлу shows her his cheek—Periwinkle and a boy named Calculus punched him. They start heading home and as they chat, they realize they have a lot in common. As they reach the intersection near Orлу's house, Sunny asks who lives in the mud hut next door (the woman is supposedly a witch). Orлу says the woman's name is Nimm; she lives there with her daughter.

Just then, a girl—Orлу's neighbor—calls Sunny another rude name as she swaggers up to Orлу and looks Sunny up and down. The girl, Chichi, explains she doesn't need to go to school and refuses to share her age; she says cryptically she could be older or younger than Sunny's 12 years. Chichi then insults Sunny's American-accented Igbo. The girls exchange a few more insults as Chichi saunters away.

CHAPTER 2

Another excerpt from *Fast Facts for Free Agents* explains that home won't be the same once a free agent learns what they are. A person's world fractures into even more groups once they learn they're a Leopard Person—and it doesn't help that the world is full of "idiot Lambs." As a free agent, the reader is part of the Leopard society and kind of part of the Lamb world. The free agent's "ignorance" will make it easier to exist in the Lamb world.

Sunny and Orлу walk home together after school for the next two weeks. It distracts Sunny from thinking about what she saw in the candle—and it protects them from a ritual killer called Black Hat Otokoto, who's on the loose and has been abducting and brutally murdering children. Chichi usually joins Sunny and Orлу near Orлу's house and gradually, Sunny gets used to her. Chichi insists she spends her days helping her mother and walking—and she loves tricking people. Sunny is shocked when Chichi shares that her absent father is Nyanga Tolotolo, Sunny's father's favorite musician. Soon, Sunny and Chichi are friends, too.

One day, Orлу has to take a bus somewhere mysterious after school, so Sunny walks home alone and keeps an eye out for Black Hat Otokoto. She shivers as she thinks of the candle—just as Chichi appears behind her. Chichi asks if Sunny and Orлу are friends now and declares that if Sunny is going to be Orлу's friend, she has to be Chichi's friend, too. Sunny is confused; she thought she and Chichi were already friends. But Chichi says she doesn't know enough about Sunny yet to consider her a friend.

Once Sunny realizes that Orлу did indeed try to defend her, her entire demeanor changes. And Orлу, for his part, could be unusually noble—it's unclear, at this point, why he chose to stand up for her this time, when they've been classmates for a while now. Noting that there's another supposed witch in town suggests that Sunny might have something in common with Orлу's neighbor, though it's still not clear what that might be.



When even Chichi—someone who doesn't know Sunny at all—insults Sunny and is rude, it highlights just how at odds Sunny is with so many people in her hometown. Even complete strangers are, in Sunny's opinion, unfairly judging her and then being oddly cryptic.



This excerpt foreshadows that Sunny may soon learn what she is. The possibility that a free agent's home won't be the same once they figure out who they are might not be such a bad thing for Sunny. She already feels so out of place at home and in her wider community that discovering her true identity may help her feel more secure.



Sunny might have seen the end of the world in the candle, but she has bigger things to worry about now—such as Black Hat Otokoto, a serial killer who may choose to target a young girl like Sunny. Befriending Orлу helps Sunny feel safer, but it also helps her expand her circle of trusted friends. Chichi is a bit of an enigma, though; even as Sunny starts to piece together Chichi's parentage and what she spends her days doing, Chichi is still mysterious.



Sunny is confused because she thought Chichi was already her friend—they hang out most days after school, after all. But Chichi subtly implies that in her opinion, this isn't enough to make them real friends. They'll have to connect over something more substantial, though it's not clear yet what that thing might be. This is unsettling for Sunny, since it seems like the rules are suddenly changing.



Chichi says she's sure there's more to Sunny than meets the eye. People say that **albinos** are part ghost, or that they can see things. Sunny rolls her eyes; people always think those with physical differences are magic, and she hates it. Chichi laughs at Sunny's anger and says that Orlu can "undo bad things." Sunny says she already knows Orlu is good at fixing things, but Chichi says that's not the whole story. Nervously, she invites Sunny to come to her house. Sunny calls her mother and then follows Chichi into the red mud hut. The hut is filled with dusty books and makes Sunny sneeze, but Sunny says it's fine—she's a book lover too. These old thick books don't look like Sunny's novels, though.

Sunny finally notices Chichi's mother and greets her. Chichi's mother offers Sunny tea, and Sunny feels like she can't refuse—she wants tea, but she sees no way to warm water and pointing that out would be rude. But Chichi's mother leaves the hut and returns minutes later with sweetened Lipton. Chichi explains that she and her mother read a lot and trade back the books they don't want anymore. Chichi's mother shows Sunny the book she's reading currently, which is an old favorite: *In the Shadow of the Bush* by P. Amaury Talbot. It's as stereotypical as one might expect of a book written by a white man in 1912—but Chichi's mother says Talbot unwittingly preserved important information in the book.

Sunny loses herself in her thoughts. Both her parents are highly educated and very successful in their jobs, so it's a bit shocking to encounter an educated woman like Chichi's mother living in a hut like this. After chatting for a while, Chichi's mother gets up to leave. Once she's gone, Sunny asks how long Chichi has known Orlu—and the girls hear Orlu get home next door. Chichi calls for him, and he enters the hut looking very concerned. While Chichi runs outside to get him some tea, Sunny asks if Orlu can really "undo things." Orlu shouts for Chichi and scolds her for having a big mouth. They argue, but Sunny doesn't understand exactly what they're arguing about. She demands to know what's going on.

In Sunny's experience, people scapegoat those with physical differences (like albinism) and connect them to magic—which, at this point, Sunny believes is ridiculous and not even real. Chichi continues to speak cryptically; it's not clear what "undo[ing] bad things" even means. But Chichi's behavior suggests that there's more for Sunny to learn, if Sunny is willing to trust her. Then, entering Chichi's hut shows Sunny a new way of living. Sunny might love books, but she realizes suddenly that not all books are created equal—or serve the same purposes.



Sunny's intense desire to not offend Chichi or her mother means that she doesn't question where the tea comes from—but nevertheless, the tea seems to appear magically out of thin air. As Chichi's mother tells Sunny about her book, she implies that there are many different ways to look at a work like this. P. Amaury Talbot's books, written about the people and cultures he studied while living in Southern Nigeria, are now considered anthropological classics—but Chichi's mother makes it seem like there's more to the book than that. And whatever allows her to see more in the book isn't, at this point, visible or accessible to Sunny yet.



This is a bit of a culture shock moment for Sunny. She's been raised to believe that education exists for one purpose: to get someone a high paying job that will then fund a comfortable life. Chichi's mother is clearly educated, so Sunny begins to suspect that there's something else going on here, since Chichi's mother lives in this crude hut. Things get even more complicated, then, when Orlu—who seems calm and levelheaded usually—starts to shout and argue with Chichi. Whatever Chichi is saying seems important and secret, since Orlu is so upset about it.



Sighing, Orlu pulls a piece of chalk out of his pocket and draws a circle with three lines radiating from the center on a book. He scribbles symbols and then offers Chichi the book to "mark it." Chichi presses her thumb to the chalk, and then Orlu offers it to Sunny. Sunny says her mother thinks this is evil, but Orlu says that Sunny's mother doesn't know anything about juju. Sunny presses her thumb to the chalk—and then Orlu pulls out a knife. This irritates Chichi, but Orlu says he wants this to be strong. He touches the knife to his tongue and passes the knife to Chichi, who does the same. Chichi passes the knife to Sunny. Sunny is afraid of diseases, but Chichi says that once Sunny does this, she "can't turn back." Curious, Sunny touches the knife to her tongue.

The knife cut stings—and suddenly, everything looks weird. Sunny feels like "reality is blossoming." She asks her friends to make it stop, but Chichi just asks Sunny to swear to never tell anyone about this. Desperately, Sunny shrieks that she swears—and everything goes back to normal. Orlu explains that they just performed a trust knot; Sunny physically can't tell anyone what she hears her friends say. Orlu explains that he can undo bad juju by instinct. Chichi says that juju can be good, bad, or neutral, and Orlu adds that in Nigeria, people with powers like this are called Leopard People. Sunny remembers the candle but says nothing as Orlu explains that Chichi can remember anything she sees. Feeling ill, Sunny gets up to leave, but Chichi asks Sunny to meet her and Orlu tomorrow morning. Sunny nods.

CHAPTER 3

An excerpt from *Fast Facts for Free Agents* explains what chittim are: Leopard People currency. They're curved metal rods; big copper ones are the most valuable and tiny gold ones are the least valuable. *Chittim* fall from the sky like rain, but they never hurt people. One earns *chittim* by gaining knowledge and wisdom. Isong warns the free agent reader that they'll never get rich.

Everything seems normal when Sunny gets home, but she's exhausted and goes to bed early. In the morning, Sunny gets dressed and puts on her favorite gold necklace, a gift from her father. Sunny's mother tells Sunny to be home by four. Once Sunny meets up with Chichi and Orlu, Orlu says his mother was really angry about the trust knot. His parents also said that Sunny can't enter Leopard Knocks until she's fully initiated. Chichi grins—she knew this, and she's certain Sunny is "one of [them]." Sunny is angry and confused, but Chichi says the worst that'll happen is that Sunny can't talk about this, or speak to her or Orlu again. They're going to see a man named Anatov, Defender of Frogs and All Things Natural.

Immediately, Sunny realizes that what's going on here is juju (magic). Orlu essentially assures Sunny that not all juju is bad, thereby broadening how Sunny looks at the world. By trusting him, Sunny starts to move away from her parents and how she's been raised to see the world; now, she's relying on and trusting her friends rather than her family. And though this is scary for Sunny, she's ultimately too curious about what's even going on to refuse the chalk drawing or the knife. This will, Chichi suggests, change Sunny's life forever—and Sunny is ready for a change.



Sunny literally develops a new way of seeing as she participates in the trust knot—reality "blossom[s]," or in other words, she's seeing more than what she initially thought was there. This introduces the idea that there's more to Sunny's world than she thought possible, as it seems like magic is woven through her world in ways that are invisible to the average person. The implication here is that Sunny, like Orlu and Chichi, is a Leopard Person. At this point, this is a lot for Sunny to take in. She needs some time to think about it before she can trust her friends and accept this potential new facet of her identity.



Currency has a different purpose in the Leopard world than in the Lamb world. It rewards knowledge and education, rather than a person's ability to perform a task. The fact that gold chittim are the least valuable reinforces this idea—in the real world, gold is a more valuable metal than copper.



That Sunny chooses to wear a necklace from her father complicates their relationship a bit. On some level, she loves him and what he's given her, even if she also resents how he treats her at other times. As Sunny meets up with her friends, Chichi's trickster nature shines through: she acts like she tricked Orlu into performing the trust knot with Sunny yesterday. But Sunny isn't entirely sure if she's "one of [them]," or what that means, so Chichi's unwillingness to speak plainly just raises the stakes in Sunny's mind.



Orlu hires a cab to take them to the market. Once it reaches the market, he and Chichi lead Sunny away from it until they reach a path leading into the bush. There, several older men come out of the bush and ask if Sunny knows where she's going. Chichi tells the man that Sunny is with her, which satisfies the man. Once the man is out of sight, Sunny begs for Orlu or Chichi to explain things—but they say Anatov will explain. Sunny grouses to herself that her friends could easily be Black Hat Otokoto's accomplices—she saw the worst possible thing in the candle, after all, so anything's possible.

When Orlu, Sunny, and Chichi reach a rushing river with a thin, slippery bridge with no handrails stretching across it, Sunny stops. Orlu explains that the entrance to Leopard Knocks is on the other side, and Chichi says the place is named after juju an Efik woman created to make an attacking leopard stub its foot. She and Orlu argue about which ethnic group has the strongest juju, but Sunny can't listen: the river is too scary. Chichi says they'll cross it later, but for now, they're taking a path on this side of the river.

Finally, Anatov's hut comes into view. It's big with two doors, one labeled IN and one labeled OUT. Chichi and Orlu lead Sunny through the OUT door. Anatov rises from a throne-like chair as Sunny sneezes snot into her hands. Anatov scolds Chichi that this is improper, and then asks Sunny what's wrong with her. He hands her a tissue when she explains she needs to blow her nose—and then he watches her intently and declares that she's "yellow." Sunny snaps that she's **albino**, but Anatov tells her to sit down or things will get even worse for her. He walks a slow circle around her and then pulls out white powder, which he sprinkles in a circle around Sunny. He then pulls out a jeweled knife—Sunny is terrified he's Black Hat Otokoto.

Chuckling, Anatov says Sunny will remember this for a while. He draws in the air with his knife and a red symbol floats down from it toward Sunny's head. Chichi tells Sunny to hold her breath—but as the symbol touches Sunny, Sunny is yanked through the floor, deep into the earth. Earth fills Sunny's mouth and it pulls her clothes off. Sunny starts to move back up. Her body is in pain already as she bursts into water and then back out of it again. With a splat, she's back in Anatov's hut with mud in her mouth and things falling around her. When Sunny opens her eyes and asks what happened, she sounds like a glamorous smoker and feels like a graceful ballet dancer. Orlu says he's never seen "that kind" before, but Chichi hisses at him to turn away.

Chichi, at least, seems well-known to the men who emerge from the bush, suggesting that she's part of a community that gathers out here. This all remains unsettling for Sunny, though. She doesn't know what community Chichi (and perhaps Orlu) are part of, and with a ritual killer on the loose, she knows she must be careful and protect herself. The candle's vision also continues to haunt Sunny, reminding readers that there are potentially terrible things happening on a global scale.



Orlu and Chichi make it seem like it's no big deal to cross this scary bridge. They seem to know something about it that Sunny doesn't—it's Sunny's lack of knowledge that makes the bridge so frightening. Chichi and Orlu's argument, meanwhile, recalls the excerpt from Fast Facts about all the divisions that exist between people. There's clearly juju in many Nigerian ethnic groups, but the argument suggests this doesn't always lead to unity.



Immediately, Anatov reads as a very powerful person. His throne-like chair connotes power and prestige, and he seems to be able to say whatever he wants to whomever he wants without consequences. As Sunny sees it, Anatov is just being a jerk and teasing her for her albinism. But it seems likely that Anatov means something else, or more, by calling Sunny "yellow." Whatever Anatov is doing gets no explanation—and without context, Sunny assumes it could easily be a ritual that a serial killer follows before murdering a victim.



Being pulled into the earth is a total surprise to Sunny—and she seems to return from the earth a totally different person. Orlu reinforces this when he notes never having seen "that kind" before. It's not clear what "kind" he's referring to, but Sunny has definitely changed. Anatov also highlights that this is a unique and transformative experience when he warns Sunny that she'll remember this for a while. Notably, Orlu and Chichi also don't seem all that concerned, suggesting that whatever happened to Sunny is considered normal to them.



Sunny asks if this can stop now, and something seems to shrink back inside of her. She realizes she's wearing a raffia dress, and Chichi says that Sunny passed. Anatov instructs Orlu to put the chittim in Sunny's purse and explains that Sunny is a rare free agent, since neither of her parents are Leopard People. He asks if Sunny has any mysterious extended family members, and Sunny says her maternal grandmother was strange and possibly mentally ill. But she doesn't know her grandmother's maiden name, so Anatov can't identify her. He explains that Leopard abilities travel through spirit lines, rather than bloodlines, but most Leopard People are born to Leopard parents.

Anatov then explains that Sunny has been initiated: it's like she's a computer that came installed with certain programs, but now those programs have been activated. He then asks if odd things have happened to Sunny recently. Sunny tells him about what she saw in the candle, and Anatov deems it "interesting." But he tells Orlu and Chichi it's their job, not his, to explain more things—and he expects them all back here at midnight in four days.

Then, Anatov says that "he" arrived last night. Orlu groans, but Chichi laughs happily that they visited at just the right time—and Anatov says that the world is "bigger and more important than you." Anatov calls for a boy named Sasha, who enters the hut a moment later. Sasha, Anatov explains, is here from Chicago to "cool down." Chichi seems intrigued by Sasha immediately. Anatov shoos the kids out of his hut and says to take care of Sunny.

Sunny is nauseous and tired. She asks why Anatov has the IN and OUT signs if nobody uses them, but Orlu explains that Anatov's hut is *outside* of the disgusting world. Sasha offers Sunny a minty chewing stick, which helps her feel better. Chichi asks if they're ready to go, but Orlu grumbles that he doesn't want to hang out with "dangerous people." He knows what Sasha did, and he doesn't want to live with a "Troublemaking black American" and an "akata criminal." Sunny quietly asks Sasha to tell his story and shares that she was also born in the U.S. She feels like an *akata* often here. Orlu looks ashamed.

