

Cinder



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF MARISSA MEYER

Meyer was born and raised in Tacoma, Washington. As a teenager, she wrote *Sailor Moon* fan fiction under the pen name of Alicia Blade. She subsequently attended Pacific Lutheran University, where she received a degree in creative writing, and then earned a master's degree in publishing from Pace University. After graduating, Meyer worked as a book editor for five years in Seattle. She was inspired to write *Cinder* after participating in the 2008 National Novel Writing Month (NaNoWriMo) contest, in which she wrote a story focusing on a futuristic version of fairy tale "Puss in Boots." After publishing *Cinder* in 2012, she went on to write *Scarlet*, *Cress*, *Winter*, and *Fairest* for The Lunar Chronicles series. Those novels adapt the stories of Little Red Riding Hood, Rapunzel, Snow White, and the Evil Queen, respectively. In 2016, Meyer wrote *Heartless*, a stand-alone novel focusing on the Queen of Hearts from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. She then published the Renegades trilogy (*Renegades*, *Archenemies*, and *Supernova*). Her most recent novel, *Instant Karma*, was released in 2020. Meyer lives in Tacoma, Washington with her husband and two daughters.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Much of *Cinder* is centered around letumosis, a highly contagious and deadly disease that's plaguing the Earth of the novel. Although the book is a work of science fiction, the letumosis plague bears similarities to real-life contagious diseases like the 14th-century Black Death pandemic and the 2009–2010 H1N1 flu pandemic. (The latter occurred just a couple of years before Meyer wrote *Cinder*.) Like H1N1—commonly referred to as the "swine flu"—letumosis is an airborne disease. In the later stages of the disease, patients also develop a high fever and bruise-like patches on their body, symptoms that are similar to the Black Death that killed millions of people throughout Eurasia and North Africa in the 1300s. Furthermore, *Cinder* features a group of oppressed people (cyborgs, or humans with robotic body parts) who are discriminated against. The way cyborgs are treated in the novel is similar to real-life instances of racial discrimination and other forms of prejudice. One example of this is the discrimination that African American people endured under the Jim Crow (segregation) laws in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The dangerous medical testing that the government forces cyborgs to undergo is also reminiscent of the unethical and invasive experiments that various marginalized groups (notably, prisoners in Nazi concentration camps) have been subjected to throughout history.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

As its title suggests, *Cinder* is an adaptation of the classic fairy tale "Cinderella." Meyer has stated that she used two versions as her primary source material: the first was *Ye Xian*, a Chinese version of the tale (which is why Meyer sets the tale in a fictionalized, futuristic version of Beijing). The second was Perrault's *Cendrillon*, a French version that includes the well-known additions of the Fairy Godmother, the pumpkin that transforms into a carriage, and glass slippers. The other books in Meyer's The Lunar Chronicles series (which follow Cinder and other characters adapted from fairy tales) are *Scarlet*, *Cress*, *Winter*, *Fairest*, and *Stars Above*. Other young adult adaptations of "Cinderella" include Sarah J. Maas's *Throne of Glass*, Betsy Cornwell's *Mechanica*, and Gail Carson Levine's *Ella Enchanted*. *Cinder* is also part of a wider trend of young adult fiction that adapts classic sources: Robin McKinley's *Beauty* is an adaptation of *Beauty and the Beast*; Somaiya Daud's *Mirage* is based on [The Prince and the Pauper](#); Jay Kristoff's *LIFEL1K3* is an adaptation of [Romeo and Juliet](#); and *Brightly Burning* by Alexa Donne is based on [Jane Eyre](#).

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Cinder
- **When Written:** 2011–2012
- **Where Written:** Seattle, Washington
- **When Published:** January 3, 2012
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Young Adult Novel; Science Fiction
- **Setting:** New Beijing, The Eastern Commonwealth
- **Climax:** Cinder goes to the ball and warns Kai of Queen Levana's plot to kill him; Cinder confronts Queen Levana
- **Antagonist:** Queen Levana; Adri; Sybil Mira
- **Point of View:** Third Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Notable Names. In *Cinder*, Queen Channary, Queen Levana, and Princess Selene are all part of the royal family of the moon colony Luna—and their names are particularly apt for where they live. Channary derives from the Khmer words for "moon" and "girl," Levana derives from the Hebrew word for "moon" and "white," and Selene derives from the Greek word for "moon."

COVID-128. In May 2020, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, Meyer wrote the short story "COVID-128." This story is about how her characters would cope with another

deadly plague, just as they confronted letumosis in *Cinder*.



PLOT SUMMARY

Sixteen-year-old Cinder is a cyborg mechanic living in the futuristic city of New Beijing in the country of the Eastern Commonwealth. One day, at her mechanic's booth, Cinder struggles to remove her old, rusty **mechanical foot** and then fits herself with the new prosthetic she just purchased. Just after this, the prince of the Eastern Commonwealth, Prince Kai, visits her booth and asks her to fix his android Nainsi, explaining that Cinder has a reputation as the best mechanic in New Beijing. As a cyborg, Cinder faces discrimination from people who believe she is less than human, so she keeps her identity hidden from Kai. After he leaves, an outbreak of the deadly plague letumosis spreads through the market, and the baker, Chang Sacha, is taken to the quarantines.

When Cinder gets home from the market, her stepmother Adri is getting dresses fitted for Cinder's stepsisters Pearl and Peony for the upcoming ball, but Adri says that she can't afford both a dress for Cinder and new a magbelt for their hover. Cinder decides to go with Peony and Iko, her android, to a junkyard to scavenge for a magbelt. There, Cinder finds a magbelt as well as an old gasoline car. Suddenly, Peony's skin begins to break out in splotches—she's caught letumosis. Med-droids soon arrive and take Peony to the quarantines, but Cinder tests negative for the disease.

When Cinder returns to the apartment, Adri is furious with Cinder for putting Peony in danger, so she volunteers Cinder for cyborg letumosis research—she'll be paid for Cinder's contribution to the research. Cinder protests, knowing that no one survives the testing, but the med-droids knock her unconscious and take her away.

Meanwhile, Prince Kai's father, Emperor Rikan, also has letumosis and will likely die soon. Rikan's advisor, Konn Torin, suggests that he and Kai come up with a plan for the peace negotiations with Queen Levana (the ruler of Luna, the colony on the moon). Lunars are notorious for being greedy and power-hungry because they have the "gift," meaning that they can telepathically manipulate people's thoughts and actions. While Levana wants to marry Kai to form an alliance, Kai is hesitant to do so. Kai is also trying to find Princess Selene, Queen Levana's niece and the true heir to the throne. Most believe that Princess Selene died in a fire when she was young, but there are rumors that she survived and fled Luna. Kai hopes that if she has spent most of her life on Earth, she'll be more sympathetic to them than Levana is.

In the letumosis research lab, the head of research, Dr. Erland, discovers that Cinder is immune to letumosis, and he runs further tests on her blood samples over the coming days. When Cinder returns home, she decides to fix up the gasoline car she

found and leave the Eastern Commonwealth as soon as she can.

The next day, Emperor Rikan dies. Queen Levana offers her condolences to Kai and insists on visiting Earth. Before the news breaks to the public, Cinder gets up early to visit Peony in the quarantines. She assures Peony that she'll do everything she can to save her life. Cinder then visits the palace's research center and runs into Kai once more. He asks her if she would accompany him to the ball as his personal guest, but Cinder refuses, as that is the night she is planning to run away, and she knows that he probably wouldn't want to associate with her if he knew she was a cyborg.

Back at the lab, Dr. Erland reveals to Cinder she is a Lunar fugitive—that is why she is immune to the disease. Second, because Queen Levana is visiting, Cinder cannot allow Levana to see her. Cinder is a shell—she is resistant to the Lunar "gift"—and Queen Levana hates shells and would likely try to kill her.

The next day, Queen Levana arrives from Luna for peace negotiations. Meanwhile, Cinder starts to fix Nainsi and discovers an errant chip in Nainsi's wiring. When Cinder plugs the chip into her own communication device, it isn't able to link up with anything. Cinder returns to the palace with Nainsi and sees a crowd outside, protesting the Lunar queen's arrival. When Levana appears on a balcony above the protestors, she immediately brainwashes and quiets the crowd. Cinder is also almost brainwashed, but is able to resist this manipulation. Levana spots her and looks at her with disdain.

During talks with Kai, Queen Levana tells him that her research team has discovered a cure for letumosis and that she has brought one dose of it—but to make more, she needs to be compensated. Kai is disgusted that she is using a deadly disease as a political bargaining chip.