Finally, Sunny gets some information she can work with: she is indeed a Leopard Person, and someone else in her family was as well. That Sunny has always heard her grandmother was mentally ill seems akin to Sunny hearing that Chichi's mother is a witch: questionable, given all that Sunny is learning, and also a matter of perspective. Sunny also begins to feel even more like an anomaly. She's not only a rare albino; she's also a rare free agent. In this regard, she's very different from Chichi and Orlu.



Already, Anatov is encouraging Sunny to rely on her peers, rather than her teachers, for information. He implies that it's not his job to simply explain everything to her—she'll have to figure stuff out with her friends' help. His unwillingness to say anything about the candle may also suggest that he's aware already of what she saw, or that it's not anything to worry about.



Anatov cares about the kids—he doesn't want Chichi and Orlu to abandon Sunny, and he's seemingly been caring for Sasha—but he also continues to show the kids that it's really their job to support each other. He also starts to introduce the idea that in the grand scheme of things, the kids themselves don't matter very much: they're insignificant when compared to the universe, and they also have little control.



Even within Sunny's group of friends, prejudice exists: Orlu sees Sasha as lesser and as more dangerous than Chichi and Sunny, whom he sees as Nigerian. Since Sunny is both Nigerian and American, she's able to bridge the gap between Orlu and Sasha and encourage them to get along. Her dual identity, then, may be more useful than she initially thought. For his part, Sasha seems far kinder than Orlu is giving him credit for—he, not Orlu or Chichi, is helping Sunny feel better after her initiation.



Sasha shares that his parents moved to an all-Lamb neighborhood, so he got into fights—and Orlu snaps that Sasha set a masquerade on a few kids. Chichi is impressed, since that's upper-level juju, but Orlu insists that they're Ekpiri—low-level—and there are rules. Sasha remains unconcerned, even when Orlu adds that Sasha changed the minds of two police officers. Sunny tells the boys to stop fighting; they'll have to figure it out since Sasha is supposed to live with Orlu. Chichi says they should all go to Leopard Knocks, get lunch, and explain things to Sunny. When Orlu comments on how heavy with chittim Sunny's purse is, Chichi points out that Sunny knew nothing before she was initiated, so she learned a lot.

This argument develops each kid's personality. While Orlu values rules and honesty, both Chichi and Sasha are more interested in justice and in trying new things—even if that means breaking the rules. Sunny is the peacemaker. So within the group, even though the kids are all new to each other, there are already checks and balances. That Sunny earned so much chittim during her initiation highlights again how important learning and knowledge is in Leopard society—and how important knowledge of oneself is in this world.



CHAPTER 4

According to *Fast Facts for Free Agents*, masquerades aren't just symbols of ancestors or spirits, acted out by men in elaborate costumes. In the Leopard world, masquerades are real—as are ghosts, demons, and other supposedly mythical things. Masquerades are dangerous and can do anything, from steal one's soul to rewrite a person's future. Free agents should leave masquerades to those who are more qualified to handle juju.

This excerpt is a warning for free agents to be on the lookout for absolutely anything. It also suggests that humans, even Leopard People, aren't all that powerful compared to masquerades and the like. It's unclear at this point, though, if the book is correct to suggest that free agents aren't as qualified as Leopard-born Leopard People—the tone is condescending, suggesting the author herself may be prejudiced too.



Sunny complains about the itchy raffia dress as Orlu offers to carry her heavy purse across the bridge to Leopard Knocks. Then, Orlu rubs a black stone next to the bridge's beginning and steps onto the bridge. Something odd happens to his face, but he strolls casually into the mist. Sasha goes next, but Chichi turns to Sunny and explains that all Leopards must be initiated to become functioning Leopard People. Because Chichi has always known she's a Leopard Person, her initiation just marked the beginning of her life journey. Sunny's initiation, meanwhile, is the beginning of her "Self."

Because Sunny hasn't known she's a Leopard Person all her life, her journey necessarily looks different from Chichi's. The moment Sunny discovers she's a Leopard Person, Chichi implies, is the moment that Sunny learns who she really is. In turn, this suggests that Sunny has pretty much been flying blind prior to today—she had no chance of figuring out who she is without this crucial piece of her identity. Now, she can move forward and gain more self-knowledge with her friends' help.



Chichi then explains that every Leopard Person has a spirit face in addition to their human face. A spirit face is private; it's like being naked, and you can't lie in that form. Privately, Sunny thinks this is all crazy as Chichi says the bridge is part of the spirit world that exists in the physical world, so you have to call up your spirit face to cross the bridge. She swears Sunny to secrecy and then calls forth her spirit face. Chichi's face morphs into a long ceremonial mask—which looks oddly like Chichi.

Leopard identity, per Chichi, is multifaceted. A person's spirit face represents the parts of them that make them who they are, but this piece of their identity isn't something that's acceptable to share with everyone in this culture; it's personal and rather private. Chichi also reveals that the spirit world is all around them, and that the spirit world is liable to show up anywhere.



When Chichi changes back, she starts to coach Sunny through calling forth her own face, but Sunny realizes that everyone saw her spirit face after her initiation. She's mortified, but Chichi assures her it's fine and says that Sunny's face looked like the sun. When Sunny says she felt like a ballerina, Chichi pulls out a knife, speaks some Efik words, and classical music begins to play. Sunny feels drawn to the music, and Chichi tells her to concentrate on the music and cross. Sunny's face tightens and she puts a foot on the bridge. This is going to be easy. Sunny dances across the bridge fearlessly and notices that some monster is watching her from the river. She catches sight of Leopard Knocks and hurries to the end of the bridge—and then the music stops and Sunny's spirit face disappears. She slips and starts to fall.

Sasha reaches out and snatches Sunny's gold necklace, which he uses to pull her to safety. He and Orlu settle her at a picnic table as Chichi appears—and Orlu says the river beast probably cut Chichi's music. Sunny looks around as her heart slows. Leopard Knocks is like nothing she's seen before. The buildings are sophisticated mud huts, many with multiple stories, lots of windows, and white drawings on them. Palm trees grow between them, and music plays in the streets. Sunny feels like an intruder and wants to go home, but Chichi leads her forward. As the kids walk through Leopard Knocks, Chichi points out juju powder shops, tobacco shops, and a bookstore.

Chichi insists on going into Bola's Store for Books. Sunny studies the books, which are written in all sorts of languages—including one called Nsibidi. Chichi purchases a book for Sunny titled *Fast Facts for Free Agents* and pays for it with Sunny's chittim. Then, Sasha suggests they go to Mama Put's Putting Place for lunch. Sunny pays for her meal in *chittim* and asks her friends to tell her everything. Chichi explains that there are Leopard People all over the world; they're called witches or sorcerers elsewhere. Being a Leopard Person is spiritual, rather than genetic. Usually it stays within families, but sometimes it skips a generation, as it seems to have done in Sunny's family.

The tightness Sunny felt in her face during her initiation, she discovers, was due to her spirit face showing. It's interesting that Sunny's spirit face looks like the sun—the sun is, at this point, Sunny's enemy due to her albinism, so this offers hope that Sunny may discover a way to safely be in the sunshine after being initiated. Sunny also discovers that when she settles into her true self (by calling forth her spirit face), she's not afraid and is confident in her own abilities. This reinforces the idea that as Sunny puts together who she is, she'll start to feel more at home in her own body and in the wider world.



In a roundabout way, Sunny's father saves her—recall that the necklace was from him. So even as he resents his daughter, he's still protecting her. As Sunny studies Leopard Knocks, the sophisticated huts she sees suggests that she was wrong to judge Chichi's mother's hut and think it's crude—it is, no doubt, sophisticated like these ones, but just not as visually compelling. Sunny has been through a lot today and isn't convinced she's where she belongs. But with her friends' help, she steps forward into her new world for the first time.



*Finally, readers discover where *Fast Facts for Free Agents* comes from: Chichi trying to help Sunny learn about the Leopard world. At lunch, Chichi makes it clear that by being inducted into Leopard society, Sunny has become part of something much larger. She's spiritually connected to people with magical abilities all over the world. Though again, the novel implies that there are still divisions between magical people; having different names for those with magical abilities naturally creates divisions.*



Leopard Knocks, Chichi says, is the West African headquarters for Leopard People. Sasha says that New York is the official American headquarters, but the African American headquarters are on the Gullah Islands in South Carolina. Chichi continues that she and Orlu have known their spirit faces their whole lives, so they've been coming to Leopard Knocks since they were babies. They were initiated two years ago into the first level, which is called Ekipiri. They've all done this early, as most kids do it at 14 or 15. Next comes Mbawkwa at 16 or 17; Sasha boasts that he's ready for it now. Chichi says Ndibu is after that, and it's like getting a Ph.D. A candidate has to get a masquerade's consent to progress.

Finally, there's Oku Akama; only eight living people in Nigeria have gotten there. Chichi says Anatov is one person. There are Kehinde and Taiwo, and Sugar Cream is the Head Librarian at the Obi Library. She's the most respected. Seeing Sunny's confusion, Orlu interjects that in the Lamb world, money and material things are the most important. But in the Leopard world, people earn chittim by learning—knowledge is the most important thing. So Sugar Cream protects the greatest knowledge site in West Africa. Sunny asks if this is why Chichi's mother lives the way she does, and Chichi nods. Orlu notes that Chichi's mother is also a Nimm princess, but Sunny has no time to ask what this means. Sasha says that not all Leopard People use this philosophy; some Leopard People just want power, or Lamb wealth.

Sasha notes that the four of them are an Oha coven. Orlu says they're too young, but Sasha says it adds up: he's an outsider, Sunny is "outside in" because she's **albino**, and there are two girls and two boys. Sunny grumbles as Sasha explains that an Oha coven is a group set up to defend against something nefarious. Before he can say more, though, something above them explodes—and warm, wet meat, hair, and teeth fall onto the table, letting off a rotten smell. Sunny almost vomits as Orlu tells her that nobody knows exactly what tungwas are, they're just annoying and disgusting.

On the walk back, Sunny checks her phone and realizes she's going to be late. She tries to call her mother, but the call won't go through. It takes 10 minutes to get Sunny back across the bridge. At Sunny's gate, Chichi warns Sunny that she'll sleep poorly tonight. Sunny is two hours late. She calls for her mother as soon as she opens the door, but her mother still slaps her. Sunny's father shouts at her and threatens to flog her if she comes home late again. Sunny hates him. Her mother pushes her toward her room and quietly tells Sunny to change her clothes.

Again, Sasha makes it clear that there are divisions within the Leopard world: Black Americans have created their own community in the South. That Chichi, Sasha, Sunny, and Orlu are Ekipiri already suggests that all four kids are precocious and able to handle juju that's advanced for their age. Then, noting that Ndibu candidates need a masquerade's consent starts to complicate Fast Facts for Free Agents's insistence that masquerades are all evil. They play an integral role in Leopard higher education, suggesting they have some stake in allowing Leopard People to progress.



Orlu crystallizes how Leopard society views money and power. Power, he insists, comes from learning—and a person's earnings delineate how educated they are, rather than how good they are at a specific job. This, in theory, incentivizes lifelong learning rather than becoming educated just so one can amass wealth (which explains why Chichi's mother lives in a hut, rather than a more comfortable house, and is still studying). However, Sasha implies that there is corruption in the Leopard world. In this way, it's no different from the Lamb world. This also suggests that young people, like Sunny, will have a choice as they get older: do they want to value education, or enriching themselves?



Sasha thinks highly of himself and his abilities, so it follows that he'd jump right to thinking he's part of something that Orlu insists is for people with way more education and maturity than they have. At this point, Sunny doesn't want her albinism to define her. So far in her life, being albino hasn't done her any favors, and she's been teased for it. That Sasha suggests it's what makes Sunny part of the Oha coven, though, suggests that albinism may be able to define her positively, too.



Sunny has entered a whole new world after being inducted into Leopard society, but she's still a kid and still has to deal with her parents when she gets home. So though discovering her Leopard identity may have started Sunny's "Self," her world is still fracturing—especially since she can't tell her parents anything. Her mother, though, seems unusually incurious about the raffia dress, suggesting she may have some idea of what's going on.



CHAPTER 5

Fast Facts for Free Agents describes a clear green substance that's sturdier than diamond. It occasionally appears as a juju knife blade—and anyone who is chosen by a knife like that should wonder what they did in a past life to warrant that. The substance is so rare that it doesn't have a name, and nobody knows where it comes from.

When Sunny showers, the water tickles. She's generally uncomfortable and alert, and she feels even worse when she discovers a newspaper on her bed. The headline reads that Black Hat Otokoto killed a five-year-old. Sunny wants to explain to her mother what's going on, but she knows she can't. The trust knot means Sunny can't say anything anyway, but Sunny's mother is Catholic and would forbid Sunny from seeing Chichi or Orlu again—and who knows what Sunny's father would do.

Sunny struggles to sleep, as she's itchy and sweaty. She can taste dirt, too, and by three in the morning she's sobbing. An hour later, her face starts shifting back and forth between her face and her spirit face. Sunny studies her spirit face in the mirror once: it's gold and looks like the sun, with pointy rays. It's smiling. It's frightening, but it's also exciting. Sunny eventually opens her window to enjoy the cool breeze and falls asleep right next to it. She dreams that she's happily swimming in a river—until she catches sight of the river beast below her.

Sunny wakes up hours later, the sun shining directly on her. She's certain she's burnt, but to her surprise, her face is cool and unburnt. Sunny laughs: she realizes the sun can be her friend now, not her enemy. She can play soccer. This is exciting, but still, Sunny knows it's the end of her old life.

CHAPTER 6

Fast Facts for Free Agents defines a free agent as someone who "isn't privileged with even one pure Leopard spiritline," as a "result of mixed-up and confused spiritual genetics," and as someone who will struggle to learn anything. The book warns free agents to find someone to help them, as they'll be helpless, like a disoriented baby.

The Leopard world may have more tools (like magic) with which to look at the world, but this doesn't mean they know everything. The origins of this substance, for instance, are as mysterious as where chittim comes from—but the book's nonchalant tone suggests this isn't a problem. It's just another thing to maybe, someday, learn.



Chichi already warned Sunny it was going to be a rough night after going through her initiation. But part of Sunny's discomfort comes not just from learning she's a Leopard Person—it's also because suddenly, a huge wedge has come between her and her parents. This is a normal part of growing up and figuring out one's identity as a teen, but Sunny still feels unmoored since she can't ask her mother for help or guidance.



Shifting back and forth between her spirit face and her real face points to how difficult of a change this is for Sunny. She's literally having to make space in her body for what's essentially a second person, though her face is part of her. Sunny's dream about the river beast foreshadows that entering the Leopard world means she now has new enemies, some monstrous like the beast, and others that she knows nothing about yet.



It's thrilling to be able to go in the sun like everyone else. But this doesn't mean Sunny is totally happy with the change. It's bittersweet—Sunny gets the sun now, but she's also giving up a close and trusting relationship with her mother.



Fast Facts' tone is derisive as it describes free agents, as though free agents themselves aren't actually supposed to exist. Taking it at face value, the book suggests that Sunny will never amount to anything. However, Sunny does have many people to help her: Anatov, as well as Chichi, Sasha, and Orlu.



Angry, Sunny throws *Fast Facts for Free Agents* across the room—the author is so pompous and discriminatory. But Sunny doesn't want to look ignorant in front of Anatov, so she gets up to fetch the book. As she does, the book sprouts legs and climbs onto her pillow. Sunny is terrified, especially when it then flies open to Chapter Four once she gets close to it. But she reads that Lambs focus on attaining perfection. Leopard culture, the book says, isn't like this. All Leopard People, even free agents, have an ability that usually stems from the things that set them apart, like a talent or a physical trait. The book's tone is still condescending, but Sunny learns to look past it to the useful information within. She reads whenever she can and comes to enjoy how eagerly the book crawls into her lap.

Mostly, Sunny focuses on a juju called “*Etuk Nwan*” in Chapter Eight, which will allow her to leave the house undetected on Saturday night to meet Anatov. Three ingredients are easy to get, but the final ingredient is going to be a challenge. So on Saturday, Sunny goes to the market and asks the meat seller for a sheep's head. This request isn't unusual—but then she asks the seller if the sheep is an *ebett*, a “sleeping antelope sheep.” Suddenly afraid that she's going to look like a scary **albino** witch asking for such a thing, she says the regular sheep head will be fine.

When Sunny gets home, she only has an hour to butcher the head. It disgusts her, and it's clearly not an *ebett*, but she decides to work with what she has. So Sunny scrapes all the flesh off of the skull, wraps it in paper, and then makes it look like she's actually cooking. Her brothers, Chukwu and Ugonna, briefly come into the kitchen for snacks and to share that Black Hat killed a kid in a nearby town, but they notice nothing. Sunny sneaks upstairs with the sheep skull so it can dry, hides her purse outside, and then makes a spicy red stew with the sheep's brain.

Sunny must work the juju at exactly 11:00 p.m. It will allow her to pass through locked doors if she's successful. So Sunny sips her rainwater, rubs palm oil on her hands, and sprinkles chamomile on her hands. Then, she sits and holds the skull, trying to empty her mind of all thoughts. Suddenly, the skull drops to the floor—and Sunny can't pick it up again. The keyhole yanks her through it and on the other side, chittim fall around her. She leaves them, since she can't pick them up, and then passes through the front door's lock. Outside, she fetches her hidden purse and runs for Chichi's hut.

Now that Sunny knows she does, in theory, belong in the Leopard world, she's desperate to look like she fits in. This means wading through a book that seems designed to insult her and other free agents like her, suggesting Sunny might struggle to fit in more than she'd hope. However, the chapter about abilities offers hope that Sunny will be able to continue reframing the things that set her apart and make her a bullying target in the Lamb world (such as her albinism). She might not know how that makes her special now, but the novel implies that it will make her special.



Again, Sunny is hyper-aware of how her albinism marks her as different and could, in some cases, put her in danger. In this situation, she decides to compromise on being able to do the juju properly in order to keep herself safe and look nonthreatening to the meat seller—so she might not even be able to join Anatov and learn more about herself later, if the juju doesn't work.



Sunny is intent on making this sheep's head work, even though it isn't appropriate for the juju—in much the same way that she's intent on making herself fit in, despite harboring fears that she's not actually part of the Leopard world. Chukwu and Ugonna's tale about Black Hat's gruesome murder makes Sunny feel even more like she's in danger—and makes it seem even more necessary that she learn juju so she can protect herself.



*Even though the sheep wasn't an *ebett*, the juju still works—suggesting either that the juju didn't actually require an *ebett*'s head to begin with, or that Sunny is particularly powerful and just doesn't know it. Regardless of why the juju works, Sunny now has freedom she's never had before. She also gains confidence in her abilities, and this confidence is presumably granted by the chittim she's earned—she's gaining skills and figuring out what she can do, two processes Leopard society values.*



Sunny almost cries as she tells Chichi about performing the *Etuk Nwan*. Sasha and Orlu appear a minute later, and they hail the strangest vehicle Sunny has ever seen. Chichi calls it a “funky train,” and Sunny starts sneezing as soon as she gets on. Chichi suggests that Sunny is allergic to juju powders as they reach Anatov’s hut. Inside, Anatov tells the kids to sit down—but Sunny startles as she sees a hand-size red bug on the wall. Orlov explains that it’s a harmless ghost hopper, and Sunny asks if she can see lots of new creatures now. A bronze chittim falls in her lap.

Anatov welcomes Sunny to Leopard school and asks how she snuck past her parents—he visited her mother and father at work this week and can tell they’re strict. Sunny jokes that she’s **albino** and is basically a ghost, and Chichi says Sunny worked an *Etuk Nwan*. When Sunny says she made do with a normal sheep’s head instead of an *ebett*, Anatov laughs that she’d never find an *ebett*’s head at a Lamb market—*ebetts* are albino sheep with spirits that go to the spirit world when they sleep. He says that Sunny could do it *because* she’s albino and instructs her to reread chapter four on abilities and “bad” qualities.

Sunny asks if Leopard People aren’t proud of their imperfections, and Anatov says that the students must learn how to learn, and they’ll do this by gaining experience. He explains that the author of *Fast Facts*, Isong Abong Effiong Isong, is very knowledgeable—but she was educated in Europe and America, and so came to think that free agents and African Americans are ignorant and misguided. So she has problematic biases, but the book itself is good.

Addressing everyone, Anatov says that Leopards are confident, but they’re insecure like every other kind of person. Sasha, for instance, is here because he’s a troublemaker and has a photographic memory. Chichi is much the same. In the Lamb world, they’d be diagnosed with ADHD and medicated—and when the medications don’t work, they’ll be thought of as budding criminals. But in the Leopard world, they’re almost guaranteed to be successful. Orlu was diagnosed with dyslexia, which went away as soon as he realized he could instinctively undo bad juju.

Sunny is becoming more confident and knowledgeable, but she’s also getting closer to her friends—it’s a relief, it seems, to be able to tell Chichi the truth about how she snuck out and not have to hide. Around her friends, Sunny can be her true self. And Orlu and Chichi also help Sunny adjust to the Leopard world by interpreting new things for her, such as the funky train and the ghost hopper. As Sunny becomes aware of how much her world is expanding, she’s praised for these discoveries with chittim.



*When Anatov asks Sunny how she snuck out, Sunny doesn’t yet realize how important her albinism is to the fact that she was able to perform the *Etuk Nwan*. Her albinism has always been just a punchline, so it’s a shift for Sunny to see it as the very thing that makes her powerful and capable. It’s also telling that Sunny was able to perform the *Etuk Nwan* all on her own, without a mentor’s guidance. The Leopard world, it seems, prizes students learning to figure things out on their own.*



*Anatov doesn’t immediately answer Sunny’s question. Instead, he encourages her to read critically—an important skill as a young person comes of age—so she can evaluate why a person, like Isong, might feel the way she does. He also makes it clear that practical knowledge (such as Sunny figuring out how to work the *Etuk Nwan*) is extremely important to Leopard education: this isn’t a society that prizes book smarts alone.*



Anatov subtly gives Sunny a very important lesson as he opens this speech: that it’s okay to feel self-conscious and overwhelmed, even though Sunny is a Leopard Person. By explaining how Chichi, Sasha, and Orlu fit in so poorly in the Lamb world, Anatov again suggests that a person’s identity, and where they belong, is a matter of perspective. What’s important, he suggests, is that a person finds where they fit in, and where their skills and abilities will make them successful.



Sunny, because she's **albino**, has one foot in the real world and one in the wilderness (the spirit world). Chichi and Sasha say that Sunny should be able to make herself invisible by stepping into the wilderness, harness time, and receive premonitions. Abilities, Anatov explains, are things Leopards can do without the help of juju knives or other ingredients; all experienced Leopards can learn to manipulate time and be invisible, but Sunny will be able to do these things naturally.

Then, Anatov asks Orlu and Chichi to tell him about their assignment last time, which was to talk to “street folk.” Chichi and Orlu say that a few men tried to attack them, but most of them were just hungry—and the kids learned that those people have stories and lives, just like anyone else. Staring at Sunny, Anatov says that he'll teach his four charges about themselves, about new juju, and will help them pass their levels. This will be dangerous and scary, but if they die, the world will keep going. Sunny finds this disturbing, but Anatov goes on to give a new assignment: the kids are to go call on Kehinde. They'll have to figure out how to get to him.

CHAPTER 7

Fast Facts for Free Agents explains that Nigeria is known for its 419 scams, where people get roped in to helping Nigerian princes get their money out of banks. Leopard scammers, though, are supposedly working on supercomputers that will bring down Lamb economies in seconds. Isong won't write any more on the subject; free agents should refuse if they're ever asked to help one of these criminals.

Orlu, Sasha, and Chichi lead Sunny down the path and then stop. Sunny asks what's going on. Chichi says wryly that Kehinde is an elder of sorts, though he isn't old—and he lives in Night Runner Forest, which makes things difficult. Orlu notes that one can only enter Night Runner Forest at night, and Sasha immediately kneels and starts to draw with chalk powder. He explains he's drawing a *vévé* as he draws a circle with a tree in it and stabs a knife into the middle. Chichi asks Sunny to say “Night Runner Forest come” in Igbo. Sunny nervously complies—and the *vévé* spins and stops to point at a new, very dark path leading into the forest.

Finally, Anatov, Chichi, and Sasha lay out exactly what Sunny's abilities should be—and they connect them all to Sunny's albinism. This is the clearest indicator so far that Sunny's albinism isn't a curse, as she's been raised to believe. Rather, it's the very thing that will make her an extremely powerful Leopard Person—without even having much training.



Anatov's previous lesson seems designed to teach Orlu and Chichi to develop empathy for people they normally wouldn't think about (presumably, houseless people). Interestingly, he then suggests that an individual person's life doesn't matter much on a grand scale. Perhaps he wants his charges to realize that having empathy for fellow human beings is essential exactly because the world cares so little about them. Sunny finds Anatov's advice disturbing because she's been raised to expect adults to take care of her and protect her.



*Thus far, the parts of Leopard society that Sunny has encountered have seemed positive or neutral. This passage from *Fast Facts* makes it clear that just as there are people doing nefarious things in the Lamb world, the same thing is happening in the Leopard world. In this way, the two societies aren't so different.*



As the kids consider their task, they immediately begin working together to support each other. Sasha, Chichi, and Orlu must explain to Sunny exactly what the big deal is, but they also give her the opportunity to help and practice working juju (by asking her to summon Night Runner Forest). The way that Night Runner Forest exists—hidden alongside the physical world until someone summons it—highlights again how intertwined the spirit and physical worlds are, a new idea for Sunny.



Orlu goes first and asks a firefly to light their way. The firefly complies, so Sunny, Chichi, and Sasha follow Orlu into the forest. None of them knows what Kehinde looks like, and as they discuss, everything suddenly starts to creak and hum. Orlu shouts for everyone to get down as bats swarm above them. Chichi screams, and Orlu shouts for everyone to cover their ears and for Sasha to make “it” as high as possible. A shrill noise pierces the air, causing most of the bats that don’t drop dead to flee. Chittim falls and Orlu calls for another firefly to light their way (the first got eaten).

Chichi is bleeding. She explains to Sunny that the bats were a diversion: a bush soul attacked her. This is why her arm is bleeding; hurting something with one’s juju knife means the injury is mirrored on the knife’s owner. But if she hadn’t cut it, they’d all be zombies. Sasha and Orlu gather the chittim, which the four earned for teamwork, and they vote Sunny treasurer. When Chichi is feeling better, the group moves on. Orlu goes first and protects them from creatures and juju meant to hurt them.

Finally, they reach Kehinde’s hut. Chichi calls for Kehinde, and he appears and greets “the princess, the American, the dyslexic, and the **albino**.” He tells Chichi, Sasha, Sunny, and Orlu to sit, and they all sit right where they are. Dirt builds up behind Kehinde until it’s formed a chair for him, and Kehinde then demands light from lightning bugs—he doesn’t have to plead with them like Orlu. He offers the kids drinks and a monkey tosses glass bottles of soda to them. Then, Kehinde observes that the four made it—they wouldn’t be worth his time if they hadn’t.

Sunny frowns and Kehinde asks her to explain. Sasha, Orlu, and Chichi are also upset, so Sunny bursts out that they could’ve died. What kind of teacher, she asks, sends students to die? Kehinde says simply that had the kids died, their bodies would’ve been returned to their parents with “explanation.” But he then pulls out a newspaper and says that young people’s lives aren’t worth much these days and the world is a big place. Sunny starts to speak up again, but Kehinde tells her to be quiet and Chichi smacks Sunny. Smirking, Kehinde says Anatov thinks the four might be useful to Leopard People. He then says he’s busy—the kids can go. Sunny is enraged.

This passage is told more from Sunny’s perspective, so it allows readers to feel just as lost as she does as she ventures into the forest and encounters new, frightening things. Again, except for Sunny (who’s mostly just learning), the kids all work together to best handle whatever is attacking them. Orlu is able to talk the fireflies into helping, while Sasha creates the shriek that disperses the bats. The chittim highlights that the four did exactly what they were supposed to do—and learned how to defend themselves.



As Chichi explains to Sunny what happened, she presents the idea that defending themselves successfully has consequences—she still has to heal from the mirrored juju knife injury. This highlights how interconnected the magical world in the novel is. When the kids identify that they earned the chittim for teamwork, it shows that they’re coming to understand how much the Leopard world values teamwork and friendship—indeed, it values them more than the fact that they survived.



Kehinde seems fully in control of the natural world. The earth itself moves to serve him, and the insects seem to not dare to disobey a command. The way that Kehinde speaks to the four suggests that getting to his hut was a test. Now they’ve proven that they’re worthy of something, though it’s not clear yet what they’re worthy of.



Sunny isn’t used to a world or an education system where adults care so little about children’s lives. This seems, to her, to be on a totally different level than even Miss Tate whipping kids for poor English. So it seems disturbing that Kehinde speaks so nonchalantly about her and her friends’ prospective deaths. Kehinde tries to put this in perspective by bringing up Black Hat Otokoto’s murders—it’s better, he seems to suggest, to die during one’s lesson than to be brutally murdered.



Kehinde pulls Sasha aside and says something; Sasha nods. Then, Kehinde throws something into the path, scattering creatures and opening up a short path leading right to Anatov's hut. As Sasha, Orlu, Chichi, and Sunny reach Anatov's hut, Anatov emerges looking relieved—and Sunny realizes how much danger she was in. They take a funky train back home, and Chichi coaches Sunny through sneaking back through the keyhole. Sunny earns more bronze chittim when she materializes inside her bedroom. It's five in the morning—Sunny has to get up for school in two hours.

Sunny isn't a fan of Kehinde, but she has to rethink how she feels about him when he essentially ensures that the kids are going to make it back to Anatov's alive. She also realizes, upon seeing Anatov's expression, that she's not taking what's happening to her quite seriously enough. Sunny and her friends are rewarded with praise and chittim when they succeed—but the consequences if they don't succeed, Sunny now realizes, are deadly.



CHAPTER 8

Fast Facts for Free Agents warns female Leopard readers that if they plan to marry a Leopard man, they'll need to learn to cook magical meals, like Tainted Pepper Soup. The book includes the recipe and gives warnings about what will happen if the cook doesn't use the correct ingredients or otherwise does something wrong—in most cases, the soup will explode or the person eating it will die.

Though this passage also warns readers about deadly consequences for making mistakes, it's far more humorous and almost deadpan. This suggests that possible death is just a fact of life in the Leopard world; it's something that people get used to until it no longer bothers them as it still bothers Sunny.



At school, Sunny can barely stay awake—and Jibaku bullies Sunny worse than usual all morning. By lunchtime, Sunny's head hurts and Jibaku shoves her on the playground. Just as Sunny starts to step toward Jibaku, her phone rings—it's Orlu, and he warns her to not use juju on Lambs. If she does, she'll have to go to the Library Council for punishment. As he walks up to her and picks up their conversation in person, he assures her she'll get used to being so tired. She should do her homework as early as possible and sleep when she can.

Sunny is in a difficult position, since Jibaku is still the biggest bully on the playground at school—but Jibaku doesn't know that Sunny now has the power to do something terrible to her, if she so chose. Orlu presents the idea that Leopard People are faced with the choice to use their powers for good, rather than to harm others. And if they don't, they'll be punished severely.



Sunny takes Orlu's advice that evening as she does her homework and then goes downstairs for food. She finds her mother cooking a red stew and sits in the kitchen with her. Then, Sunny asks her mother to tell her about her grandmother. Her mother refuses, so Sunny goes to bed, curious about why her mother is so cagey about this.

Sunny can tell there's something odd in her grandmother's past, so she's becoming even more interested in learning about her. Sunny believes that if she learns about her grandmother, she'll gain important information about herself—so right now, her mother is obstructing this goal.



CHAPTER 9

Fast Facts for Free Agents introduces free agent readers to Udide, the “ultimate artist.” Udide is a spider who switches between masculine and feminine pronouns depending on their mood. Some believe Udide lives under Lagos; others believe Udide is in Abuja. Udide has written a book called *Udide's Book of Shadows*, which is full of the spider's recipes, juju, notes, and stories. It's only been copied three times, but nobody knows where the copies are. Isong insists Udide is a trickster who wanted people to find the book—but “those who choose to use it are idiots.”

*It seems possible that Sunny will encounter a copy of Udide's Book of Shadows at some point, if this excerpt mentions it—which suggests that education itself isn't always a good, easy thing. Indeed, if one means to learn from Udide's book, it means that the reader will have to do what Sunny is doing with *Fast Facts*: keep in mind who the author is, what their biases are, and how those biases might color the information within.*



Sunny wakes up early on Saturday morning, makes herself breakfast, and tells her parents goodbye. She meets Orlu, Sasha, and Chichi at Chichi's hut. They're studying a newspaper headline. Black Hat abducted a little boy, who was found alive—but with his eyes gouged out. Sunny feels sick. Chichi promises to get Sunny a subscription to a Leopard newspaper so she can get information faster.