After this confrontation, Cinder returns Nainsi to Kai, and they both go visit Dr. Erland together. Kai gives Dr. Erland the antidote and asks if he can replicate it. After Kai leaves, Cinder accuses Dr. Erland of lying to her about being a shell, because she was just as susceptible to Levana's gift as the others. Dr. Erland explains that he's been doing research on her family. Her adopted father, Garan, designed a biological security system that prevents outside manipulation by Lunars, which protected Cinder from Levana's gift and also protected her own identity, because she couldn't use her "gift" on others growing up. But now, it seems that Cinder's gift is returning to her. Dr. Erland also reveals that he is Lunar, and that he fled Luna because Queen Levana killed his daughter, who was a shell.

At that moment, Cinder learns that Peony has entered the fourth stage of letumosis. Dr. Erland gives Cinder a small portion of the antidote to save Peony, but she arrives too late to save her. Instead, Cinder spots Sunto—Chang Sacha's son—and gives him the antidote instead. When Cinder returns home

from the quarantines, Adri has discovered that Cinder spent 600 univs on her new prosthetic foot. Adri then tells Cinder that she's sold some of Cinder's things to pay for a funeral for Peony, and she is also taking her foot away. Cinder is horrified to learn that Adri even sold Iko for parts.

On the day of the ball, Kai pays one more visit to Cinder's booth, giving her a pair of silver silk gloves. She thanks him but insists that she's not going to the ball. Kai tells her that he's probably going to marry Levana and will announce it that night after his coronation. At home, Cinder watches Kai's coronation: he gives a speech insisting that he'll always prioritize the citizens of the Eastern Commonwealth. At that moment, Cinder receives communication via the chip that was implanted in Nainsi—a Lunar girl informs Cinder that Queen Levana is planning to kill Kai after they are married and have an heir. Cinder realizes that she has to go to the ball to warn Kai.

Putting on Peony's dress, her old mechanical foot, and Kai's gloves, Cinder drives the gasoline car to the palace. She arrives at the ball and dances with Kai as she warns him that Levana is going to kill him. Hearing this, Kai insists that he still has to marry Levana for the good of the people. Cinder decides that the only way to stop him is to make Levana so angry that she won't want to marry Kai, and so Cinder kisses Kai.

After they kiss, Queen Levana confronts Cinder, declaring that Cinder is a Lunar fugitive and must be taken into custody. Kai tries to protest, but Cinder tells him that it's true, and a guard grabs Cinder. Queen Levana tells Kai that Cinder can go free if he marries the queen, but as Cinder protests, Kai refuses to marry her. Queen Levana then controls Cinder, forcing her to take the gun from the guard and point it at her own head. But before Cinder can pull the trigger, her cyborg interface overrides her body, and she drops the gun. She tries to run—but her small mechanical foot severs from her calf, and she falls down the stairs. Kai runs after her, but he now knows that she's a Lunar and sees from her missing foot that she is a cyborg. He seems disgusted by her and wonders if all of their interactions were a Lunar "illusion." Levana demands that Cinder be returned to Luna, and Kai agrees.

In the book's final chapters, Cinder sits in a prison, waiting to be taken to Luna. Dr. Erland uses his gift on the guards to break in and give her a new hand and foot. He tells her to escape the prison and meet him in Africa before giving her a final revelation: she is Princess Selene, Queen Levana's niece. Cinder realizes that the only way to stop the inevitable war and protect Kai is for her to retake the Lunar throne from Levana.

mechanic who lives in the futuristic city of New Beijing, in the Eastern Commonwealth. Cinder was severely injured in a hover accident that killed her parents when she was 11 years old, causing her to need an operation that implanted a mechanical interface in her brain and gave her a prosthetic **foot** and hand. And man named Garan then adopted Cinder in Europe and brought her to the Eastern Commonwealth (a fictionalized version of Asia). Five years later, she lives with her stepmother Adri and stepsisters Pearl and Peony—Garan died of a recently emerged disease called letumosis shortly after returning. Cinder often faces discrimination as a cyborg, as many people, including Adri, believe that cyborgs are subhuman. Adri frequently verbally abuses Cinder, who has little power because Adri is her legal guardian. Cinder works in the market as a mechanic, but all the money she makes goes to Adri. But in spite of this cruelty, Cinder is extremely hard-working, determined, and kind. She befriends Prince Kai when he visits her booth to fix his android, Nainsi, and their budding friendship leads him to invite her to his coronation ball. When Adri volunteers Cinder for letumosis research and Dr. Erland discovers that she is immune to letumosis, Cinder continues to return to the lab in order to help find a cure for Peony, who falls ill with letumosis. Throughout the book, Dr. Erland also reveals key aspects about Cinder's true identity that she never knew about: first, she's actually Lunar (from the society on the moon) which is why she is immune to letumosis. Second, her cyborg operation put a lock on her Lunar "gift" (the ability to control others telepathically), making her impervious to its effects. Lastly, she is actually Princess Selene, Queen Levana's niece and the true heir to the Lunar throne. At the end of the novel, Cinder puts her own life at risk when she goes to warn Prince Kai that the Lunar Queen Levana plans to kill him, because Cinder values his safety and wants to prevent Queen Levana from wreaking havoc on Earth. Cinder's impulse to better society even at the cost of her own life affirm her as a true heroine.

Prince Kai – Eighteen-year-old Prince Kai is the prince of the Eastern Commonwealth, where Cinder lives. Prince Kai is handsome and charming, so most of the girls in the Eastern Commonwealth fawn over him—including Cinder's stepsister Peony. At the beginning of the book, Prince Kai's father, Emperor Rikan, has fallen ill with letumosis and will likely die. But Kai is hesitant to assume the role of emperor, and he's also horrified at the idea of marrying the Lunar Queen Levana for a political alliance, as she wishes to do. He looks desperately for ways to avoid this fate, constantly monitoring Dr. Erland's progress on developing an antidote for letumosis and researching Princess Selene (Levana's niece). He hopes that if Selene is discovered alive, she could regain the Lunar throne instead of Levana. Prince Kai also befriends Cinder when she fixes his android, Nainsi. But over the course of the novel, particularly after his father passes away from letumosis, Kai grows into the responsibility of being emperor. When Queen



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Cinder/Princess Selene – Cinder is the protagonist of the novel. She is a 16-year-old cyborg (human/robot hybrid)

Levana reveals that she has a cure for letumosis, Kai reconsiders marrying her, knowing that many of his citizens are suffering from the disease. Even after Cinder warns him that Queen Levana is going to try to kill him after they are married, he decides to put himself in harm's way in order to do what's best for his country. Then, after realizing that his citizens would rather fight a war than become Queen Levana's slaves, he decides not to marry Queen Levana, even though this also means that he has to turn Cinder over to Levana as a part of their negotiations. In this way, Prince Kai shows that, like Cinder, he cares more about benefitting his citizens than he does about his own happiness—and this is what makes him a just leader.

Queen Levana – Queen Levana is the novel's antagonist and the queen of Luna, the society on the moon. She uses her glamour (the power to telepathically manipulate other people's thoughts and actions) to appear beautiful all the time. She appears with long, auburn hair, a pale, unblemished face, and deep red lips—but her perfection seems somewhat unnatural to others. Queen Levana is in her early thirties, and she assumed the throne after her older sister Queen Channary and Channary's daughter Princess Selene died—and many Lunars believe that Queen Levana killed her family members in order to assume the throne. Queen Levana constantly uses her power to threaten innocent people and even attempt to destroy societies. Using her glamour, Levana brainwashes her citizens into obedience, robbing them of freedom. She also roots out shells (Lunar people who don't possess glamour and are impervious to it), since they cannot be manipulated in the same way. She has her Lunar scientists research a letumosis antidote, but she withholds the cure until after Emperor Rikan dies because she hopes to negotiate with Prince Kai instead—and to marry him. And when she discovers that Prince Kai is searching for Princess Selene (whom many believe is still alive) in order to reinstate the princess as the rightful queen, she plots to kill Kai after marrying him. When Cinder warns Kai of this plot, Levana uses her glamour to manipulate Cinder, almost causing Cinder to shoot herself with a gun. Queen Levana's desperate and horrific acts illustrate the problem with power: it can often cause people to become greedy for more influence or wealth, leading them to abuse their positions as Queen Levana does.

Dr. Erland – Dr. Erland is the head of New Beijing's letumosis research team. Dr. Erland reveals much of his backstory to Cinder as the novel goes on: he is actually a Lunar fugitive. He fled Luna after Queen Levana killed his daughter, Crescent Moon, who was a shell (someone who's impervious to glamour, the Lunar ability to telepathically control others). His story reveals several layers of discrimination that he has to combat: Earthens tend to stereotype Lunars as cruel and dishonest, so he has to prove to Cinder that he is trustworthy. He also recognizes the injustice of killing shells simply because they

cannot be manipulated by glamour. Dr. Erland meets Cinder after Adri volunteers her for cyborg letumosis research. He runs many tests on Cinder and learns that she is also Lunar; he also reveals to Cinder that her cyborg surgery put a "lock" on her glamour, but that it is slowly coming back. Finally, he divulges to Cinder that she is Princess Selene (Queen Levana's long-lost niece), whom he wanted to find so that she could overthrow Queen Levana. Learning this, Cinder realizes that he only set up the cyborg draft—which selects one cyborg every day as a research subject—because he knew that Princess Selene was also a cyborg and that she fled to the Eastern Commonwealth. Even though his intentions were good, he also caused major harm to a vulnerable population, underscoring the problems with secrecy and manipulation. Still, Dr. Erland is also self-sacrificial: he experiences severe psychological side effects from refusing to use his glamour on Earthens, and he works tirelessly and does experiments on himself to try and find a letumosis cure.

Adri – Adri is Cinder's stepmother, Garan's widow, and Pearl and Peony's mother. Adri is exceptionally cruel and abusive toward Cinder, particularly because Cinder is a cyborg (human/robot hybrid) and Adri therefore views her as subhuman. Because Adri is Cinder's legal guardian, she forces Cinder to work and then takes all the money Cinder earns. She makes it clear that she never wanted Cinder, and she blames Cinder for causing Garan's death because she believes that Garan caught letumosis when he traveled to Europe to adopt her. Adri also blames Cinder when Peony catches letumosis, and as a result, she volunteers Cinder for cyborg letumosis research. She does this—even though she knows that no one survives the letumosis testing—because she receives a stipend for Cinder's sacrifice. At the end of the book, Adri takes away Cinder's new prosthetic foot after discovering that Cinder spent a lot of money on it; she also sells many of Cinder's possessions, including Iko, to pay for Peony's funeral. In this way, the book shows that Adri's cruelty stems from her power as the head of the family. Rather than caring for Cinder, her greed causes her to care only for herself, destroying any chance of a happy family unit and almost killing Cinder in the process.

Sybil Mira – Sybil Mira is Queen Levana's head thaumaturge (advisor). Like Queen Levana, Sybil is Lunar and keeps up her glamour all the time to make it seem as though she is beautiful. She also brainwashes Lunar citizens and even tries to manipulate people on Earth. When a servant gives Queen Levana a **mirror** by accident (Levana hates mirrors), Sybil almost makes the woman put her own eye out with a knife as punishment. In this way, like Levana, Sybil compromises her integrity as a leader by committing horrific acts against innocent people to benefit herself and remain in power.

Peony – Peony is Cinder's 14-year-old stepsister, Pearl's younger sister, and Adri's daughter. Unlike Pearl, Peony is kind to Cinder, but she is powerless to stop her mother and sister

from abusing Cinder. Peony loves Prince Kai and is particularly excited when she learns that Cinder met the prince at her mechanic's booth. One day, when Peony accompanies Cinder to a junkyard, she falls ill with letumosis, and med-droids take her to the quarantines. Cinder tries tirelessly to help ease Peony's suffering and works with Dr. Erland to find a cure, but Peony ultimately dies of the disease.

Iko – Iko is Cinder's android and her best friend. Iko has a faulty personality chip, which makes her seem much more human than most androids. She assists Cinder in her mechanic booth and helps Cinder fix up the car that she plans to use to escape Adri. But when Adri discovers that Cinder has spent a lot of money on a new foot, Adri sells Iko for parts to make back some of the money.

Garan – Garan was Cinder's stepfather, Adri's husband, and Pearl and Peony's father. He adopted Cinder when she was 11 years old in Europe, and shortly after returning to the Eastern Commonwealth, he died of letumosis. Dr. Erland reveals to Cinder that Garan was the one who performed the operation to make her a cyborg (human/robot hybrid), and he put a biological "lock" on her Lunar gift (the ability to telepathically control others) so that other Lunars couldn't manipulate her.

Chang Sacha – Chang Sacha is the baker in the market where Cinder works. She discriminates against Cinder, telling her son Sunto not to play near Cinder's booth because she is a cyborg. But when Sacha comes down with letumosis and Cinder visits the quarantines, Sacha begs Cinder to bring Sunto to him before she dies. As a result, when Cinder is given a dose of the letumosis cure, she gives it to Sunto.

Sunto – Sunto is Chang Sacha's son. When Cinder spots Sacha in the quarantines, she pleads with Cinder to bring her son to her just before she dies. As a result, when Cinder visits the quarantines a second time and spots Sunto among the dying, she gives Sunto part of the letumosis antidote, and he recovers from the disease.

Queen Channary – Queen Channary is Queen Levana's older sister and Princess Selene's mother. Like Levana, Channary was power-hungry and cruel: she instituted a policy to kill shells on Luna, believing that they were dangerous because they cannot be controlled. Many Lunars believe that Levana killed Channary in order to ascend the throne.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Pearl – Pearl is Cinder's 17-year-old stepsister, Peony's older sister, and Adri's daughter. Like Adri, Pearl is cruel to Cinder and treats her like a servant rather than a part of the family.

Emperor Rikan – Emperor Rikan is Kai's father. At the beginning of the book, he is ill with letumosis. He dies shortly after, leaving Kai to take up the mantle as emperor.

Konn Torin – Torin is Emperor Rikan's advisor. After Rikan's

death, he advises Kai on his negotiations with Queen Levana as well.

Nainsi – Nainsi is Prince Kai's android. Cinder fixes Nainsi and discovers that Prince Kai has been using the android to search for Princess Selene.

Fateen – Fateen is one of Dr. Erland's assistants at the letumosis research lab, along with Li.

Li – Li is one of Dr. Erland's assistants at the letumosis research lab, along with Fateen.

TERMS

Android – An android is a robot with a human appearance. In the novel, **Iko** and **Nainsi** are androids.

Cyborg – A cyborg is a human being who also has mechanical or robotic body parts. **Cinder** is a cyborg who has a prosthetic hand, a prosthetic foot, and a mechanical brain interface that allows her to control these parts of her body. Many Earthens (citizens of Earth) view cyborgs as inferior to humans or more expendable; for example, Cinder's stepmother **Adri** doesn't believe that Cinder can feel love. The government also drafts cyborgs as forced scientific research subjects, choosing random cyborgs for letumosis research on the principle that cyborgs owe their lives to scientists and should be willing to sacrifice themselves to help society as a whole.

Earthens – Earthens are citizens of Earth. They contrast with Lunars, who are citizens of the moon colony Luna.

The Eastern Commonwealth – The Eastern Commonwealth, where **Cinder** lives, is one of the major nations of Earth in the novel (its real-world counterpart is the continent of Asia). The Eastern Commonwealth's capital is New Beijing. **Emperor Rikan** is the emperor of the Eastern Commonwealth before **Prince Kai** ascends the throne.

Glamour/The "Gift" – Glamour (also known as the "gift") is the Lunar ability to manipulate other people's bioelectricity. This allows Lunars to telepathically control others' thoughts and actions. However, glamour does not work over screens or through **mirrors**, which is why Lunars like **Queen Levana** hate mirrors. Lunars without this gift are called shells.

Hover – Hovers are the primary means of transportation on Earth in the novel. These vehicles are designed to hover above the ground using a magnetic device called a magbelt to propel it off the ground.

Letumosis – Letumosis is a deadly airborne disease that has killed millions of Earthens. The disease has four stages: the first stage is an incubation period, and the second is characterized by large bruise-like patches on the skin. In the third stage, the patients become very weak and has a fever. In the fourth and final stage, their skin becomes yellowed and pasty, and the patches envelop the patient's body. Patients usually die shortly

after reaching the fourth stage. Letumosis was likely carried to Earth by Lunar shells.

Luna/Lunars – Luna is the society on the moon in the novel, and Lunars are the people who reside there. **Queen Levana** is their leader. Though Lunars were initially human, they have since evolved into a different species. Most Lunars possess the “gift”—the telepathic ability to control others’ thoughts and actions by manipulating their bioelectricity. Those without this gift are called shells. Because of this power to manipulate others, Earthens (citizens of Earth) often think of Lunars as greedy and power-hungry. Some Lunars, like **Dr. Erland**, flee Luna to escape Queen Levana’s oppressive regime.

Netscreen – A netscreen is a device with a screen that’s used for entertainment and media broadcasts, similar to a television.

The Quarantines – The quarantines are a facility where people with letumosis are segregated from the population and treated. After **Peony** comes down with letumosis, an ambulance takes her to the quarantines, and **Cinder** visits her there.

Shell – Shells are Lunars without the “gift.” They cannot control others, nor can they be controlled by others. Because shells cannot be controlled, **Queen Levana** and **Queen Channery** despised them, labelled them dangerous, and had them killed.

Dr. Erland’s daughter was a shell.

Thaumaturge – A thaumaturge is a person of power in the Lunar government. **Sybil Mira** is **Queen Levana’s** head thaumaturge. The word “thaumaturgy” is derived from Greek, meaning magic or miracle.

their own happiness—the novel suggests that these traits are virtues worth striving for.