Anatov greets Chichi, Orlu, Sasha, and Sunny happily when they arrive. He asks them to sit and explains that Kehinde was very impressed—especially with Sasha, whom he's agreed to mentor. Sasha looks ready to burst with happiness. Anatov continues that the four survived because of their teamwork. He reminds them that knowledge is more valuable than chittim, and says he had to risk their lives to further their educations. Anatov notes that each kid has skills that can help the others—but he says Sasha has to learn Igbo quickly. Then, he gives them their assignment for the day: to visit Taiwo in Leopard Knocks. He gives Chichi a package to give to Taiwo and asks the students to also stop at the bookstore to purchase *Advanced Juju Knife Jujus* and a book of their choice.

At the bridge to Leopard Knocks, Sasha and Orlu have already crossed. Chichi shows Sunny how to call music, though without a juju knife, Sunny can't do it yet. Chichi demonstrates how to cut the air and create a juju pouch, which she can then speak words into. Sunny can't see the juju pouch, but Chichi lets her touch it—it feels cool, soft, and wet. Chichi explains that a person speaks the "trigger words" in their first language; hers was Efik, Sunny's was English. Chichi speaks the words to call music into the pouch and Sunny calls up her spirit face. A voice deep within Sunny says, "Anyanwu"—Sunny's spirit name. On the bridge, Sunny feels sure of herself. She rushes forward and crosses the bridge in seconds. Chittim fall at her feet: Sunny made herself invisible.

Sasha leads everyone to Bola's Store for Books. He, Orlu, and Chichi disappear into the store, and Sunny feels drawn to the book she noticed last time in the store. It's titled *Nsibidi: The Magical Language of the Spirits*, and the writing seems to wiggle. Sunny pulls the book closer to her face and it seems to whisper—but she jumps when the shop owner, Mohammed, taps on her shoulder. He confirms that she's a free agent and asks if she saw anything wiggling in the book. When Sunny says she did, he tells her to buy it. He doesn't know what's in it, but she'll learn something—and he shares that the author is Sugar Cream. Mohammed then helps her hunt down the knife juju book.

It continues to feel to Sunny as though her world is becoming more and more dangerous by the minute. She's becoming educated so she can protect herself, but any mistake could lead to her death—and she also has to live with the existential dread that she could easily become one of Black Hat's victims, too.



Getting a private mentor will mean that Sasha can continue his education with another trusted adult—something that will help him move more easily toward adulthood and competency with juju. More broadly, Anatov continues to make the point that the kids need to value their educations more than they value the chittim their educations will earn them. That he continues to drive this point home suggests that there are perhaps others who haven't made this choice. He also highlights the importance of teamwork and reveals an important part of working as a team: identifying each teammate's strengths and weaknesses, and using those to the team's advantage.



Sunny is reminded again in this passage that she can and should rely on her friends to teach her, just as much as she should rely on adults. With Chichi, Sunny isn't self-conscious about having the juju pouch explained so simply, or about touching it. And because she's more comfortable in this setting, Sunny is willing to experiment—though she perhaps didn't intend to make herself invisible. Regardless, thanks to Chichi's help, Sunny discovers one more thing she can do—and she's rewarded handsomely for it.



As Mohammed encourages Sunny to buy the Nsibidi book, even he starts to demonstrate some of what the novel suggests is good teamwork. He can't read Nsibidi, but that doesn't mean he won't encourage someone who shows potential to learn how to—if Sunny learns, it'll benefit her and possibly Leopard society as a whole. Recall that Sugar Cream is the Head Librarian at the Obi Library. This creates a connection between her and Sunny (they both, it seems, can read Nsibidi), but this seems to go over Sunny's head at this point.



Sasha purchases *Udide's Book of Shadows*, Orlu purchases *A Field Guide to the Night Runner Forest*, and Chichi gets *Leo Frobenius: Atlantis Middleman or Sellout?* She explains that Frobenius was a German Leopard man who almost told Lambs that Atlantis is near Victoria Island. They then discuss the knife juju book, which Chichi says contains jujus for Mbawkwa and above. Orlu explains to Sunny that working jujus above one's level isn't illegal, it's just dangerous—you can die. With this, they set off for Taiwo's house.

Taiwo lives at the end of Leopard Knocks's main road, a two hour walk from the bookstore. Chichi, Orlu, and Sasha point out shops, Leopard Spots Village (where people sell illegal things), and the Obi Library to Sunny. Orlu explains that anyone can use the library's first floor, but the second and third floors are for those studying Ndibu, like Chichi's mother. Chichi notes that Sugar Cream also lives there. They pass farms where supplies sold in shops are grown, and a wall protecting people coming up with new juju charms.

Finally, the four reach tall palm trees at the end of the road; there's a hut hundreds of feet up in one of the trees. Chichi calls for Taiwo, but when she gets no answer, she, Orlu, Sasha, and Sunny sit to wait. After a while, they hear a loud noise from above—and Orlu points to a giant Blue-Footed Miri Bird. It's the size of a horse, and it's coming right for them. The bird divebombs the kids before it finally lands in front of them. Sasha shouts that it's insane, and Chichi grouses that it probably has fleas. At this, the Miri Bird clicks and poops. Sunny suggests the bird is angry; Sasha and Chichi are being awful to it. Sunny tries to offer the bird a cookie, but it steps away.

Sunny shares her cookies with Orlu, Sasha, and Chichi. After a bit, Orlu gets up, tells the Miri Bird that they've come from Anatov, and asks for help getting to Taiwo's house. The bird clicks its beak in Orlu's face—but Orlu says of course the bird wants to be treated like a person. They all politely introduce themselves to the bird, and then Orlu interprets the bird's clicks. He and Sunny will ride the bird to Taiwo's house first, and then it'll come back for Sasha and Chichi. As Orlu and Sunny tumble into the hut, Taiwo says the kids took long enough and then thanks the bird—Nancy—for her help.

Each person's book reflects their personality: Sasha is fearless, Orlu loves animals, and Chichi is interested in political questions like this. That Anatov asked the four to purchase such an advanced knife juju book suggests he believes they're capable of working these higher-level jujus. With his guidance, hopefully they can avoid the danger that comes with working above one's level.



The walk to Taiwo's hut gives Sunny ample time and a reason to explore way more of Leopard Knocks than she'd otherwise have reason to. Leopard Knocks seems like a self-sufficient community, with gathering places, farming areas, and a university. Seeing all of this also allows Sunny insight into what adult Leopard People do—they can be farmers, scholars, and vendors, just like in the Lamb world.



Sasha and Chichi aren't all that into animals, so when the Miri Bird shows up and insists on getting so close to them, they're disgusted. On some level, they see themselves as superior to the bird—and they seem not to truly appreciate how big and powerful the bird is. From Sunny's perspective, the bird deserves respect: it's big and could hurt her, and what bird doesn't like cookies? The bird reads as another test the kids must pass, and Chichi and Sasha seem like they might struggle with this one.



Unlike his friends, Orlu doesn't treat the Miri Bird as a bird—he treats it like a person. So even though Sunny was trying to be kind when she offered the bird a cookie, she still wasn't treating it with as much humanity as the test required. This is a reminder for Sasha and Chichi to check their superior feelings: they may be smart and have photographic memories, but that doesn't mean they don't sometimes need to rely on beings they consider lesser, like Nancy, for help.



Taiwo declares that the kids' lesson today was in humility. Sasha and Chichi have none, Sunny has it because she's new, but Orlu was born with it. Sunny thinks that Orlu will obviously become Taiwo's mentee. Then, Taiwo accepts the package from Anatov and pulls out a bag of treats for Nancy. She tells Chichi to feed the contents to the bird, and Chichi acts disgusted as she does. Taiwo explains that all creatures have their place in the world; this is why the world keeps moving if someone dies. She says they must be figuring it out by now, and Chichi asks if they're really an Oha coven. Laughing, Taiwo says that Sunny has no idea what they're talking about. She notes that that's ironic—but she refuses to explain.

Dramatically, Taiwo says that Sunny, Sasha, Chichi, and Orlu will be West Africa's first "pre-level" Oha coven, though none of them know what's coming. Sunny mentions her vision in the candle, and Taiwo acknowledges that she was wrong: Sunny knows. She asks if the kids have all heard of Black Hat Otokoto, who is a Leopard Person. She explains that he passed the highest level years ago, when he was only 34, and he never should've taken it. He just wanted wealth and power—and now, it's the kids' job to save the world from him. She says whatever he's doing, it's dark and dangerous and preys on innocence. The kids will go after him in about three months, and scholars have seen this moment coming for a while.

Sunny can't stand it. She asks if Taiwo and other scholars seriously expect a bunch of kids to catch someone who knows extremely advanced juju. It's insane, and if she, Orlu, Sasha, and Chichi die, the scholars will just find more kids to do it. Taiwo says seriously that this is bigger than Sunny; she just doesn't understand yet. Sunny struggles to shut her mouth. The next morning, she receives her first edition of the Leopard Knocks newspaper.

CHAPTER 10

In the conclusion of *Fast Facts for Free Agents*, Isong repeats again that a free agent is doomed to die. Free agents should simply stay put and be unambitious—they should learn only the basics and should stay on the periphery of the Leopard world. In all caps, the book warns the reader to keep their Leopard identity secret from Lamb friends and relations, as there are terrible consequences for telling the truth.

Chichi's unwillingness to acknowledge Nancy's dignity suggests that she hasn't fully internalized Taiwo's lesson—and because of this, Chichi may struggle to be a good teammate to her friends. Taiwo then crystallizes an idea Anatov has floated several times: that individual lives are, in the grand scheme of things, not all that important or meaningful. In her estimation, this is a good thing—it means people can die without ruining things for everyone else.



By making it official that the four are an Oha coven, Taiwo essentially explains why it's so important that they work together as a team. They have a job to do—and they're going to have to use their combined skill and knowledge to best someone as advanced as Black Hat Otokoto. In describing Black Hat, Taiwo also starts to illustrate why Anatov regularly encourages the kids to prize their education over the chittim it earns them. The extreme alternative is, perhaps, ending up like Black Hat Otokoto—becoming someone who cares only about oneself.



Leopard society continues to shock Sunny—she's not used to being told to be quiet and trust her elders. But Taiwo also makes it clear that when it comes to someone as evil as Black Hat Otokoto, Sunny's life—and those of her friends—are, perhaps, perfectly reasonable sacrifices if they save many more young kids from death and mutilation.



This passage from Fast Facts is extremely ironic, given that Sunny was essentially just tasked with saving the world—the exact opposite of what this passage advises. But this may also speak to the author's prejudice: she doesn't expect someone like Sunny to be as powerful as it seems like Sunny is.



Over the next two months, Sunny gets the hang of doing homework for two schools. She reads *Fast Facts for Free Agents*, learns basic juju, and practices calling forth her spirit face. The Nsibidi book is very interesting, and Sunny slowly starts to figure out how to read the wiggling symbols. She makes it through a third of the first page, on which Sugar Cream writes that her book won't be a bestseller. The information in *Advanced Juju Knife Jujus* is also beyond Sunny's comprehension. Sunny's mother seems happy with Sunny, but Sunny's father avoids her. Chukwu and Ugonna play soccer with her more often, and they sometimes watch movies together.

One Monday, Sunny wakes up happy—she had a breakthrough the night before with the Nsibidi book. But when she opens her newspaper and reads that Black Hat Otokoto abducted a boy and cut his ears off, Sunny throws the paper. She's certain she can't do anything if the Scholars can't stop Otokoto. At lunch, she and Orlu discuss the news. Sunny grows grimmer and snappier as the day goes on—and then, after school, Jibaku pushes Sunny. Jibaku's boyfriend drives up outside the school and taunts Orlu, and Jibaku launches herself at Sunny. Sunny has brothers—she knows how to fight—but as more kids pile on, Sunny's anger grows. She calls her spirit face and roars, frightening Jibaku.

Jibaku and the other kids run away and Orlu walks for home with Sunny, who's limping. But they only get a few steps before a Mercedes pulls up next to them. The driver rolls down her window and tells Sunny to get in: she must go to the Obi Library for punishment. Sunny calls her mother and tells her that she's having dinner with Chichi and Orlu. Then, she falls asleep until the driver wakes her up outside of the Obi Library. Sunny waves at some passing students and then enters the library, which is filled with stacked books and people performing juju.

Sunny approaches the “WETIN?” (help) desk, and the man there instantly knows who she is. He calls for a woman named Samya to take Sunny upstairs. Sunny is upset with herself—her first time in the Obi Library is as a criminal. Samya leads Sunny to the third floor and refuses to say anything. When they reach a door, Samya knocks and tells Sunny to wait until she's called. Nothing happens for five minutes. Sunny wants to sit, but there are red spiders everywhere. Finally, after another 10 minutes, Sunny opens the door. There's an old woman inside. Sunny apologizes, but the woman says that only those who want to enter can do so. Sunny asks if she should've left, and the woman cryptically says, “Maybe.”

Things are starting to settle for Sunny. She's learning new skills, is being challenged in both schools, and is feeling more and more like she fits into the Leopard world. Because of Sunny's fraught relationship with her father, she doesn't seem to pay much mind to his avoidance—but this does suggest that they could experience more conflict going forward. Sunny's mother, on the other hand, seems simply pleased that Sunny is acting like she's found her place.



Sunny feels good about life until she's reminded that she's supposed to take on Black Hat Otokoto soon, something that makes her feel childish and powerless. This makes her even more susceptible to Jibaku's bullying. It's a sign of how much pressure Sunny is under that she snaps and shows Jibaku her spirit face. Recall that Sunny is supposed to keep everything to do with Leopard society and her identity secret; she's likely broken a rule by trying to intimidate Jibaku.



Suddenly, showing her spirit face to Jibaku doesn't seem like it was such a good idea: Sunny is clearly in deep trouble. That Leopard elders know exactly when people break rules speaks to how much Leopard society values the collective: they don't want someone like Sunny to blow their cover, so it's essential that they punish individualistic actions like Sunny took. This is how Leopard society stays a secret and a safe place for all Leopard people.



Recall that Sunny has always been a good student, and she seems to value following rules and staying on the good side of authority figures. So it's unsettling to be treated like a “criminal.” The way the old woman frames the expectations around entering the room suggests that Leopard society wants people to take responsibility for their actions, as Sunny does essentially by entering at all. It's a choice, this implies, to take responsibility for one's actions, just as it's a choice to use one's education for good and to help others.



The woman tells Sunny to sit on the floor (she doesn't deserve a chair) and asks if Sunny is sorry. Sunny isn't—so the woman says Sunny will be flogged or locked in the library's basement with frightening creatures. Sunny starts to cry and begs for mercy. Softly, the woman confirms that Sunny is a free agent. She warns Sunny that the council always knows when people break rules. Next time, Sunny will be flogged and imprisoned for a week, and next time Sunny gets in a fight, she should fight fair. The woman then asks Sunny how the Leopard world has been. Sunny is too nervous to answer, so the woman says that Sunny can't behave as she did. She expects better—and she expected Anatov to introduce Sunny to her later, under different circumstances. Sunny realizes she's speaking to Sugar Cream.

Exhausted and afraid, Sunny breaks the silence by asking how Sugar Cream got her name. Smiling, Sugar Cream says she walked out of the forest as a little child, and the only way a man could coax her in was with a creamy, sugary cup of tea. That man raised her; she doesn't know where her "true" parents are. Sugar Cream stands and Sunny sees that she has severe scoliosis. As Sugar Cream leads Sunny out into the library, Sunny wonders if Sugar Cream's parents abandoned her because of the scoliosis—but don't Leopard People celebrate things like that? Seeming to read her thoughts, Sugar Cream sharply tells Sunny not to stare, that she wasn't born this way, and that she believes her parents were killed.

Sugar Cream and Sunny continue to wander through the library, and Sunny asks what Sugar Cream's ability is. Sugar Cream says she's a shape-shifter, like Sunny—but Sunny says she's not a shape-shifter. Very seriously, Sugar Cream says she can turn into a snake, but Sunny's ability to shape-shift is spiritual. Sunny can become invisible because she can literally step into the spirit world, but Sunny probably hasn't done this yet—it would require Sunny to die a little bit. Sugar Cream asks if Sunny wants to learn, and Sunny says she doesn't. Who wants to learn to die?

Sugar Cream and Sunny have now reached Sugar Cream's office again. Once they're inside, Sugar Cream shares that Anatov was going to bring Sunny in two weeks so that Sugar Cream could decide whether to take Sunny on as a mentee—but after Sunny's bad behavior, it's not an easy choice. Privately, Sunny hates how Orlu, Sasha, and Chichi have mentors and seem to have such an easy life in the Leopard world. Sugar Cream reminds Sunny that she's the one who misbehaved, so it's her own fault that she might not get a mentor.

Leopard society, Sugar Cream makes clear, takes punishment very seriously—it's part of how they protect the collective and encourage Leopard People, especially young ones, to behave. Sunny, however, is too nervous and feels too out of her depth to realize this—and she's also still too angry and emotional about Jibaku. So at the moment, Sunny feels overwhelmingly like she doesn't fit in anywhere. And discovering that this woman is Sugar Cream is another nasty shock for Sunny. Sunny has been starting to admire Sugar Cream ever since she was initiated, so disappointing her makes this punishment even worse.



Even though Sugar Cream is angry and disappointed with Sunny, she still takes the opportunity to educate Sunny and share her story. This shows that she's not vindictive, at least when it comes to kids making mistakes. For her part, Sunny is still trying to fit Leopard culture and values into a neat system. Sugar Cream's story doesn't make much sense to Sunny if she's experienced abuse and discrimination because of her scoliosis. This, of course, ignores that Sunny herself has continued to experience teasing due to her albinism, even among Leopard People.



Sunny is still on guard and doesn't see Sugar Cream as an ally, so it's uncomfortable to have Sugar Cream say with such certainty that she knows exactly what Sunny is. And because Sunny also sees Leopard society (which is responsible for punishing her) as her enemy at the moment, she's hesitant to express interest in learning more. Her fear, in other words, keeps her from being open and willing to experiment.



Now that Sugar Cream and Sunny have built up a rapport, Sugar Cream can again encourage Sunny to take responsibility for her actions. The consequence for scaring Jibaku is that she's not going to be just like her friends and have a mentor separate from Anatov—so Sunny's selfishness essentially deprives her of more opportunities to learn. And Sunny still feels like she's on the outside because she doesn't have the years of experience in the Leopard world that her friends do.



Sighing, Sugar Cream says that there's still no doubt that Sunny should be involved with the Oha coven. When Sunny asks why, Sugar Cream sadly explains that Sunny's grandmother, Ozoemena, was Otokoto's mentor—and Otokoto killed her to steal her abilities and become the Black Hat. Soon after, Sugar Cream sends Sunny home. Sunny feels worthless and childish, like a criminal—and she's ashamed that her grandmother taught a serial killer. She falls asleep on her schoolbooks by 11:00 p.m.

In the middle of the night, Sunny wakes up to knocking on her window. There's a tiny light in the window, like the one that watched over Sunny when she had malaria—but it's just a firefly. Outside, Orlu hisses for Sunny to come down. Sunny turns invisible and swoops out the window. Sasha and Chichi hug Sunny, and Sasha tells her he saw the council once—they caned him 20 times and sent him to Nigeria. Sunny tells her friends what Sugar Cream said about Ozoemena, and Sasha starts to say that Otokoto must've eaten some of Ozoemena's flesh. Sunny is ready to vomit. Orlu asks Sunny to find out as much as she can about her grandmother. They'll learn more about Black Hat if they know what her grandmother could do. Back in her bedroom, Sunny feels better about her grandmother—she wasn't a criminal.

CHAPTER 11

During his next lesson, Anatov tells Sunny she's lucky she wasn't caned. He notes that he can't send Sunny, Orlu, Sasha, and Chichi to meet Sugar Cream after Sunny got in trouble, so they'll learn about healing juju instead. He asks the kids to pretend he's a man with a boil on his butt. He needs the boil to disappear before his wife sees it; what should one do? Brushing off Chichi and Sasha's suggestions, he instructs the kids to open their books to a page that details how to undo and reknit the body's cells. Then, he instructs everyone to find a bruise or scratch on their bodies and take a pinch of Healing Hands powder. Anatov leads the kids through visualizing their ailment and tells them to blow the powder at it.

Sunny's arm burns and she screeches—but her bruise is gone. Sasha and Chichi weren't able to get their ailments to heal, and Orlu's scrape healed painlessly. Anatov nods that Orlu has more control than Sunny, who just has more natural power; Chichi and Sasha just need practice. For the next two hours, Sunny shadows the others as they practice juju knife movements; without a knife, she can't do much. But then, Anatov announces that they'll all go to Abuja next weekend. Sunny will pick out her juju knife, and they'll attend the Zuma Festival and the Zuma National Wrestling Match finals. Orlu and Sasha look equally thrilled, even when Anatov notes that the fight usually ends in death.

It's interesting that Sunny blames her grandmother for teaching Otokoto, rather than Otokoto for killing her grandmother. This might simply reflect Sunny's low mood and her feelings that she's a criminal, however. Despite these low feelings, Sunny remains dedicated to her education, as shown by the fact that she's falling asleep on her homework.



Even though Sunny misbehaved and now feels worthless and alone, her friends are still around to comfort her. Sasha makes it seem like a perfectly normal thing for kids to end up in serious trouble, which helps Sunny start to feel better. Learning that Otokoto may have eaten Ozoemena is wildly disturbing to Sunny, and it helps her shift the blame in her mind from Ozoemena to Otokoto. Otokoto, she realizes now, is the one who committed (and continues to commit) heinous crimes—her grandmother was a victim, and she's someone Sunny can look up to if she wants.



Bringing up how Sunny met Sugar Cream is a subtle way for Anatov to express his disapproval of Sunny's actions: he doesn't have to scold her, he just has to acknowledge that he knows what she did. He also makes it clear that Sunny's bad behavior is what's keeping all four kids from meeting Sugar Cream. This shows Sunny that her actions affect others, and the ripples may extend well beyond what she expected. Still, Anatov's goal remains to educate his students regardless of how much trouble they get into, hence the practical lesson on healing juju.



Anatov's assessment of each student's performance is telling: that Sunny has more natural power than the others suggests again that there's more to her than meets the eye. And Orlu continues to read as calm and levelheaded when he's able to so perfectly heal his scrape. That Orlu and Sasha express no worry or emotion at hearing that the wrestling match often ends in death speaks to their innocence. Death might not yet seem real to them, and/or they may expect Leopard society to go out of its way to prevent a wrestler's death.



Sunny has no idea how she's going to convince her mother to let her go away for a full 24 hours. Chichi helps Sunny come up with a plan. Two days after the meeting with Anatov, Chichi comes for dinner. Chukwu greets Chichi at the door and turns on the charm as he shows her in. Rolling her eyes, Sunny drags Chichi into the kitchen to meet her mother. To her surprise, Chichi is extremely respectful—and Sunny's mother shares that she went to school with Chichi's mother. After some more small talk, Chichi asks if Sunny can spend the night at her house this weekend; she promises Sunny won't be late. Giving the girls an odd look, Sunny's mother asks Sunny to promise to be good and responsible. The girls celebrate once Sunny's mother leaves the kitchen.

Sunny might feel more at home now that she's a part of Leopard society, but this doesn't mean her problems at home vanish—she can't, after all, tell her mother where she's going. But by working together, Sunny and Chichi are able to convince Sunny's mother to give her permission. Sunny doesn't seem to pick up on it, but her mother seems oddly in the know about what might be happening—her odd look and the promise she asks Sunny to make seem very meaningful, as if she knows that her daughter is involved in something inherently dangerous.



CHAPTER 12

On Saturday morning, Sunny gathers with other Leopard People in Leopard Knocks. Since she's with Leopard People, she doesn't have to pretend to be sensitive to the sun—and she can't stop smiling. When the funky train pulls up, it's covered in Christian slogans. Chichi explains that this will change once they reach a Muslim-majority area. The driver, a man called Jesus's General, gets out and begins haggling with people for the price of the trip to the festival. Anatov takes care of negotiating for his, Chichi, Sunny, Orlu, and Sasha's ride. As Sunny follows her friends onto the funky train, she accidentally hits a handsome boy in the head with her backpack. They find seats and soon, the train is off.

Leopard Society gives Sunny privileges she gets nowhere else. She can be who she truly is among other Leopard People: someone who enjoys the sun. Chichi's explanation about the religious slogans on the funky train show Sunny again that Leopard society is closely intertwined with Lamb society; religion, it seems, transcends whether a person has magical powers or not. Noticing the cute boy highlights that Sunny is starting to mature and take interest in boys—a sign of her burgeoning independence.



Leopard Knocks is paying for Anatov, Sasha, Chichi, Orlu, and Sunny to stay at a fancy Hilton hotel in Abuja. They have a busy day: Sunny must get her juju knife, they'll see the wrestling finals, and then there are events, including a soccer match, all afternoon and evening. The kids are all sharing a suite, and they celebrate once Anatov leaves them alone in the room. Chichi sniffs that the room is "toxic," and Orlu says he hates how extravagant the hotel is. Chichi and Sasha start to whisper over a book, and Chichi acts guilty when Sunny asks what she's doing. But Sasha changes the subject and tells Sunny that they should both play in the soccer match later—even if Sunny is a girl.

Though the kids are still supervised in Abuja, they're also enjoying way more independence than they usually get at home. With this independence, they're able to experiment and figure out, without adults' help, how they feel about things—such as staying in such a lavish hotel. That Chichi and Sasha seem up to something adds tension, especially since they both seem relatively fearless when it comes to trying new things. The way Sasha talks about him and Sunny joining the soccer match highlights that Leopard society is, in some ways, still as sexist as Lamb society (recall that Sunny believes she'd never be able to play soccer with Lamb boys due to her sex).



Once Sunny, Sasha, Orlu, and Chichi have showered and changed, they head for the funky train. As Chichi and Sasha talk music with Jesus's General, Orlu tells Sunny to be careful; she's new, and things will be odd and unfamiliar. Sunny asks if Orlu's parents and Chichi's mother are friends. Uncomfortably, Orlu explains that Chichi's mother is a brilliant Nimm priestess, which means she was chosen at birth to be sold to a goddess named Nimm. She's not allowed to marry, must reject wealth, and has Nimm as a last name. After a minute of silence, Sunny asks Orlu how she's supposed to keep all this secret from her family. Orlu reminds her that the trust knot prevents her from saying anything, but he suggests she try to find out more about her grandmother.

The funky train takes Anatov, Sasha, Orlu, Sunny, and Chichi to the Abuja Lamb market. At a shaded part of the market, they find Junk Man's booth. He clearly looks like he's more than just a Lamb vendor. Anatov greets him loudly and Junk Man points to Sunny. He tells her to look around. Sunny studies the various objects in the stall and finally finds a cardboard box filled with knives. Junk Man appears beside her. He asks if she's American and if her parents are Nigerian, and then declares that Sunny is from America *and* Nigeria. Then, he tells her to simply close her eyes and reach into the box of knives.

Sunny does as she's told—and snatches her hand back when a knife cuts her. Junk Man fishes out the knife that cut Sunny, which has a plain silver handle and a blade of a green glassy material. He, Orlu, and Sasha all seem intrigued by the knife—and the kids gasp when Junk Man says the knife costs 13 copper chittim, a small fortune. But Junk Man says he doesn't negotiate on juju knives; Sunny has to pay up. Sunny pays for her knife and then, after Anatov looks at it, she accepts the knife from Junk Man.

As soon as Sunny takes the juju knife, she yelps. It feels like the knife is part of her hand. Anatov assures her that's normal, and then Chichi coaches Sunny through calling music. Two copper chittim fall at her feet when she successfully does so. Pleased, Junk Man gives Sunny a little blue bean that sounds like it's giggling; she must put it under her bed and wait. Sasha negotiates to purchase a big brown conch shell, which garners a meaningful look from Anatov.

Even though Sunny felt right at home with other Leopard People as she and her friends boarded the funky train in Leopard Knocks, Orlu suggests here that these feelings of belonging might not last when Sunny is faced with so many new things at the festival. But again, she has her friends to lean on as she navigates this new territory. And Orlu tries to impress upon her that she should lean on her friends as much as she needs to, especially since, due to the trust knot, she physically cannot tell her parents anything about her new world.



Sunny is getting better at identifying things and people that are clearly part of the Leopard world, such as the ghost hoppers and now Junk Man. Junk Man's insistence that Sunny is both American and Nigerian encourages Sunny to not think so hard about her identity: she is who she is, and she doesn't have to just be one thing. Changing the subject to the juju knives immediately after this also suggests that Sunny's identity as a Leopard Person is, perhaps, more important than where she's from.



This passage drops more clues that Sunny is more, and possibly more powerful, than she looks—Isong described the material that makes up the blade of her juju knife in Fast Facts, and suggested one should be concerned if a knife made of that material chooses them. Isong also noted that this has to do with a person's spirit identity—suggesting that Sunny has more self-discovery ahead of her as she explores this new side of herself.



The juju knife, it seems, is now part of Sunny's body—and part of her identity. By learning to use it, she'll learn more about herself and about Leopard society as a whole. Sasha's conch shell purchase creates some tension, as he and Anatov seem to know what it's for, but readers do not. The tension makes it seem like Sasha is preparing for something, perhaps the showdown with Otokoto.



CHAPTER 13

Sunny can see Zuma Rock long before the funky train gets there. She's visited it before with her mother; the tour guide then said it has mystical powers. Now, Sunny knows that the Abuja Leopard headquarters, Zuma Ajasco, is at the foot of Zuma Rock. This is where the festival will take place. As the funky train gets closer, Sunny asks Anatov why Zuma Ajasco isn't the West African headquarters. Anatov gives her a dirty look and curtly explains that Abuja became the capital of Nigeria instead of Lagos in 1991. Now, scholars here think the headquarters should move—but Leopard Knocks has existed for over 1000 years, and it would be inappropriate to move it.

Then, addressing Orlu, Sasha, and Chichi too, Anatov notes that the kids should be aware that things are different here. There are two scholars in Zuma Ajasco: Madame Koto, who's "wide," might own a huge oil company, and is constantly surrounded by attractive men; and Ibrahim Ahmed, who's 112, has 15 wives, and lives a lavish lifestyle after making a fortune in oil. Sunny sees the problem: these two don't sound like modest Leopard scholars. Anatov notes that these scholars are capable of amazing things, but "potential doesn't equal success."

The funky train stops in front of a huge arch. Sunny follows Anatov off the train and notices a huge wooden leopard at the top of the arch, which is animate and inspects festival goers for Lambs. It seems to stare right at Sunny as she enters the festival. The festival itself is overwhelming, with many booths, religious groups, juju everywhere, and kids playing with a tungwa. Anatov suggests they get something to eat, but as Sunny eats her okra soup, she suddenly feels entirely out of place. Chichi points Sunny toward the bathrooms; Sunny needs a moment alone. She passes the bathrooms and enters an open field, where she sobs.

A man's voice interrupts Sunny and asks if she's alright. The man is over seven feet tall and wears a bright yellow caftan. Sunny just stares—but the man smiles and offers her a handkerchief. Trying to explain herself, Sunny says she's a free agent. The man exudes calmness as Sunny says she only learned she was a Leopard Person a few months ago and explains that she's here with Anatov. The man says that the good news is that she's deep in Leopard society at the festival; it doesn't get any deeper. When Sunny says she got her juju knife today, he insists there are more valuable things than just safety and comfort. She must learn, and she'll get used to the rest of it. With this, the man walks away, leaving Sunny with his handkerchief. Sunny realizes a crowd has been watching.

Sunny's question suggests it makes sense to her that when the Lamb capital moved, the Leopard capital should've done the same. Anatov's angry response, however, clearly shows that he values Leopard tradition over constantly changing Lamb whims (the Nigerian capital moved several times in the decades before Abuja was declared the official capital, as part of several military takeovers). Sunny, this suggests, is still thinking in Lamb terms, rather than in Leopard terms.



Madame Koto and Ibrahim Ahmed sound at least a bit corrupt—and possibly like they have too much at stake in the Lamb world (with their oil dealings) to really have Leopard society's best interests at heart. This shows again that Leopard People have choices when it comes to what to do with their education. They can follow in Anatov's footsteps and focus on serving the community—or they can allow their "potential" to serve only themselves.



Orlu, it seems, was right to warn Sunny: the festival is a lot to take in, especially when she's only been part of the Leopard world for a short time. The wooden leopard makes Sunny feel even less welcome—it seems to stare at her as though it doesn't think she belongs. As Sunny's overwhelm reaches the breaking point, she finds she can't bring herself to rely on her friends. In her mind, they clearly belong, and she perhaps doesn't—so in the moment, they feel beyond her reach.



When this man approaches to comfort Sunny, Sunny discovers her three friends and Anatov aren't the only Leopard People who care about her. There are others who, when they see a young girl sobbing alone, will stop to see if they can help. This helps Sunny rethink her relationship to Leopard society on the whole, since it now seems far more supportive than she thought it was a few minutes ago. This man also echoes what Anatov and other scholars have reminded Sunny and her friends of: that it's more important for young people to become educated and serve others than it is to use one's education for selfish means.