Cinder puts the happiness and well-being of others over herself, which benefits her family, Prince Kai, and society as a whole. Cinder works as a mechanic in order to support her stepmother Adri and her stepsisters Pearl and Peony, even though Adri and Pearl take all of Cinder’s money for themselves. After Peony comes down with letumosis, and Dr. Erland (the head of the letumosis research team) informs Cinder that she is immune to the disease, Cinder allows him to do research on her to try and help her stepsister, which is both time-consuming and unpleasant. Cinder often feels pain and vulnerability as Dr. Erland runs tests on her. Through these actions, Cinder puts her own comfort and well-being at risk in order to try and save her stepsister—and others who would benefit from the research—from letumosis. Unfortunately, Peony ends up dying of letumosis—and after her death, Cinder plans to run away on the night of an upcoming ball, hoping to escape Adri’s cruelty once and for all. However, she learns that Prince Kai is planning to announce his engagement to Queen Levana, and that the queen will likely kill him in a power grab after their wedding. Learning of this plot, Cinder decides to go to the ball in order to warn Kai, even though she also knows that the Queen will likely try to kill her. In this way, she puts Kai’s well-being—and the well-being of the entire Eastern Commonwealth—above her own life. As Cinder warns Kai about Levana’s plan, Levana arrests Cinder at the ball and nearly has her killed, but Kai asks Levana to save Cinder. When Levana gives Kai a choice—hand Cinder over or risk starting a war—Cinder assures him that she isn’t worth it, and he surrenders her. The fact that Cinder saves Kai’s life and saves her country from potential war, even at the cost of her own life, are what define her as the hero of the story and frame her bravery and self-sacrifice as virtuous.

Prince Kai also exhibits self-sacrifice as he puts the needs of his country over his own happiness. Early in the book, Prince Kai grapples with the best way to support his people as he enters into peace negotiations with Queen Levana. Initially, he’s unwilling to marry her for the sake of forging an alliance, since Lunars have a reputation for being cruel and greedy. But after Kai’s father, Emperor Rikan, dies of letumosis, Levana reveals that her scientists have discovered a cure for the disease because they want to help Earthens—but only if Kai will marry her. With this information, Kai considers the marriage so that he can get the antidote. He knows that many people are suffering and dying from the plague and wants to alleviate this suffering, illustrating his willingness to put duty to his people over himself. Kai then makes the selfless choice to marry Levana despite knowing that she might try to kill him, because he hopes to stave off war between Luna and the Eastern Commonwealth. But when he realizes that his citizens would rather fight a war than be enslaved by the Queen, he then



THEMES

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BRAVERY AND SACRIFICE

Cinder is a futuristic retelling of the classic folktale “Cinderella.” Like the original, *Cinder* is a tale of good versus evil, as the teenage protagonist,

Cinder, tries to escape the influence of her wicked stepmother, Adri. She also attempts to find a cure for letumosis (a deadly disease plaguing the Eastern Commonwealth, where Cinder lives) and tries to prevent Queen Levana (the ruler of Luna, the society on the moon) from marrying Prince Kai and brainwashing the Eastern Commonwealth’s citizens. To achieve these goals, Cinder, Kai, and their ally Dr. Erland all put themselves in harm’s way in order to protect others. In showing how the characters’ self-sacrifice and bravery benefit more vulnerable people and society as a whole—even at the cost of

decides *not* to marry her for their sake. As Kai states in his coronation speech, “I will do whatever needs to be done to ensure the well-being of my country. I will do whatever needs to be done to keep you all safe.” The Prince exhibits a self-sacrificing impulse to put his country over himself, in spite of his youth (he is only 18) and the recent loss of his father, which marks him as a true and just leader.

Dr. Erland is another example of how bravery and kindness—even at the cost of one’s own well-being—are vital for the good of society as a whole. Dr. Erland is the head of the Kai’s letumosis research team. But toward the end of the book, it’s revealed that Dr. Erland is a Lunar fugitive, meaning that he is immune to the disease and has been using his own blood samples and doing time-consuming experiments on himself in order to find a cure. He, like Cinder and Prince Kai, chooses to sacrifice his own time for the sake of others. Moreover, because of the Earthens’ prejudice against Lunars, Dr. Erland must hide his Lunar identity by concealing his “gift” (the Lunar ability to telepathically control others’ thoughts and actions). This comes at great cost, as he notes, “My mental stability, my psychological health, my very senses are failing me because I refuse to manipulate the thoughts and feelings of those around me.” Even though Earthens discriminate against Lunars, Dr. Erland still chooses to take care of the Earthens—even if it means his own mental deterioration. Like Cinder and Kai, he puts himself in harmful situations for the good of society. Hundreds of thousands of people potentially stand to benefit from the protagonists’ selfless actions, illustrating the heroism of courage and voluntary self-sacrifice.



POWER, GREED, AND EVIL

While *Cinder* portrays bravery and self-sacrifice as essential forces of good, greed and a thirst for power become the cornerstones of evil for the book’s antagonists. The Lunar Queen Levana, Levana’s advisor Sybil Mira, and Cinder’s stepmother Adri are all in positions of power and are supposed to care for others—their citizens or their family, respectively. But instead of caring for others, they instead focus on their own desires and needs, to the point where they are willing to treat others cruelly, destroy governments, and even kill innocent people. Their power thus only leads them to abuse their positions and seek more wealth and status at the expense of those who are vulnerable. With this, the book suggests that power has the potential to make people greedy and power-hungry—and when these impulses are indulged, people in power can destroy individuals, governments, and even society as a whole.

While Adri is supposed to be a motherly figure for Cinder and take care of her, her powerful position as the head of the family enables her to abuse Cinder—and nearly kill her—for Adri’s own benefit. Adri constantly reminds Cinder that she never wanted her—it was Adri’s late husband Garan who adopted

Cinder before he died. As a result, Adri resents Cinder and essentially uses her as a slave: Cinder is the only one in the household that works, but because Adri is her legal guardian, Adri takes all of Cinder’s money to use for herself and her daughters, Pearl and Peony. Unlike Cinder, who puts others above herself, Adri clearly cares only about her own needs and uses her power to further subjugate her stepdaughter. Adri even goes so far as to volunteer Cinder for research for letumosis—the deadly disease ravaging the Eastern Commonwealth—even though she knows the dangerous tests will likely kill Cinder. Adri does this because she will receive a stipend for Cinder’s contribution to the research. Thus, Adri’s greed spurs her to sacrifice her powerless stepdaughter, for whom she’s supposed to be responsible, simply because it will benefit her financially.

Queen Levana, the ruler of the colony on Luna (the moon) is the epitome of evil, as she uses her power to take advantage of the vulnerable Earthens and even to try to take over the Eastern Commonwealth, where Cinder lives. Queen Levana initially visits Earth just after Emperor Rikan dies of letumosis, eager to initiate an alliance negotiation with Prince Kai, who is soon to ascend the throne. Upon arrival, however, Levana reveals that her research team found a cure for letumosis only hours before her departure, though Kai knows that she’s lying—they found a cure long before this. This indicates Levana’s desire for power: she could have saved Rikan, but she thinks that she will have more success negotiating with Kai, and so she withholds the antidote for her own political gain at the cost of Rikan’s life and political upheaval in the Eastern Commonwealth. Levana also brings one dosage of the antidote with her to Earth, but she says that for more doses, her country will need further compensation—a marriage to Kai. Kai is horrified by her selfishness: “You would withhold this? When so many are dying?” But Levana is uninterested in doing what is morally right; instead, she only seeks greater wealth and power and uses the cure as a bargaining chip. She also threatens war if Kai doesn’t accept her marriage, showing how she is willing to abuse her power to the point that she would even destroy an entire society.

Both Queen Levana and Sybil Mira, the queen’s advisor, even control or kill their own innocent citizens, compromising their integrity as leaders as they use their power to benefit themselves. Queen Levana and Sybil Mira both have the Lunar “gift,” meaning that they are able to telepathically control the thoughts and actions of those around them. This is how Queen Levana maintains power and quells unrest on Luna, because she brainwashes Lunars into following whatever she says. Kai counters that brainwashing isn’t a just way to deal with unhappy citizens—but rather than work in the interest of the common people, as Kai does, Levana only pursues further political power. Queen Levana also institutes a policy to imprison and kill “shells” (Lunars who do not have this gift and are also

immune to it), as she views the shells as dangerous because she cannot control them. As Dr. Erland puts it, “Queen Levana will stop at nothing to ensure her control, to terminate any resistance.” This reinforces the fact that she is so power-hungry that she will even kill her own citizens in order to maintain that power, completely counteracting the purpose of a political leader. Levana and Sybil both display this tendency toward control and violence in disturbing ways: when a servant unknowingly gives a **mirror** (which Levana hates) to the Lunar queen, Sybil Mira almost forces the servant to stab herself in the eye before Kai takes the blame for the insult. Later, at the ball, when Cinder tries to tell Kai that Levana plans to murder him, Levana controls Cinder’s body. She forces Cinder to take a gun from one of the guards and point it at her own temple, until Cinder’s cyborg interface resists the queen, and she is able to drop the gun. The antagonists’ willingness to even make others harm themselves against their will shows how power has the potential to corrupt, as they will risk innocent people’s lives if it means getting what they want and furthering their power. While selflessness is the primary driver of good in *Cinder*, power can spur people to horrific, selfish actions in the name of maintaining their influence.



STEREOTYPES AND DISCRIMINATION

In the fairytale “Cinderella,” characters largely overlook the titular protagonist because of her poverty. In *Cinder*, a futuristic adaptation of the original classic, people avoid Cinder because she is a cyborg—that is, part robot, with a computerized brain interface and several mechanical limbs. Cyborgs are widely discriminated against on Earth in the novel, but they aren’t the only group that’s stereotyped. Humans on Earth, or “Earthens,” also despise those who live on Luna (the moon): they view Lunars as greedy and self-serving people because they have the ability to telepathically control others’ minds and thoughts (called their “gift”). In turn, Lunars discriminate against shells (people who do not possess this gift and who are immune to it). With this two-sided discrimination, the book suggests that it’s easy to prey on people for qualities that differ from the norm, particularly for those who do not belong to that minority. But sometimes, the qualities for which people are singled out are the very qualities that give them advantages in society or make them special.

Cinder faces discrimination as a cyborg, because the majority of Earthens (who are not cyborg) view her as unnatural or subhuman. Cinder received surgery to become a cyborg at 11 years old, after getting in a severe hover crash. She has a prosthetic hand and foot, which she tries to cover up, as well as a computerized interface in her brain. While Cinder is largely a normal teenager, her stepmother Adri still treats her cruelly because, as she notes, Cinder “[isn’t] even *human* anymore.” Although Cinder is still a regular teenage girl despite her

cyborg elements, Adri feels that she can mistreat her stepdaughter because she believes Cinder is abnormal and subhuman. Furthermore, the government discriminates against cyborgs on an institutional level as well: they are drafted as involuntary research subjects for scientists to experiment on as they develop a cure for letumosis (an infectious disease that’s plaguing Earth). Cyborgs are not immune to the disease; the general population simply believes that they are “lucky to have lived this long,” and that they should help the scientists who helped them survive. Cinder thinks that the draft is “it was really just a reminder that cyborgs [are] not like everyone else,” suggesting that the general non-cyborg population views them as more expendable simply because of their differences.

Even though Cinder experiences discrimination as a cyborg, she (and Earthens at large) discriminate against Lunars, reinforcing the ease of buying into stereotypes about a group to which one doesn’t belong. Cinder provides some backstory on Lunars early in the novel, explaining that “Their unnatural power had made them a greedy and violent race, and Queen Levana was the worst of all of them.” Though Cinder understands the pain of stereotypes, she is equally willing to buy into them when the bias is turned against others. Cinder even maintains this belief about Lunars when she discovers that she herself is a Lunar fugitive who was brought to Earth as a child. She thinks, “Lunars were a cruel, savage people. They murdered their shell children. They lied and scammed and brainwashed each other because they could. They didn’t care who they hurt, so long as it benefitted themselves. She was not one of them.” Cinder’s staunch opinions highlight the difficulty of counteracting stereotypes, as she would rather distance herself from the group than reconsider her biases.

Lunars, in turn, have their own minority that they discriminate against: shells, Lunars who do not possess the gift and who are impervious to it. Lunars kill their “ungifted” children because the Queen believes it is dangerous to have Lunar citizens who cannot be brainwashed. Dr. Erland, who escaped Luna when his shell daughter was killed, explains, “I agreed with the laws in the past, thought the shells were dangerous. That our society would fall apart if they were allowed to live. But not my little girl.” This situation illustrates how easy it is to discriminate when someone is not affected by discrimination—but when someone identifies with minorities, the injustice becomes clear.

Yet, sometimes, it is precisely the qualities that make people different that enable them to help others and themselves—suggesting that people should not be victimized for differences but celebrated for them. Cinder’s skill as a mechanic, which allows her to help Prince Kai (the prince of the Eastern Commonwealth, where Cinder lives) fix his android and enables her to escape from New Beijing, is only due to the fact that she is a cyborg and has had to fix many problems with her prosthetics and interface over the years. Because of this, people call Cinder the “best mechanic in New Beijing.”

suggesting that being a cyborg has given her skills that are of high value to others. Additionally, when Cinder eventually learns that she is Lunar, the combination of her identity as Lunar and a cyborg means that she is both immune to letumosis and immune to the Lunars' gift—as Dr. Erland explains, her cybernetic surgery prevents others from controlling her thoughts and actions. This allows her to take on challenges that non-cyborg and non-Lunar people wouldn't be able to: for instance, she can try to save Kai from Queen Levana's influence without falling under the Queen's control, hide weapons and other things in her prosthetic compartments, and use her retina display to know when people are lying (enabling her to see through Lunar ruses). Thus, while Cinder and many others experience discrimination for their differences, such differences can also be the very qualities that make people special and uniquely capable of helping others.



SECRECY AND MANIPULATION

The societies in *Cinder* are filled with secrecy and manipulation, the most obvious example being the Lunar people, who are able to telepathically manipulate the thoughts and actions of those around them using their “gift.” In addition, people like Cinder or Dr. Erland often try to conceal parts of their identity or the identity of others in order to paint themselves in a better light or to try and protect others. Yet in each of these instances, the secrecy and manipulation inevitably come to light and cause more harm than if characters were honest in the first place. Through these outcomes, the novel suggests that deception, even in service of a worthy goal, is self-defeating.

The Lunars, including Queen Levana and Sybil Mira, use their gift in order to appear more attractive to others as well to control others' actions—but this has the opposite effect on those who are aware of their tactics, making Earthens (citizens of Earth) feel that Lunars are cruel and oppressive. Prince Kai describes seeing Queen Levana for the first time: “she was indeed beautiful, as if someone had taken the scientific measurements of perfection and used them to mold a single ideal specimen. [...] She was unnatural.” He acknowledges her beauty, but because he recognizes the way she manipulates others, he instead views her as “cruel” and resists the impulse to adore her. Thus, in attempting to control him, Levana only makes Kai dislike her and want to defy her. When a crowd gathers to protest the Lunar queen's arrival, Levana appears and immediately quiets them, making them believe that she is their savior. But the effect only lasts as long as Queen Levana appears—afterward, the crowd recognizes her brainwashing tactics and demands that Prince Kai go to war with Levana rather than marry and be brainwashed by her. The feeling of being manipulated only buoys their resistance, rather than quelling it.

Cinder experiences the fallout of concealing her identity when

Prince Kai finally discovers that she is both a cyborg (a human/robot hybrid) and Lunar. Cinder spends much of the book concealing her cyborg identity from Kai: she doesn't want him looking at her in disgust, because cyborgs are generally discriminated against. And when Dr. Erland tells Cinder that she's actually Lunar fugitive (not an Earthen, as she believed), she likewise tries to hide this fact from Kai because she doesn't want to be associated with people like Queen Levana. However, at the ball, Prince Kai discovers both of these aspects of her identity, and he confronts her: “It seemed he had to force himself to meet her gaze, and he flinched at first. Cinder could not read him, the ever-changing mix of disbelief and confusion and regret. [...] ‘Was it all an illusion?’ he asked.” While Cinder worried about Kai's perception of her, in reality, he is more hurt by the fact that she lied and hid her identity. This effectively ends their friendship in the book's final chapters, illustrating that Cinder's secrecy and manipulation was more detrimental than being open and honest about her identity.

The fact that Dr. Erland hides Cinder's true identity and manipulates government policies for his own purposes also causes widespread harm. One of Dr. Erland's primary goals in the book is to find Princess Selene, Queen Levana's niece and the true heir to the Lunar throne. While many believe that Selene died in a fire when she was three years old, there are rumors that she survived the fire by becoming a cyborg and fleeing to Earth. As a result, Dr. Erland sets up the cyborg draft on Earth for letumosis research—picking out cyborgs to test antidotes for a deadly plague gripping the Eastern Commonwealth. While he does this to find Princess Selene in the hopes of overthrowing Queen Levana, Cinder notes that this caused the death of countless cyborgs in the name of letumosis research. His secrecy and manipulation, therefore, caused more harm than good to an already vulnerable population. Moreover, when Adri volunteers Cinder for the scientific research, Dr. Erland realizes that Cinder is Lunar and is therefore immune to the disease. However, he does not reveal this fact to her, in the hopes that she will continue to help him with his research for a cure—because he also realizes that Cinder is, in fact, Princess Selene, whom he and Prince Kai have both been trying to find. However, because he hides these facts from Cinder, she is unable to use this information to her advantage and stand up to Queen Levana. Together, these examples illustrate how regardless of intentions—good ones like Dr. Erland's, or bad ones like the Lunars'—secrecy and manipulation tend to do more harm than good.