Sunny, Chichi, Orlu, Sasha, and Anatov get good seats for the match. They're in the very front, in a special section for teachers and students. Anatov introduces the kids to Madame Koto and to Sugar Cream. Sugar Cream greets everyone in the group but Sunny, who gets only a glare. As they wait for the match to start, Chichi and Sasha exchange insults with a boy they call Yao—Chichi tells Sasha cryptically that he's the person she was referring to earlier. Orlu groans; Chichi is planning something.

Just then, a woman steps onto the field and drags her juju knife across her throat to amplify her voice. She introduces herself as Mballa, the commentator for the match. She explains that the finalists this year are undefeated, and they're also generous, loving, and loyal. They would, she says, give their lives for Africa, and they're the exact type of person that Western society fears. The first man enters the ring; his name is Sayé. Orlu whispers to Sunny that Sayé wears a leather sleeve because he lost his arm, and his ability is connected to the loss. The second man, Miknikstic, is the man Sunny spoke to earlier. Orlu whispers that he can see the near future, so he can anticipate his opponent's movements. Sunny asks why the fight must happen at all, but Orlu says it's just a tradition.

Mballa explains the rules to the audience: the fighters must stay in the ring and can't use any juju knives, powders, or other aids. She quickly leaves the ring. Miknikstic and Sayé circle each other, run at each other a few times, and then Miknikstic punches Sayé so hard he falls. When Sayé gets up, his arm seems to be made of blue mist—it morphs as Miknikstic tries to fight it. Sunny plugs her ears. She's horrified, but then she decides she should honor Miknikstic by watching. Everyone else in the audience seems to have become a real, bloodthirsty leopard. Sunny, on the other hand, sobs.

After a while, both Miknikstic and Sayé bring forth their spirit faces. The fight continues until Sayé runs his ghost arm straight through Miknikstic's chest—and Miknikstic dies. Chittim rains onto the field. As Mballa gets up to announce the winner, Miknikstic suddenly gets up. Feathers sprout from his back, and he flies into the sky. Mballa shouts that he's become a guardian angel. Applause fills the arena, but Sunny shouts that she wants to go home. Orlu pulls Sunny close as Anatov goes to the ring to help heal Sayé. Mballa invites both fighters' wives into the ring and then announces the end of the match.

That the teachers and students get special seats close to the wrestling ring implies that the festival's organizers see the match as a learning opportunity for students. Learning is, quite literally, front and center. Sunny continues to face up to the consequences of frightening Jibaku: she realizes Sugar Cream is still punishing her.



The way Mballa characterizes the wrestling finalists is interesting: they're not bloodthirsty fighters, but are instead upstanding members of society who will seemingly protect Leopard society at all costs. Mballa also doesn't allow spectators (or readers) to forget Nigeria's colonial history, or the West's racism. She frames Nigerian Leopard People as trying to preserve a way of life in the face of overbearing and frightened white Westerners, suggesting that joining this defense is a way for Leopard People to give back to their community.



Almost immediately, Sunny discovers that this isn't fun and games. The match is serious, bloody, and as Anatov noted previously, seems likely to end in death for one of the fighters. Sunny is fighting her own fight and trying to figure out how to serve her community. She decides that watching, and allowing herself to experience pain and upset, is how she can make the fighters' potential sacrifices worth it.



It feels counterintuitive to Sunny that such capable, competent men have to fight until one of them dies—how is that person going to protect Leopard society if they're deceased? But Miknikstic transforming into a guardian angel answers this question somewhat, and it suggests that there's just more to the Leopard world that Sunny doesn't know about yet.



Nobody says anything to Miknikstic's wife, Kadiatou, who stands in the arena staring at the sky. Sunny breaks free from Orlu and runs to the tall, regal woman. Kadiatou brushes Sunny off at first, but Sunny explains that earlier, Miknikstic helped her feel better when she was overwhelmed. She wanted Kadiatou to know how grateful she is to her husband and his kindness. As Sunny turns to go, Kadiatou thanks Sunny—and gives Sunny a blessing.

When Sunny approaches Kadiatou, she emulates Miknikstic and the way he stepped in to comfort her earlier without being asked. This experience again helps Sunny see that the Leopard world is supportive, even if some of the adults in it are standoffish and prideful in a way that's a bit confusing to Sunny.



Anatov returns to the kids a moment later, and Sasha asks why nobody stopped the violent fight. Anatov explains that life doesn't work like that. Bad things keep happening to people until they die or figure out how to make the bad things stop. He reminds the kids that this isn't a vacation; this is a learning experience, and they'll face something just as bad soon.

The wrestling match, Anatov suggests, ended the way it did because the fighters couldn't figure out how to make "bad things" stop without someone dying. Facing Otokoto later, he implies, is going to follow much the same trajectory: the kids will have to make the "bad thing" stop, or they'll die.



CHAPTER 14

Since Anatov has to attend a scholars' meeting, Sunny, Chichi, Sasha, and Orlu are on their own until 11:00 p.m. They return to the booth where they had lunch and glumly purchase weak palm wine. A few minutes later, a young boy steps up and asks if Orlu or Sasha want to play in the soccer match later. Sasha says he'll play and Sunny will too. The boy argues—girls can't play—but Sasha insists. The boy hands over uniforms and says the match starts in an hour. Thrilled, Sunny changes into her green uniform and says she doesn't care if she has to play defense. She's just excited to play. Sasha insists Sunny will play center forward and leads her to run a warmup lap around the field.

The gruesome end to the wrestling match casts a shadow over the four kids' moods. Though they've been warned that death is common and likely when doing difficult things, it hasn't seemed real to them until they witnessed Miknikstic die. The soccer match presents a convenient opportunity to turn the mood around and to give Sunny a place where she can succeed. She's still up against a lot, since Leopard society seems to see her as lesser because of her sex, but her friends are here to support her and advocate for her.



Other boys gradually join Sasha and Sunny to run and soon, a tall boy calls for the green team to come to him. The boy, Godwin, is the boy Sunny hit with her backpack on the funky train. Godwin introduces himself to the team, finds a translator for the three young French players, and then starts to test the players' abilities. Several younger boys stumble over the ball, but a few boys in their mid-teens, including Sasha, perform well. An older boy, Agaja, emerges as a skilled player, and then Godwin calls Sunny forward. He tries to kick her off the team because she's female, but Sasha convinces Godwin to test Sunny's skills first. Sunny isn't able to get the ball past Godwin playing goalie, but he is impressed—so Sunny can stay.

Godwin emerges almost immediately as a good team captain. He seems relatively unbothered by having a few kids on the team who don't speak English, and by having several more who aren't skilled players. His goal, this suggests, isn't winning; it's having a good time. He isn't immune to what the novel presents as standard sexism, as when he tries to kick Sunny off. But he's not so prejudiced that he refuses to keep her after she demonstrates that she's a skilled player. He's willing to change his views when he gathers new information.



Godwin assigns Sasha, Agaja, a boy named Ousman, and Sunny to play forwards; he'll play goalie, and the smaller and younger boys will play defense. The referee calls everyone to the middle of the field to seal a pact to not break the rules (nobody can use juju), and then the players take their places. The captain of the white team taunts Sunny and the green team for letting a girl play, so Sasha pulls out some juju powder and makes a boy named Ibou fall. After scolding Sasha, the referee starts the game. As Sunny kicks the ball, chittim falls.

Sunny realizes instantly that the white team is surprised she's so skilled. She and Agaja score a goal within minutes; Ibou looks enraged. Sunny isn't scared, however. Ibou and the white team—all of which are older and stronger than the green team—begin to terrorize the young defenders on the green team. With a minute left, the white team has two goals to the green team's one. In the center facing off with Sunny, Ibou snarls that girls belong on the sidelines. Play starts again and the green team manages to score one more goal. By the time the whistle sounds, the green team has lost by one point—but they don't care. They run into a celebratory group hug as chittim falls around them. The white team doesn't look nearly as happy despite their win, and they earn way less *chittim*.

CHAPTER 15

Sunny and Chichi are in the bathroom, trying to clean up before the social. Chichi took Sunny to get her hair braided earlier, but there are no showers. The girls leave the bathroom and meet up with Orlu and Sasha. Then, they all head to a tent near the field for the social. An older student checks them in at the door and praises Sunny for her performance on the soccer field—she's always wanted to play, but she didn't know she could. The male student helping, though, chuckles that girls have to play as well as Sunny. This annoys Sunny, but she accepts the white towel the students offer her and enters the tent.

The tent is humid and there are vines growing everywhere. A huge tree is in the center; it lifts onto its roots and spins as it starts raining over the dance floor. Orlu leads Sasha, Sunny, and Chichi to the buffet to get food. As they eat, Yao approaches and exchanges insults with Chichi. Chichi sends him away, and Orlu groans that something bad is going to happen. Proudly, Chichi says she got the better of Yao last year, and now she's going to have to do it again. Orlu warns Chichi to not do anything dangerous. A few minutes later, Yao approaches again—and asks Chichi to dance. Sasha scowls as she accepts, and he leaves to talk to Agaja and Ousman. Sunny invites Orlu to dance, and though she feels awkward at first, they dance happily for an hour and a half.

Again, Godwin is clearly taking stock of the players he has and tries to assign them positions that will allow them all to be as successful as possible. This is especially important since the players can't use juju—the small, young players may be skilled at using magic, but that doesn't matter in this situation. The chittim Sunny receives suggests that she's discovering how powerful she is in this moment.



The white team seems to comprise older, burlier boys who are all good at soccer, so they naturally have an advantage over the younger and less skilled green team. But the novel also suggests that the white team is kind of missing the point, especially when they win the match but receive less chittim. The point is, presumably, that each team learns to work together to support all the kids who want to play, from girls to boys who are new to the game. By prioritizing winning, the white team seems to have more in common with corrupt Leopard figures, like Madame Koto—they're enriching themselves, rather than caring for others.



Sunny has only been part of Leopard society for a few months, but she's already learning that she's more than just naturally powerful at working juju. She's also learning that she has the power to change things in Leopard society, such as how the soccer match thinks about and accepts (or doesn't accept) female players. The boy's insistence that girls have to be really good to play highlights that Sunny has a long way to go in order to change attitudes, but the change seems possible.



The student social allows Sunny, her friends, and other African students the opportunity to be kids together. They're all learning to harness juju, but they're all also experimenting with romance and social power. Chichi makes it clear that she's intent on looking powerful in front of these peers—she knows she's good at what she does, and she's not going to stand for boys one-upping her. Sunny, however, is far more interested in hanging out with Orlu, thereby strengthening their friendship—and possibly opening the door for romance.



Near the end of the social, the music slows and students start to leave the tent. Chichi rejoins Sunny and Orlu, and then she notices that Sasha is standing with five girls. She storms in his direction, but Ibou and Yao intercept her and ask what she has. As Sunny, Orlu, and Sasha approach, Chichi asks Yao the same thing. He pulls out his juju knife and blows a charm at Chichi—and her *rapa* turns to gold and becomes very tight. The girls who were with Sasha are impressed, but Chichi isn't. As Chichi brings out her knife, Sasha reminds Ibou that Sunny humiliated him on the soccer field earlier. Godwin shouts that though the white team won, the game was supposed to be about brains—not just brawn.

Chichi slashes with her knife, but nothing happens. Yao and Ibou insult her for being incompetent, and Chichi says they're right. But as she reaches out to shake Yao's hand, Yao hits something—Chichi created an invisible barrier around him. After laughing at him for a minute, Chichi undoes the juju. She insists she has full control of it, even though it's third-level juju, but Yao angrily insists he has more to show. Chichi offers a deal: she calls a masquerade, and Yao never challenges her again. Orlu scolds Chichi for taking things too far, and Yao and Ibou look worried. Sasha, though, says he's called a masquerade already—he tells Orlu it was “that day at [his] house.” Yao accepts the deal, on the condition that Chichi call the masquerade. Chichi notes that she told Sasha how to do it the first time.

Orlu begs Chichi to not do this, but Chichi ignores him and begins to draw in the dirt with her juju knife. Sunny has known about masquerades her whole life. They're spirits that enter the physical world through termite mounds. In the Lamb world, people dress as masquerades and pretend—but in the Leopard world, masquerades are real. The tent is silent as everyone still at the social watches Chichi draw a circle with radiating lines. She stands, speaks in Efik, and cuts the air with her knife. As the ground starts to move under the circle, some people flee the tent.

The mound grows to be six feet tall, and termites crawl out of holes. Chichi announces that this juju charm came from *Udide's Book of Shadows*—and Yao yelps. Sunny wants to run, but she doesn't want to abandon Chichi. A wailing begins, followed by the sound of small drums, a flute, and then big drums. Orlu warns Sunny not to run as the masquerade emerges from the mound. It has a wooden knob at the top, which is attached to a tuft of raffia. The body is blue fabric with strings of beads and cowry shells hanging from it. The raffia falls away to reveal four mask faces as the head. Students call for deities as the masquerade looks around—and drops its wooden masks. Under the masks are angry stinging insects.

Chichi doesn't care for fine things; she and her mother prioritize education over material possessions. So the gold rapa is, Yao discovers, a terrible way to try to impress Chichi. There's also clearly some romantic tension brewing between Sasha and Chichi, as both express jealousy when the other spends time with people of the opposite sex. Finally, Godwin confirms that the point of the soccer match was teamwork, not just about having an unbeatably strong team. Winning wasn't the point.



This is the first time that readers really get to see what Chichi is capable of. It's clear that she does indeed have control over some advanced juju, but Orlu also suggests that Chichi is taking things way too far when she offers to call a masquerade. Chichi, this shows, is willing to put herself (and potentially others) in danger to make herself look cool and powerful. Sasha too shows that he's just as brash and confident as Chichi is, since he already called a masquerade, and it's implied that this wasn't a fun experience for Orlu.



Orlu tries desperately to put some checks on Chichi's behavior, but he's ultimately unsuccessful. Sunny is far too terrified to try to stop Chichi or run away, though she knows from Fast Facts that masquerades are extremely dangerous. As the ground begins to move when Chichi finishes her charm, it suggests she's going to be successful in calling the masquerade.



Recall that Fast Facts made it very clear that Udide's Book of Shadows is not something to mess with—it's serious, powerful, and dangerous in the wrong hands. Chichi's choice to work from it may illustrate her confident nature, or it may simply suggest that she lacks the maturity to understand how to safely work from such a dangerous book. The masquerade itself terrifies Sunny, as it's clearly very different from the men in costumes she's used to from Lamb masquerades. Those men wouldn't hurt her, but the stinging insects within the masquerade's body seem dangerous and unpredictable.



Orlu shouts for everyone to get down, but people are too panicked. The masquerade dances and Orlu shoves Sunny down. He tells Chichi and Sasha that “it” is going to happen soon. Just as Orlu tells Sunny to hold her breath, insects fly out of the masquerade’s body, burying students in bugs. Sunny is sure she’ll die, especially when Orlu stands up. He calmly makes scooping motions and as he does, insects return to the masquerade’s body. As he does this, he asks the masquerade gently to go home now that it’s frightened people. When the masquerade has been put back together, it points to Chichi, says something in Efik, and disappears back into the termite mound.

Orlu leads Sunny, Sasha, and Chichi to where they’re supposed to meet Anatov. They’re late, and Orlu is enraged. When Sasha tells him to loosen up, Orlu shouts that everyone knows Sasha is brilliant—and now they know he’s “stupid.” Chichi notes that nobody got hurt because Orlu was there to fix it, which Orlu resents. Anatov also looks angry when they reach him. He asks how many chittim they got and says they got paid because they made a mistake and learned they could fix it.

Then, Anatov tells Sasha he’s an “idiot.” Orlu’s mother told him about the masquerade he called—and calling a powerful water spirit like Mmuo Miri could’ve been deadly. Anatov threatens to have Sasha caned and to take *Udide’s Book of Shadows* away if Sasha does something like this again. Turning on Chichi, Anatov says they’ll go to the council as soon as they get home. The trip home the next day is somber, but Godwin does find Sunny, Orlu, Sasha, and Chichi. He laughs that everyone’s talking about Sunny’s soccer skills, and Chichi’s ability to call a masquerade and send it back.

CHAPTER 16

The funky train lets Orlu, Sasha, Chichi, Sunny, and Anatov out in front of Orlu’s house. Anatov announces that he expects everyone at his hut in two weeks for a lesson, and then he takes Chichi with him to Leopard Knocks. Orlu tells Sunny he expects she’ll be caned. Sasha spits that he hates this—nobody is willing to try new things. Orlu argues that the levels and the suggested ages for the levels are set for a reason; being able to do something advanced doesn’t make a person mature. He likens it to a young girl developing breasts early, which makes Sunny groan. She hugs the boys goodbye, and Orlu gives her an unexpected kiss on the cheek.