RESOURCEFULNESS, KINDNESS, AND PERSEVERANCE

Cinder shares many major plot points with its predecessor “Cinderella”—particularly Charles Perrault's *Cendrillon*, the 17th-century version of the folktale. Both center on a poor female protagonist with a wicked

stepmother and stepsisters who goes to a ball and falls in love with a prince. However, there are crucial differences between the two stories: primarily, there is no figure comparable to the fairy godmother in the original tale, who makes Cinderella's wishes come true by providing her with a dress, a carriage, and slippers that allow her to go to the ball. In *Cinder*, Cinder must do all of these things herself, and she is able to go to the ball not due to luck or magic, but instead because of her own ingenuity and because her kindness makes those around her want to help her. Thus, Meyer's adaptations to the original tale suggest that hard work, resourcefulness and kindness are more important than luck in achieving one's goals.

Cinder's skill as a mechanic, coupled with her ability to scavenge for parts, are what enable her to get to the ball, rather than luck. When Cinder finds an old orange gasoline car that looks like a "rotting pumpkin" in a junkyard, and she decides to fix it up to make her escape from her cruel stepmother, Adri's, house (though she eventually uses it to get to the ball instead). The description of the car as a pumpkin ties the car to the pumpkin in the folktale, which the Fairy Godmother transforms into a carriage for Cinderella. However, Cinder is the one who has to fix up the car, spending many nights secretly working on it so that it will run. This adaptation emphasizes that Cinder needs hard work to find success. Cinder is also resourceful: upon deciding to go to the ball to warn Prince Kai about a plot to kill him, she realizes that she must scrape together an outfit to get into the ball. She recovers the dress that belonged to her late stepsister Peony and steals a set of boots from her other stepsister Pearl in order to go. Rather than waiting for someone to provide her with clothes, Cinder finds a way to go to the ball herself, further stressing that resourcefulness is more important than luck.

Cinder is also able to go to the ball because of her kindness: Prince Kai grows friendly with Cinder over the book, and her kindness towards him prompts him to ask her to the ball. When Prince Kai hires Cinder to fix his android, Nainsi, she and Kai get to know each other as he visits her mechanic's booth and she visits the palace. Noticing that Cinder always wears gloves (though he doesn't know they are to hide her cyborg hand) Kai asks her to the ball and gives her a beautiful set of silk gloves in payment for her kindness. The gloves, too, become critical for Cinder to attend the ball, so that she isn't forced to wear her dirty mechanic's gloves and risks being turned away. In this way, her kindness and hard work for Kai is rewarded with yet another piece of the outfit she needs to attend the ball. When Cinder arrives at the ball, the guards notice that she is somewhat disheveled, particularly because Peony's dress is quite wrinkled, and Cinder had to trek through the mud after crashing her car on the way to the ball. At first, the guards seem determined to turn Cinder away, until they realize that her name is on the list as a personal guest of Prince Kai. Again, only through her own kindness and perseverance—rather than any

luck or magic—is Cinder able to get to the ball.

The changes between the original folktale and *Cinder* are perhaps best encapsulated by the parallel symbols of Cinderella's slipper and **Cinder's foot**. In "Cinderella," the protagonist's slipper represents luck—but in *Cinder*, the protagonist's prosthetic foot represents resourcefulness and hard work. As punishment for buying a brand-new, expensive prosthetic foot, Cinder's stepmother Adri takes Cinder's foot away from her. As a result, in order to go to the ball, Cinder must reattach her old prosthetic foot, which is extremely small and rusted. At the end of the ball, when Cinder tries to run away from Queen Levana's wrath, this mechanical foot completely severs from her calf—analogous to Cinderella's slipper being left behind in the folktale. But what these two symbols represent is completely different: for Cinderella, the slipper was evidence of her luck in receiving the Fairy Godmother's help, allowing her to illustrate her true value and help the prince find her. But in *Cinder*, Cinder's foot symbolizes her resourcefulness and perseverance in the face of difficult situations. In reinterpreting the plot points that enable Cinder to go to the ball to center on hard work, resourcefulness, and kindness, and by adapting the central symbol of "Cinderella" in turn, the novel emphasizes the importance of developing these qualities rather than relying on sheer luck or magic.



SYMBOLS

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



MIRRORS

Mirrors symbolize various characters' struggles to accept their true identities. Mirrors first appear in the book when Cinder is at the letumosis research lab and sees her reflection in a giant mirror on the wall. While she often tries to hide her cyborg parts, they are exposed in the enormous mirror. This moment parallels Cinder's eventual realization that her cyborg identity is an intrinsic part of her and something to be ashamed of. Her inability to hide from her own reflection—and thus from being a cyborg—also foreshadows the fact that others will learn the truth about her identity by the end of the novel.

Mirrors are also fraught objects for the Lunars: they do not like to see themselves in mirrors because their glamour (the Lunars' ability to telepathically control others) doesn't translate in them. Lunars like Queen Levana and Sybil Mira use their glamour to make themselves appear beautiful and charming, but this doesn't apply to their reflections. As Dr. Erland mentions, "mirrors have an uncanny way of telling the truth"—and for people who rely on manipulation of their image and others' perception of it, mirrors become a source of

weakness and shame about who they are beneath their façade. This is why Prince Kai removes all mirrors from the palace when Queen Levana visits: she insists on keeping up her false image, showing her resistance to the truth. Then, when a servant unknowingly gives a mirror to Levana, she and Sybil Mira use this infraction to severely punish the servant by controlling the woman's actions and almost forcing her put her own eye out. In this way, mirrors represent the characters' inability to hide who they really are: even Levana and Sybil Mira, who refuse to look in the mirror, reveal their true colors when confronted with the possibility of self-reflection.




CINDER'S MECHANICAL FOOT

Cinder's mechanical foot represents her resourcefulness and perseverance in the face of difficult circumstances. In the book's opening passage, Cinder replaces her small, rusty, 11-year-old mechanical foot with an expensive new prosthetic. But at the end of the novel, when Adri realizes that Cinder purchased this foot without her knowing, Adri takes the prosthetic away from her. As a result, in order to go to the ball, Cinder must reattach her old prosthetic foot, which is very uncomfortable—and her willingness to do so represents her resourcefulness and unyielding determination. At the end of the ball, as Cinder flees from Queen Levana, the foot severs from Cinder's calf—calling back to the classic fairy tale “Cinderella” that *Cinder* is based on, in which Cinderella's glass slipper falls off. But these two symbols represent two different ideas: in the original, the fairy godmother gave Cinderella the slipper, equating it with luck and magic. However, Cinder had to overcome the obstacle of her foot herself in order to go to the ball, which instead emphasizes the importance of ingenuity and grit.

Related Characters: Cinder/Princess Selene, Prince Kai (speaker), Sunto, Chang Sacha

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 10

Explanation and Analysis

When Prince Kai visits Cinder's mechanic booth for the first time, he is surprised that she's known as “the best mechanic” in the city at such a young age. Cinder's thoughts in response reveal that she's good at her job because she's a cyborg, a human who also has mechanical or robotic body parts. In Cinder's case, this means that she has a prosthetic foot, a prosthetic hand, and a mechanical brain interface—and maintaining these body parts is what has helped her become a skilled mechanic.

Cinder's fear of people finding out that she's a cyborg exposes the widespread prejudice against cyborgs throughout New Beijing (and throughout the Earth of the novel in general). Earlier in the chapter, as she notes here, Chang Sacha (a baker at the market where Cinder's mechanic shop is located) pulled her son Sunto away from Cinder's booth, because she views Cinder as subhuman. This highlights how, when people discover that Cinder is a cyborg, they immediately treat her as lesser based on their stereotypes of cyborgs as inferior and other. But Cinder also exposes that their biases are just that—unfounded stereotypes. Those who don't know she is a cyborg, like Kai, treat her with the same respect that they would anyone else. Thus, there is nothing inherent in a cyborg that warrants lesser treatment; instead, the discrimination is simply based on ignorance.

Cinder's exchange with Kai also highlights that sometimes, the differences that cause people to be discriminated against are the very things that make them special or capable. Even though Cinder is a cyborg and is thought of as less than human, it is this fact that enabled her to become a skilled mechanic, as she has spent years fixing up her own prosthetics and brain interface. Thus, not only does being a cyborg give her a remarkable ability, but it is also one that benefits the whole of society, because it enables her to fix things for other people. Thus, the book not only suggests that discrimination is unwarranted, but that people should be celebrated for their differences.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Feiwel and Friends edition of *Cinder* published in 2012.