The masquerade seems ready to maim or kill people with all the dangerous stinging insects. But Orlu speaks to the masquerade in much the same way he spoke to Nancy the Miri Bird earlier: gently, with respect, and as though the masquerade is a person who can be convinced to do the right thing. Doing this saves everyone from further harm, and it also highlights how balanced the group of four is. Sasha and Chichi can get into trouble—and Orlu has the sense and presence of mind to fix things.



Though Orlu is enraged, Chichi shows that she is thinking of her group of friends as a team. Just as the green soccer team could work together to make up for inexperienced players’ weaknesses, Chichi knows that she doesn’t necessarily have to know how to, say, send a masquerade back—Orlu will be there to help her.



It seems like Anatov was willing to overlook the fact that Sasha already called a masquerade, assuming it was an isolated incident. Now that it’s turning into a pattern, though, Anatov makes it clear that Sasha (and Chichi) will face consequences if they continue to put themselves and other people in danger like this. Essentially, Anatov wants to make sure Sasha and Chichi are thinking about others when they do dangerous things.



As far as Orlu is concerned, Chichi broke the rules and so she’s going to suffer the consequences—which should be a surprise to no one. Sasha, though, thinks this kind of punitive system punishes people for trying to learn as much as possible, something Leopard society ostensibly values. In Sunny’s opinion, Orlu delegitimizes his position by using this clunky and sexist metaphor about a young girl growing breasts. After as much sexism as Sunny experienced at the festival, she’s not about to put up with casual sexism from someone she considers a friend.



Sunny's father is drinking palm wine with a friend when Sunny gets home. She stops dead when she greets him: there's a ghost hopper on his head. After telling him there's a leaf on his head, Sunny follows her mother's voice to the kitchen. Her mother is on the phone with Sunny's Auntie Chinwe, who lives in Atlanta with her husband. Sunny accepts the phone from her mother and tells her aunt she had a great time with friends. Since her mother has left the kitchen, Sunny asks her aunt to tell her something about her grandmother. Auntie Chinwe says she can't say much, but her mother kept secrets. She suggests Sunny check her mother's side of the bedroom for a box just as Sunny's mother takes the phone back.

Sunny grabs a packet of cookies and heads for her bedroom. She gently lifts a ghost hopper off of her bed and then lies down to study her juju knife. But when her pocket wiggles, Sunny yelps—and remembers the bean Junk Man gave her. The bean giggles and Sunny puts it under her bed. Then, Sunny unrolls her newspaper and reads that Black Hat Otokoto stole a secret book from the Obi Library. Just as she tosses the paper across the room, she hears a crack from under her bed. A blue wasp emerges from the bean and flies to Sunny's dresser, where it eats the bean casings. Sunny falls asleep moments later and wakes around midnight. She shines a flashlight on her dresser, where the wasp has sculpted a castle out of cookie crumbs. Sunny praises the wasp and does homework for a few hours.

CHAPTER 17

Over the next two weeks, Sunny does well in Lamb school and studies hard for her Leopard studies. Chichi refuses to speak of Sugar Cream and nurses her bruised back, though she and Sasha continue to pore over *Udide's Book of Shadows*. Orlu and Sunny also catch Chichi and Sasha kissing on several occasions. Orlu brings Sunny chocolates and opens doors for her, but he's careful around her. One day, Sunny tells Chichi about the wasp. Chichi explains it's a wasp artist, and that Sunny must praise it so it lives a long time. Sasha deems wasp artists "psychotic," as if you don't praise them they sting and then commit suicide. He and Orlu argue, and Sunny laughs when Chichi tells them to quit. Things are back to normal.

Sunny waded much deeper into Leopard society at the Zuma Festival, but this seems like it's going to make things more difficult at home. The ghost hopper on her father's head adds humor, but it also reminds Sunny that her Leopard identity is going to color every interaction she has with her family. Then, Sunny takes her friends' advice to heart by asking her aunt for information about her grandmother. Sunny gets some information, but not enough to do much with. For now, she can only accept that there may be a box of information somewhere, but it's inaccessible for now.



Not everything in the Leopard world is nefarious or dangerous: the wasp seems harmless enough and extremely entertaining. This helps Sunny develop more warm feelings about the Leopard world, which helps counteract the fear that learning about Black Hat's theft makes Sunny feel. That Black Hat stole a book suggests that whatever he's doing, he's still following the Leopard way of prioritizing education. However, it's implied that his goals are nefarious and evil, so he's shut out of public spaces like the library and must resort to theft.



In the weeks after the festival, Sunny and her friends essentially get to work on strengthening their bonds with each other. Things move to another level between Sasha and Chichi and between Orlu and Sunny, which may create even more loyal feelings among the four. Chichi's explanation of how to properly care for a wasp artist shows that the wasp isn't just an uncomplicated delight. It needs attention and nurture, just like a person does. The wasp artist is, however, akin to another friend for Sunny.



CHAPTER 18

It's the middle of the dry season now, but it's been raining for six days straight—so hard that schools are closed. Sunny wakes up on the seventh day of rain, praises Della (the wasp artist), and checks her Leopard newspaper. The front-page story is about the rain, which makes Sunny laugh. But Sunny stops in her tracks when she goes downstairs for breakfast and discovers Anatov at the kitchen table with her mother. Sunny's mother sounds ready to cry as she introduces Sunny to Anatov as a friend of Sunny's grandmother. She kisses Sunny and runs away. Anatov tells Sunny to gather her things; they're going to Leopard Knocks. She does as she's told and follows Anatov to an official Obi Library car. Sunny waves at her mother standing on the step.

The car has no trouble navigating the mud. As they drive, Anatov praises Sunny's progress—but he suggests she think about *who* she is. Only when she learns who she is will she learn what she's capable of. In a whisper, Sunny says she doesn't know who she is. She asks Anatov to tell her about her grandmother, but he insists Sunny must ask her mother. He suggests she rest until they get to Leopard Knocks.

Sunny wakes up when the car stops outside of the Obi Library. Anatov leaves Sunny outside with Sasha and Orlu, and Chichi's mother drops Chichi off and heads for the markets soon after. The mood is somber, but Chichi notes that kids are being maimed and murdered. Sasha says they're lucky to get to prove themselves—but Orlu grumbles that he's worried about the rain. Just then, Sugar Cream appears behind them and ushers them into the library. There are buckets all over the library to catch water, which shocks Sunny. When they reach a big door on the third floor, Sugar Cream tells the kids to be quiet until they're spoken to.

The inside of the room is another interior jungle, but it's more controlled. There are seven people sitting around a table; Sunny only recognizes Taiwo, Kehinde, Anatov, and Sugar Cream. The adults argue in several languages, and Sugar Cream says politely, in English, that Sasha is American and doesn't speak enough Igbo. A toucan flies from a vine to the table, transforms into a man, and then the man harumphs that Americans expect everyone to understand them. Sasha gets up, enraged, but Anatov and Kehinde tell him firmly to sit down.

The ominous start to the chapter makes it clear that the rain is unusual and should be treated with caution. It is, perhaps, not something to laugh about. Things take a turn for the worse when Sunny finds her Leopard world and her family life colliding, with her mother and Anatov in the kitchen together. However, this does give Sunny one good thing: finally, her mother is willing to mention Sunny's grandmother. It is presumably time for Sunny and her friends to take on Black Hat, but if Sunny is successful, she may have better luck getting her mother to divulge more information.



Anatov links Sunny's academic progress essentially to figuring out more about who she is. This entails learning some seemingly fraught family history. It's interesting, though, that Anatov insists Sunny asks her mother about her grandmother, since Sunny's mother likely doesn't know the extent of Ozoemena's Leopard abilities. Whatever Sunny needs to know is, perhaps, not connected to her grandmother's powers.



Sunny and her friends are trying to internalize the message that Leopard society promotes: that it's noble and worthwhile to sacrifice a few lives for the good of many more lives. Chichi is reminding them all that they have a goal here: to hopefully save innocent children who have no hope of defending themselves. That the rain is soaking the library is odd, as one would expect a magical building like the library to keep the elements out just fine.



Over the last few months, Sunny has been taught that scholars like these adults are generous, kind, and extremely well-educated. So it's a bit of a shock that the toucan man is so callous about Sasha's language deficiencies. This anti-American sentiment, the novel suggests, isn't just something that affects Lambs or lower-level Leopard People. It's a prejudice that many in the Leopard world deal with.



Sugar Cream introduces Sunny, Sasha, Chichi, and Orlu to the adults as the Oha coven that will handle Black Hat Otokoto. The adults study the kids and point out the qualities they notice, like Sasha's rage and the fact that there's love and lust between the four. A blind woman, Abok, notes that Sunny looks nothing like Ozoemena, and a man says that Chichi's royal blood will make things dangerous. Abok then addresses Sunny and asks if she's "seen it." She says this is why they're here today: Black Hat is just "one leg of the centipede." Sasha asks if someone can explain what's going on and how four kids are supposed to take on Black Hat. Orlu stands and respectfully greets each adult. He says they're confused and need guidance.

Abok says that what Sunny saw in the candle is a nuclear holocaust—but that's just the beginning. She says that Sunny has always been a Leopard Person and she was an important person in the spirit world before her birth, which is why someone—friend or enemy—showed her the vision in the candle. Abok asks the kids to imagine what will happen when people know the end is coming, and then someone emerges with a blueprint. Many people, she says, will follow that person. She believes they'll see more people like Black Hat as the end gets closer, and she believes Black Hat isn't the real leader.

Abok explains that Otokoto passed the fourth levels, but he's corrupt. He was an oil dealer who worked with Americans, and he's always sought chittim, Lamb money, and power. Because he wants power, he's been working on a forbidden juju—which will bring "the head of the centipede" from the spirit world. The "head," she says, is Ekwensu. At this, Chichi and Orlu gasp and look ready to cry. Abok continues that Ekwensu will build an empire once she's here, just as she did last time; it was only luck that she was sent back before.

Then, Abok says Sunny, Orlu, Sasha, and Chichi's task is simple: they have to bring two kidnapped children who were just taken back to their parents. The rain, she explains, is Ekwensu's doing; it's cleansing the air and readying it for her arrival. Black Hat will perform a ceremony on the two children in about six hours, kill them, and then he'll bring Ekwensu through. Nervously, Sunny asks if Black Hat will recognize her. Abok says it's possible.

Taiwo says to find Black Hat, the kids should head for a gas station near Aba. Black Hat, she says, is arrogant and will think the four are harmless. Sunny asks why nobody tried to save the other kidnapped children. Abok and the other adults imply that they sent other Oha covens, but while several saved a few kidnapped children, none of the covens survived.

The adults notice what the novel has urged readers to notice since the beginning: that the four friends balance each other out and support one another's strengths and weaknesses. So where Sasha is angry and rash, Orlu is right there to calm him down and appeal to the scholars. Abok is being purposefully cryptic, but she implies that Black Hat is just a small part of bad things that will happen—if he's not stopped, that is. But Sunny and her friends struggle to piece together what else they must learn until the adults agree to tell them all they know.



It's unclear whether what Sunny saw in the candle is definitely going to happen, or just one of many possibilities and can be avoided. Either way, Abok suggests, the goal should be to preserve life on Earth for as long as possible, for as many people as possible. As it becomes increasingly likely that the world will experience a nuclear holocaust, she suggests that more people will begin acting selfishly to try to gain power in a potential new world order.



Like Madame Koto and Ibrahim Ahmed, Otokoto is active in the oil industry—though while they remain part of mainstream Leopard society, Otokoto has left it and is now an enemy due to his selfish, corrupt actions. Readers at this point don't know who Ekwensu is, but Chichi and Orlu's reaction is telling—as is the fact that she's in league with Otokoto. Like him, she's likely corrupt and selfish.



The rain isn't just cleansing the air for Ekwensu. It's trapping people in their homes (recall that workplaces and schools are closed) and the unseasonable weather is something many people are finding disturbing. The bigger problem for Sunny, though, is that she's unsure how visible her relationship with her grandmother is to outsiders. Essentially, she's concerned that her relationship to Ozoemena puts her in more danger than even her friends.



Black Hat is so selfish and corrupt that essentially, Taiwo insists he doesn't know how to value teamwork or friendship. If Sunny and her friends are successful, it will presumably be because of their ability to work well together—a skill Anatov has been helping them hone for months now.



Sunny, Sasha, Orlu, and Chichi board a funky train and Sunny calls her mother on her cellphone. Sunny's mother can barely speak, but she tells Sunny to come home. Once she hangs up, Sunny wipes her tears and asks who Ekwensu is. Chichi explains she's like Satan, but she's real and not just a metaphor. She's a powerful masquerade, and if she comes through, what Sunny saw in the candle will come true—and an unstoppable “super-monster” will be controlling it.

Even as Sunny wades deeper into Leopard society, she remains emotionally attached to her mother and to her family. Chichi's description of Ekwensu suggests that the kids are preparing to take on the epitome of evil—and because Ekwensu is a masquerade, she has powers beyond what humans have.



CHAPTER 19

“Trouble is never hard to find,” so Sunny, Sasha, Orlu, and Chichi just have to follow a line of cars waiting to get gas. They all huddle under Sunny's umbrella to protect themselves from the rain and wonder if Black Hat wants to have so many people around. Suddenly, Orlu tells everyone to cross the street. On the other side, he explains that he feels things. Sasha asks if Orlu can undo whatever he's sensing—but Orlu just says he's afraid. He adds that when he starts undoing things, the showdown will start. Sasha looks almost hysterical as he pulls out his knife. The four touch their juju knives together, and it feels for a moment like they're one being. Then, Sunny sticks her closed umbrella in the mud and follows her friends.

Sunny and her friends are familiar enough with Black Hat's way of thinking to realize that he probably enjoys terrorizing people—part of why he murders kids so brutally is, perhaps, the spectacle of it. As Orlu admits he's afraid, it's a turning point for the friends. Orlu is generally so level-headed and doesn't show his fear, so this is an indicator that whatever is happening is going to be frightening. As Sunny leaves her umbrella in the mud, she symbolically leaves behind her old life, the one where she was powerless to stand up for herself when she was bullied. Now she's powerful—and is about to try to save the world.



The people in cars watch as four kids holding knives walk to the gas station—and some see the kids' faces look like ceremonial masks. People drive away, terrified, and others just sink down in their seats. Orlu stops when he's yards from the gas station and starts fighting with something invisible. As Orlu fights, Sunny feels something shift. People in the cars shout and more people flee as they feel it too, and then Orlu falls. Sunny and Sasha pull him up, and he points to an *obi* (a thatched building) that has just appeared in the empty lot. It has unusual steel pillars—and inside, they can see a man and two small children.

It seems likely that Orlu, Sunny, Sasha, and Chichi are so focused on their task that they have no choice but to call on their spirit faces—the parts of their identities that help them feel confident. In this situation, the scholars won't punish them for revealing themselves, showing that Leopard society does allow exceptions to its rules. The obi that Orlu's fighting reveals presumably contains Black Hat and the kidnapped children, and that it so easily emerges suggests that the juju protecting it is perhaps not as involved as Black Hat would like to think.



Lightning and thunder crash above, and Orlu says the storm is right above them. Just then, a flock of parakeets flies for them from the *obi*. Chichi waves her knife at the birds, ignores a few men who ask what the kids are doing, and they all run for the *obi*. Something hits Sunny in the head and Chichi and Sasha continue to fight the bush souls hidden in the parakeet flock. Finally, Sunny and Orlu enter the *obi*, and Sunny looks into Black Hat Otokoto's eyes. He laughs at the “last effort,” turns away, and begins to draw around the toddlers' lifeless forms with chalk. He tells Sunny and Orlu to go away so they don't die, and then he tells the bush souls to leave Sasha and Chichi alone.

Remember that Sunny and her friends are the first pre-level Oha coven—that is, they're the youngest people sent to fight Black Hat yet. But despite their youth, they've prepared well for this: they've already fought bush souls in Night Runner Forest, so they know what to do. Black Hat, as expected, thinks nothing of seeing kids show up to thwart him—he underestimates their power and ability to work together. He also implies that he expects them to be selfish, like him, when he calmly tells Sunny and Orlu to essentially save themselves and give up on the toddlers.



As soon as the bush souls leave, Chichi and Sasha race into the *obi*. Sasha pulls out the conch, blows into it, and thousands of insects fly into the *obi* to attack Black Hat. He screams in fear and surprise, so Sunny and Orlu seize the opportunity to take the toddlers out of the *obi*. The toddlers are clearly dead. Black Hat turns the insects to dust and begins to battle with Sasha, and Sunny starts to panic. Orlu gets a faraway look in his eyes as he kneels in the mud next to the toddlers. He says he's not sure what he's doing, but he has to do it alone. He asks for one of Sunny's braids—the "hair of one who walks between"—and sends her back to the *obi*.