Chapter 1 Quotes

☞ “They say you're the best mechanic in New Beijing. I was expecting an old man.”



“Do they?” she murmured.


He wasn't the first to voice surprise. Most of her customers couldn't fathom how a teenage girl could be the best mechanic in the city, and she never broadcast the reason for her talent. The fewer people who knew she was cyborg, the better. She was sure she'd go mad if *all* the market shopkeepers looked at her with the same disdain as Chang Sacha did.

Chapter 2 Quotes

☝ Irritation hardened in Cinder's gut. She might have pointed out that Pearl and Peony could have been given ready-made rather than custom dresses in order to budget for Cinder's as well. She might have pointed out that they would only wear their dresses one time too. She might have pointed out that, as she was the one doing the work, the money should have been hers to spend as she saw fit. But all arguments would come to nothing. Legally, Cinder belonged to Adri as much as the household android and so too did her money, her few possessions, even the new foot she'd just attached. Adri loved to remind her of that.

Related Characters: Iko, Peony, Pearl, Adri, Cinder/Princess Selene

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 24

Explanation and Analysis


When Cinder returns from the market to find her stepsisters Pearl and Peony being fitted for custom dresses for the upcoming ball, Adri tells her that they can't afford a dress for Cinder because they have to buy a magbelt (a magnetic part) for their hover (hovering vehicles that are the main form of transportation in the novel). This passage introduces the power imbalance between Adri and Cinder, and how cruelly Adri treats Cinder as a result. Cinder legally belongs to Adri as her adoptive child—but where Adri's power as the head of household should endow her with the responsibility to take care of Cinder, instead it enables her to take advantage of her by taking the money Cinder earns. It's implied that, because Cinder is a cyborg (a human with robotic body parts), she has fewer legal rights than a non-cyborg person would, because cyborgs are discriminated against in the world of the novel. And this imbalance is why Adri is able to lay claim to everything Cinder owns: "her money, her new possessions, even the new foot she just attached."

This dynamic illustrates how positions of power have the potential to make people greedy and even more power-hungry—even to the point of destroying the love and trust in a family, as Adri does. While Cinder thinks that since she "was the one doing the work, the money should have been hers to spend as she saw fit." That is, because Cinder is the breadwinner of the family, she should be the one in charge of the finances. But instead, Adri takes advantage of

Cinder's low social status, forcing her to work and but not giving her access to the money she's earned. At the same time, Adri pampers her other daughters at Cinder's expense. The passage's mention of the fact that Adri technically owns Adri's foot also foreshadows the fact that Adri will take Cinder's new prosthetic foot from her, forcing her to reattach her old, rusty mechanical foot instead. The latter will become a symbol of Cinder's resourcefulness and perseverance in the face of Adri's cruelty.

☝ The cyborg draft had been started by some royal research team a year ago. Every morning, a new ID number was drawn from the pool of so many thousand cyborgs who resided in the Eastern Commonwealth. Subjects had been carted in from provinces as far-reaching as Mumbai and Singapore to act as guinea pigs for the antidote testing. It was made out to be some sort of honor, giving your life for the good of humanity, but it was really just a reminder that cyborgs were not like everyone else. Many of them had been given a second chance at life by the generous hand of scientists and therefore owed their very existence to those who had created them. They were lucky to have lived this long, many thought. It's only right that they should be the first to give up their lives in search for the cure.

Related Characters: Pearl, Emperor Rikan, Prince Kai, Cinder/Princess Selene

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 28

Explanation and Analysis

When Prince Kai gives a press conference about his father, Emperor Rikan's, declining health as he suffers from letumosis (a contagious disease), Pearl suggests that Cinder volunteer for cyborg plague testing. This quote's exposition about the cyborg draft reveals that cyborgs face discrimination not only on an individual level—as Cinder has already experienced at the market—but also on an institutional level. Discrimination against cyborgs is essentially sanctioned by the government, as they deem cyborgs to be more expendable than non-cyborg people and therefore use them as involuntary test subjects for a letumosis antidote.



However, even the cyborg draft reinforces the link between heroism and doing something for the good of society: as Cinder notes, the draft is made out to be a heroic act of self-sacrifice. However, the fact that Cinder uses the word "they"—"they were lucky to have lived this long, many

thought”—rather than “we” implies that Cinder does not view herself as someone to be sacrificed. Even though it may be honorable, it is an unjust sacrifice because the cyborgs are forced into it, while non-cyborg humans are not. It is easy to discriminate against a group that most people have no relation to—whereas those like Cinder, who are directly affected by these kinds of policies, feel that injustice keenly.

Chapter 4 Quotes

☝☝ Lunars were a society that had evolved from an Earthen moon colony centuries ago, but they weren't human anymore. People said Lunars could alter a person's brain—make you see things you shouldn't see, feel things you shouldn't feel, do things you didn't want to do. Their unnatural power had made them a greedy and violent race, and Queen Levana was the worst of all of them.

Related Characters: Dr. Erland, Queen Levana, Prince Kai, Peony, Cinder/Princess Selene

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 43

Explanation and Analysis

When Peony mentions a rumor that Prince Kai (the prince of the Eastern Commonwealth, the nation on Earth where they live) is going to marry Queen Levana (the leader of Luna, the society on the moon), Cinder immediately denies it. Here, she provides some background information on Queen Levana and the Lunars (the citizens who live on the moon). First, the passage reinforces the connection between power and greed: because Lunars like Queen Levana have the unique ability to “alter a person's brain” and thus control those around them, it makes them even more greedy and power-hungry. And because Queen Levana is in a position of power, she has the greatest opportunity to abuse this power in order to further her own influence.

While Cinder's low opinion of the Lunars may be justified, it also plays into harmful stereotypes and discrimination. Even though Cinder faces discrimination herself as a cyborg (a human with robotic body parts), she still buys into stereotypes about Lunars and paints them with a broad brush, describing them as “a greedy and violent race.” This reinforces the idea that people who do not belong to a particular group find it easier to discriminate against those they view as other. Cinder will eventually meet Lunars who do not fit this stereotype, like Dr. Erland—and she will even

learn that she is Lunar herself. But in this moment, she chooses to view the Lunars as a monolith rather than understanding that they are still individuals. In this way, she's treating others with the same prejudice that she suffers as a cyborg. This is particularly ironic given that, at the end of the novel, it's revealed that Cinder is actually Lunar—she's Princess Selene, Queen Levana's niece. And given that Cinder doesn't have any of the negative qualities she thinks are inherent to Lunar people, it's clear that these stereotypes are largely baseless.

☝☝ “I'm not sure I would label it a ‘survivor,’” said Iko, her sensor darkening with disgust. “It looks more like a rotting pumpkin.”

Cinder shut the hood with a bang, sending an impressive dust cloud over the android. “What was that about having a fantastic imagination? With some attention and a good cleaning, it could be restored to its former glory.”

Related Characters: Cinder/Princess Selene, Iko (speaker), Adri, Peony

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 47

Explanation and Analysis

When Iko, Cinder, and Peony are scavenging for parts in a junkyard, Cinder uncovers an old gasoline car that hasn't been used in over a century. Iko's comparison of the car to a “rotting pumpkin” is more than just a simile for the car's orange hue—it's also a reference to the original folktale of “Cinderella” that *Cinder* is based on, in which the fairy godmother transforms a pumpkin into a carriage so that Cinderella can travel to the ball.

However, while the original protagonist of “Cinderella” relied on luck and magic to be able to get to the ball, here Cinder must repair the car herself. This speaks to the importance of resourcefulness and self-sufficiency rather than relying on others for help or leaving things up to chance. Over the course of the next several weeks, Cinder works tirelessly to fix up the vehicle—first, to try and make her escape from her stepmother Adri, and then to be able to go to the ball. She even notes here that what the car really needs is “some attention and a good cleaning.” It is Cinder's resourcefulness and hard work on the car that ensures her success, not the happenstance of a magical fairy godmother.

Chapter 12 Quotes

☝☝ “No, we’re talking about her daughter. Kai, the entire bloodline, every last one of them has been greedy, violent, corrupted by their own power. It’s in their blood. Believe me when I say that Princess Selene, even if she were alive, would be no better.”

Kai realized his arms were aching from squeezing them so hard, his skin gone white around his fingertips. “She can’t very well be worse,” he said. “And who knows? If the rumors are right, and she has been on Earth all this time, maybe she would be different. Maybe she would be sympathetic to us.”