Sunny has no idea what to do. The toddlers are dead, Sasha is dying, and Chichi is missing. When Black Hat throws Sasha back with juju, Chichi suddenly appears, screams that she's a princess of Nimm, and slashes with her knife. She tells Black Hat that Ozoemena gave this charm to Chichi's mother, and now it's coming back to Black Hat. Hot streaks of color blast past Sunny and whirl around him as Chichi says that "past sins" will always return to haunt. Black Hat shrieks and tries to evade the colors, but then he laughs. He says that the kids can kill him, but they're too late. Calling for Ekwensu, he slits his own throat with his juju knife—he's the final sacrifice.

Sunny and Chichi lock eyes as the biggest, scariest drum starts to beat. The girls drag Sasha's body into the *obi* as a termite mound rises in the mud outside. The masquerade starts to emerge when the mound is six feet high; it looks like dead, tightly packed palm leaves. Chichi says Black Hat was successful as Ekwensu comes through. She's more than 100 feet tall and 50 feet wide, and she smells like car exhaust. Chichi says all they can do is pray. Ekwensu falls over and the drumbeats and the thunder stop—but then a haunting flute tune begins to play. Ekwensu begins to rotate, pulling up mud and plants as she does. Mud fills the air and Ekwensu shrieks a warning to everyone on earth.

Sunny feels a vibration and a tug in her chest. She stands up, feeling strong—she doesn't want to die in hiding. Slowly, Sunny approaches Ekwensu. The masquerade doesn't notice Sunny until Sunny is very close and has called her spirit face to move forward. Sunny suddenly knows everything she needs to know, and she's not afraid. The world will end someday, Sunny will die someday, and Sunny's family will go on if she dies now.

By working together, Sunny and her friends manage to surprise Black Hat and get the toddlers to safety—and given Orlu's odd behavior, it seems like it's perhaps not too late to bring them back to life. This passage also confirms why Anatov allowed Sasha to purchase this conch at Junk Man's stall: he knew Sasha would use it for a noble purpose, not just to cause mayhem. Sunny, though, is totally lost. She doesn't know enough juju to feel like much help, and with Orlu busy, she lacks guidance.



As Sasha collapses and as Black Hat commits suicide to bring Ekwensu through, it looks as though Sunny and her friends have been unsuccessful in thwarting the ritual killer. But Sunny still has Chichi alive and ready to fight, which offers hope that the girls will be able to come up with some way to do away with the dangerous masquerade. The charm Chichi uses, however, speaks to how generations in Leopard society help each other—even from beyond the grave.



Chichi, for her part, speaks as though all is lost: once Ekwensu is through, she suggested earlier, the end of the world is inevitable. They can call on a higher power through prayer, but Chichi's tone suggests even that's a lost cause. Ekwensu's car exhaust smell highlights her connection to the corrupt Leopard Person who brought her here. Black Hat made a fortune in the oil industry—which creates fuel for cars, which create exhaust. Her existence on earth, in other words, is a byproduct of his corruption.



Where Chichi's confidence fails, Sunny's jumps into overdrive. As Sunny stands in front of Ekwensu, true evil, she suddenly accepts who she is—and the Leopard world she's a part of. Noting that her family will go on if she dies now isn't Sunny wanting to die. Rather, it's Sunny finally accepting that as Anatov has said time and again, the world is—fortunately—bigger than she is and will keep turning without her.



Sunny also realizes that she knows and hates Ekwensu, and she can tell that Ekwensu is looking at her. Allowing Anyanwu, her spirit, to guide her, Sunny lifts her juju knife. Things seem “more,” and it seems like Sunny is somewhere else at the same time as she’s at the gas station. As Ekwensu starts to spin again, Sunny says “Return” in a language she doesn’t even recognize. Ekwensu sinks back into the mud.

Sunny isn’t just battling true evil—this is an almost spiritual experience for her as her perception changes and she accesses language she doesn’t know anything about. All of this shows clearly that Sunny is more than she knows she is—and continuing to get to know Anyanwu, her spirit identity, will help her learn more about who she is as a whole.



CHAPTER 20

Mud and trees fall from the sky, the storm stops, and chittim rains down around Sunny. Sunny’s fear turns into pain—she’s very sore. Chichi calls for Sunny and then sends her to check on Orlu, who’s still with the toddlers. When Sunny finds them, the toddlers are alive and clinging to Orlu, who’s unconscious. They beg Sunny to not hurt him. Sunny shakes Orlu and his eyes fly open. He explains that he brought the toddlers back to life and points to a huge pile of chittim. As Sunny leads Orlu and the toddlers back to the *obi*, she explains that Black Hat killed himself and brought Ekwensu through. Sunny explains that she somehow sent Ekwensu back—and Orlu says that the elders sent the four of them for a reason.

In all ways, Sunny and her friends were successful: Ekwensu and Black Hat are gone, and the toddlers are alive and ready to be returned to their families. Though the danger has passed, the four continue to work together to care for each other and for the toddlers. Orlu, true to form, accepts that the scholars knew exactly what they were doing when they sent the four to deal with Black Hat. One of the scholars, at least, seems to know what Sunny is capable of and that she just needs a push to reach her full potential.



Sasha is awake when Sunny, Orlu, and the toddlers enter the *obi*. They figure a council vehicle is going to show up soon, so they set about gathering all the chittim they earned. Sure enough, a van arrives 30 minutes later. On the drive, Chichi explains to Sunny that Chichi’s mother knew Sunny’s grandmother, and in a dream recently, Ozoemena taught her the juju that Chichi used. It’s called a “bring back,” and powerful scholars can give it to someone when they die to bring back a person’s worst sins. Sasha and Orlu join the conversation; they realize that the Oha covens that didn’t survive probably took the place of the kidnapped children they saved. The driver stops at the police station, and he and Orlu take the toddlers inside.

Though there’s no indication Chichi and Sunny are related, they’re nevertheless connected because of their older family members. Ozoemena, the novel implies, is still around in spirit and able to influence what’s happening in the here and now—so though she’s dead, she’s not really gone. This offers some hope that in the future, Sunny may have more of an opportunity to get to know her grandmother. As the four discuss the other Oha covens’ sacrifice, they essentially thank and acknowledge those sacrifices—they allowed these four to survive.



Once the toddlers have been delivered, the driver turns the van onto a bumpy road that he says leads to Leopard Knocks. As the van reaches a bridge, everyone closes their eyes except Sunny. She feels her spirit face come forward as the wheels hit the bridge, and she looks around at her friends’ spirit faces. Orlu’s face is square, green, and decorated with tiny Nsibidi symbols. Sasha’s spirit face is that of a fierce parrot, and Chichi’s face is long and made of marble. She can’t see the driver’s face. At the end of the bridge, Sunny closes her eyes and pretends to open them with everyone else. She feels a bit guilty for looking at everyone’s faces, but she’s glad she looked.

Having been raised in the Lamb world, Sunny has next to no experience with spirit faces (she’s only seen Chichi’s and her own at this point). Essentially seeing her friends naked and vulnerable—and seeing their true natures—helps Sunny feel more secure and at home in her relationships, and in the Leopard world more broadly. The Nsibidi symbols on Orlu’s spirit face could signify that there’s perhaps more to their relationship, since Sunny is the only one of the group who can read the symbols.



The van stops at the Obi Library just as the sun comes out. The driver explains that he's taking all the chittim to Sunny, Sasha, Orlu, and Chichi's homes and drives away, leaving the four to enter the library alone. The atmosphere in the library is excited now, and Samya shouts happily when she sees the kids walk in. She leads them to Sugar Cream's office, where they tell Sugar Cream everything. Sugar Cream praises them, Sunny in particular. But she warns that it'll be easier for Ekwensu to return now that she's come through once, so they'll need to start preparing in the physical world. Then, Sugar Cream hugs each kid in turn—and tells Sunny “Okay.” Sunny has a mentor.

In the Leopard world, everything is well. Disaster has been averted, and though Sugar Cream makes it clear that things can't just go back to normal, they no longer need to live in such fear as they have been. Things also start to look up for Sunny specifically, as Sugar Cream agrees to take her on as a mentee. Now that Sunny has proven that she's responsible, generous, and not just selfish, she'll be able to further her education and reach her full potential.



CHAPTER 21

Sunny gets back to her house around sunset, after having been gone for more than 24 hours. Chukwu and Ugonna are kicking a soccer ball around, so Sunny joins them. Chukwu notices Sunny's muddy hair and sandals (she's changed her clothes) and says that their father will flog her. Sunny kicks the ball across the street to annoy Chukwu and goes inside. Sunny's mother is making pepper soup; she smiles and starts to cry when she sees Sunny. But when Sunny's father walks in, he asks in a scream where Sunny has been. Sunny leaps away as her father tries to hit her face, and Sunny's mother shields Sunny. Sunny's father bellows that it's his wife's fault that Sunny is “run[ning] wild”; it's in her genes and she's going to end up just like Sunny's grandmother. He gives Sunny a disgusted look and storms off.

At first, things seem back to normal at home: Sunny and her brothers bicker like normal, and Sunny's mother is simply thrilled to have her daughter home safe. But when Sunny's father enters the picture, Sunny realizes just how much of an impact her Leopard identity will have on her home life. Her father implies that he believes Sunny and her grandmother are running around with men—something he sees as improper and disgraceful. He, of course, can't know the truth, so Sunny is in a difficult position. She no longer has the support at home that she once did—and her father actively distrusts her.



Sunny sits down, crying, and then asks her mother who she is. Her mother doesn't answer; she just dishes them both steaming bowls of pepper soup and hands Sunny a handful of tissues. As they eat, Sunny's mother explains that Sunny's father didn't want a daughter. He thinks sons are safe, but he doesn't understand that they could've ended up like Sunny just as easily. It all comes back to Ozoemena. She asks Sunny if she really wants to know what's going on, and Sunny begs to know.

Now, Sunny understands more than ever that unlocking her own identity means figuring out who her grandmother was—and her mother, per Anatov, is the only person who can help her understand. Though Sunny's mother might not understand how Leopard abilities work, she knows enough to realize that people of all genders can get magical powers—it's not something unique to women.



Sunny's mother picks at her soup as she explains that she doesn't know how her parents met. Her father loved Ozoemena and they had three children, but they never married—Sunny's mother doesn't know why, and she just tells Sunny's father her parents were married because he wouldn't accept her otherwise. Looking ashamed, Sunny's mother says her mother was strange, but she loved her daughters. It always seemed like she was looking for something in them and never found it—but she's sure Ozoemena would've found it in Sunny. Taking a deep breath, Sunny's mother says she noticed the metal things outside Sunny's door a few months ago; she recognized the objects.

Sunny begins to empathize more with her mother as she notices her mother's shame. Ozoemena's identity as a Leopard Person hurt Sunny's mother and makes Sunny's mother feel like she has to hide things to move comfortably through the Lamb world. But as she levels with Sunny and tells her the truth (truths she presumably expects Sunny to keep from her father), the two deepen their relationship. This shows Sunny that she doesn't have to hide quite so much around her mother.



Sunny gasps, but her mother says it's fine. Sunny's mother continues that people thought Ozoemena was seeing men when she went out at night, but that wasn't true. She doesn't know what her mother was doing, but her sister once saw her disappear into thin air. Sunny says she can't explain what her grandmother was doing, and her mother nods. Sunny's mother says that she trusts Sunny, which makes Sunny cry again.

Smiling sadly, Sunny's mother says that Sunny's father will probably never understand. He, like so many other men, blames the maternal line when he doesn't like his child—though she insists that Sunny's father doesn't hate Sunny. He agreed, after all, to return to Nigeria to keep Sunny safe. Sunny hugs her mother, who then says that today is the anniversary of Ozoemena's death. It was raining that day, just like it was today. Sunny remembers the scholars saying it was all a matter of timing.

When Sunny enters her bedroom, there's a box on her bed. As she touches it, the lid flips open to reveal a handwritten letter and a page with Nsibidi written on it. In the letter, Ozoemena introduces herself to her grandchild. She explains that any grandchild able to open the box carries her spirit line, and she praises Sunny's mother: the fact that Sunny's mother passed on the juju-charmed box means that she believes and respects Ozoemena.

Ozoemena introduces herself as Ozoemena Nimm, a Nimm warrior. She explains that she was rebellious, so she found a Lamb man and had children with him. She didn't realize this would lead to living a double life—and condemn any Leopard grandchildren to a similar double life. Ozoemena says she was born with the darkest black skin, and she could make herself invisible and go back and forth between the physical world and the wilderness.

If her grandchild's ability is similar, Ozoemena tells the reader that "there is more history in you than you yet know." She warns that something is coming, and tells the reader not to fear. She says she loves her grandchild, and warns the reader to make friends and forgive her Lamb family members.

Accidents happen, as evidenced by Ozoemena accidentally disappearing in front of one of her Lamb daughters—and even the most powerful and educated people make them. Still, Sunny's mother highlights that her mother was subject to sexist ideas about how a proper woman should behave, something that Sunny is still fighting years later.



Sunny may now understand better who she is and where she comes from. But it's ironic that the one person who would benefit from learning what's going on—her father—can't know. So Sunny is essentially trapped in a poor relationship with her father due to the fact that he cannot learn to accept her. Learning that it was raining like this when Ozoemena died is another reminder for Sunny that the world is bigger than she is.



Ozoemena's letter puts Sunny's mother in an interesting and important spot. She's essentially the person who carries all the information—information she herself can't know. Passing the information on, Ozoemena suggests, is a selfless choice. Sunny's mother is, in this sense, following Leopard philosophy despite being a Lamb.



Sure enough, Sunny's abilities mimic her grandmother's: she too can become invisible and can also move into the wilderness, though Sunny hasn't done this yet. But Sunny and her grandmother are also opposites in terms of their skin color. Their differences in appearance highlight that their connection is mostly spiritual—their looks don't matter as much.



It's impossible to tell whether Ozoemena saw the events that just happened—Black Hat and Ekwensu's downfall—or if she's alluding to something more when she sees something coming. But she also suggests that if Sunny relies on her friends and her connections to the spirit world, she'll get through whatever life throws at her.



Sunny feels like she's seen her own soul. It makes sense, if her grandmother was Nimm, that she wasn't married; somehow, her grandmother was like Chichi's mother, though Chichi and her mother are royalty. Does this mean Sunny can't marry? What else does it mean? Sunny pushes these questions aside and studies the sheet of Nsibidi, but it's too advanced for her. The final thing in the box is a photograph of Ozoemena with her juju knife. Sunny looks nothing like her, but that doesn't matter.

Ozoemena's letter answers some questions, though it raises more—these Sunny will consider in later installments of the series. Sunny's feeling of seeing her own soul, and of peace when she studies her grandmother's photograph, suggests that she finally knows who she is. She's Ozoemena's granddaughter—and she knows now how she fits into the Leopard world.



CHAPTER 22

The following morning, Sunny wakes up to find that Della has created a sculpture of Black Hat out of sawdust—it knocks the figure's head off as Sunny watches. Sunny laughs, praises Della, and then picks up her newspaper. The first story is about the toddlers who were returned to their parents under mysterious circumstances. Down further on the page, a headline reads that a gas station—the one Black Hat owned—burned down after it was struck by lightning.

When it comes to Black Hat, things seem to be tying up nicely. It's impossible to tell whether the lightning was natural, sent by someone in Leopard Knocks, or brought on by Black Hat's own selfishness. But how it is destroyed matters less to Sunny than the sense that finally, justice is being served.



EPILOGUE

The rains are finally over, and Sunny is back in Lamb school. At lunch, Orlu lets Sunny know that Anatov will probably give them a few weeks before they have another lesson. However, he notes that they'll all be working with their mentors individually. He shares that Chichi and Sasha are going to start working toward the second level, even though they're too young—but he acknowledges that nobody knows how old Chichi actually is. Sunny asks if Orlu is going to do the same, and he shrugs—there are major consequences if one fails. He asks if Sunny is going to try, and she scoffs that she doesn't remember what the second level is called. Sunny sighs that having two lives feels strange, but Orlu says it's better to have two lives than none. Sunny laughs.

Having triumphed over Black Hat and learned more about her own identity, Sunny feels more secure in the Lamb world and in the Leopard world. She still has a lot to learn, since she can't recall what the second level is called. But Orlu also implies that he and Sunny have plenty of time to start moving in that direction—they're not old enough yet anyway. And Sunny may feel pretty secure, but this doesn't make it feel less strange to essentially have two identities. Her friends, Orlu seems to suggest, are what makes having two lives worth it.





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