Related Characters: Prince Kai, Konn Torin (speaker), Queen Levana, Cinder/Princess Selene, Emperor Rikan

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 114

Explanation and Analysis

Kai and Torin discuss what to do about Queen Levana, the Lunar queen, as Kai takes up the peace negotiations after Emperor Rikan dies of letumosis. Kai suggests that they instead try to find Princess Selene, Queen Levana’s daughter, because there are rumors that she is still alive. But Torin disagrees, suggesting that “the entire bloodline” is “greedy, violent, and corrupted by their own power.” Much like Cinder in Book 1, Chapter 4, Torin is reinforcing Earthen stereotypes about the Lunars, suggesting that the entire Lunar royal family is inherently evil. And while readers come to find out that Queen Levana’s position of power does indeed make her “greedy” and “violent,” Torin is perhaps unfairly writing off the “entire bloodline” because of her preexisting bias against the Lunar people.

Yet Kai doesn’t fully buy into these stereotypes, holding out hope that if Princess Selene is alive, “maybe she would be different.” Kai wants to consider every possible option that could help him protect his citizens, and his instinct turns out to be true: at the end of the book, it’s revealed that Cinder is in fact Princess Selene. She does not embody any stereotypical Lunar traits, suggesting that discrimination is often unfounded, because there are many individuals who do not fit into stereotypes.

Moreover, this quote introduces the idea that secrecy and manipulation are often self-defeating. Keeping Cinder hidden as Princess Selene, even though it was done for her own protection, is now causing political problems between Earth and Luna. If Kai knew from the beginning that Cinder is Princess Selene, the issues at hand could be resolved far more easily—but now, they are all in greater danger as he tries to search for her and end the conflict between Earth

and Luna once and for all.

Chapter 15 Quotes

☝☝ And maybe she’d been right to do it. Maybe it was Cinder’s duty as a cyborg to sacrifice herself so all the normal humans could be cured. Maybe it did make sense to use the ones who had already been tampered with. But Cinder knew she would never forgive Adri for it. The woman was supposed to be the one to protect her, to help her. If Adri and Pearl were her only family left, she would be better off alone.

Related Characters: Cinder/Princess Selene (speaker), Peony, Adri

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 131

Explanation and Analysis

When Cinder returns from the letumosis research lab, she confronts Adri about volunteering her for the research even though she knew that this would likely kill Cinder. This situation highlights Adri’s abuse of power in their relationship: she is meant to care for Cinder as a mother figure and as the head of the household. But instead, she takes advantage of her responsibility and power and allows greed to take hold, to the point that she was willing to sacrifice Cinder for the sake of getting paid by the government (in exchange for offering up Cinder for testing). Rather than focusing on keeping Cinder safe, she instead focuses on herself to the point that she’s willing to destroy Cinder. This dynamic shows how power, even on a relatively small scale, can corrupt a person—in this case, it destroys the love and trust that is meant to exist in a family.

The passage also shows that even though Cinder understands Adri’s actions are despicable, she still has a tendency to sacrifice herself for the good of others. Her willingness to risk her own health could benefit society as a whole, as the research she’s participating in could lead to an antidote for letumosis, the plague that’s wreaking havoc on Earth. In this way, bravery and self-sacrifice are shown to be virtuous qualities, since putting others’ needs above one’s own could help countless people.

Lastly, this quote demonstrates how deeply Cinder has internalized the way other people discriminate against her for being a cyborg. She thinks that “Maybe it was [her] duty as a cyborg to sacrifice herself so all the normal humans could be cured.” Even though she is a capable, kind person, she feels that her life is inherently worth less than a non-

cyborg person's.


Chapter 19 Quotes


☞ “It is why Queen Levana is so striking to look at. Some talented Lunars, such as the queen, keep their glamour up all the time. But just as she cannot trick the netscreens, neither can she trick a mirror.”

“So they don't like mirrors because they don't want to see themselves?”

“Vanity is a factor but it is more a question of control. It is easier to trick others into perceiving you as beautiful if you can convince yourself you are beautiful. But mirrors have an uncanny way of telling the truth.”

Related Characters: Cinder/Princess Selene, Dr. Erland (speaker), Prince Kai, Sybil Mira, Queen Levana

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 172

Explanation and Analysis

When Cinder visits Dr. Erland a second time, she starts to ask questions about Lunars, having learned that the Lunar Queen Levana will soon visit Earth. Dr. Erland's response speaks to the way Lunars are able to use their glamour (the ability to telepathically control people) to change people's opinions of them. For this reason, Lunars don't like mirrors, as glamour doesn't translate in reflections. As Dr. Erland describes here, mirrors are associated with introspection as well as truth. Lunars, who keep up a façade for others as well as themselves, avoid mirrors, thus emphasizing how the Lunars obscure the truth about themselves in order to keep up a distorted image in front of others.

But it is this very concept—of keeping up their glamour all the time—that makes others extremely skeptical of the Lunars, as people under their control know that they are being manipulated and lied to. Thus, the quote emphasizes how manipulation and secrecy is self-defeating, because it can so often be spotted and have the opposite effect that the deceptive person intended. Later, Prince Kai observes the detrimental effects of showing Queen Levana a mirror—Sybil Mira almost forces the servant who brought the mirror to put her own eye out as punishment—reinforcing the extreme lengths to which they will go to keep up that secrecy. Their desperation to keep up a beautiful image of themselves only reveals the ugliness of


their characters.

Chapter 20 Quotes

☞ She was indeed beautiful, as if someone had taken the scientific measurements of perfection and used them to mold a single ideal specimen. Her face was slightly heart-shaped, with high cheekbones barely flushed. Auburn hair fell in silken ringlets to her waist and her unblemished ivory skin shimmered like mother-of-pearl in the sunshine. Her lips were red red red, looking like she'd just drunk a pint of blood.

A chill shook Kai from the inside out. She was unnatural.

Related Characters: Cinder/Princess Selene, Prince Kai, Queen Levana

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 183

Explanation and Analysis

When Queen Levana arrives on Earth, Prince Kai sees her in person for the first time. His description of her emphasizes her beauty, but there's a level of irony to his observations: the book has established several times that this is not Queen Levana's true appearance. Instead, it is the appearance that she chooses to project for others using her glamour (the Lunar ability to telepathically control other people's perceptions of them). Thus, the passage takes on a different tone, because readers know that her beauty is an illusion. The passage hints at this: while it confirms her often-spoken-of beauty, it also illustrates how perfection is actually “unsettling,” giving Levana the opposite effect of what she wants.

The description of her lips as looking like she's been drinking a pint of blood highlights her underlying cruelty and violence, indicating that there are sinister motivations lurking beneath her beauty. This provides an interesting contrast with a cyborg like Cinder, who also has an altered body (albeit mechanically rather than psychologically), but whose human parts are naturally beautiful—Kai calls her “pretty” only a few chapters earlier. All in all, the passage suggests that Levana's superficial manipulation makes Kai more distrustful than if she had left her appearance alone.

Chapter 23 Quotes

“It is a most useful trick,” said Sybil, sitting on the edge of the chaise lounge by the holographic fire. “Particularly when dealing with unruly citizens, which are never tolerated on Luna.” “I’ve heard that when citizens are unruly, there’s usually a good reason for it,” said Kai. Torin flashed him a warning frown, but he ignored it. “And brainwashing doesn’t exactly seem like the proper solution.”

Sybil folded her hands politely in her lap. “*Proper* is such a subjective word. This solution is *effective*, and that can hardly be argued with.”

Related Characters: Prince Kai, Sybil Mira (speaker), Konn Torin, Queen Levana

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 207

Explanation and Analysis

After Queen Levana quiets a protesting crowd by brainwashing them, Kai is aghast. This exchange between him and Levana’s advisor Sybil Mira demonstrates the differing political philosophies between them: Queen Levana is a person in power, but rather than take care of those under her rule, instead controls her subjects through manipulation. This is true not only on Luna, as Sybil Mira implies, but also on Earth—and Levana’s actions hint at how she would rule there if she and Kai married. Sybil’s linguistic distinctions illustrate that she has no desire to find a “proper” solution—one that works for the good of the people. Instead, she aims for something “effective,” implying that all the Lunars care about is quelling resistance without actually dealing with the source of the unrest. Once again, they are only interested in their own power, even at the cost of their citizens’ freedom or well-being.

Kai provides a contrast to Sybil and Levana: while he is also in a position of power, he doesn’t take advantage of this influence. He recognizes the importance of caring for the people and listening to their needs, sacrificing his own comfort and control for the good of society. Thus, the book illustrates how those who are self-sacrificing and empathetic are virtuous because they work on behalf of the people, as opposed to those who are willing to destroy societies for their own greed.

Levana folded her hands in her lap. “That vial is your gift. I hope you will find it helpful, young prince. I believe it is in both of our interests to rid your planet of this disease. My scientists could have thousands of dosages prepared by month’s end. However, such an undertaking, coupled with six years’ worth of work and resources, has put quite a strain on my own country, and so I’m sure you’ll understand the need for compensation. That will require further negotiations.”

Kai’s lungs constricted. “You would withhold this? When so many are dying?” It was a stupid question. She’d already withheld it long enough—what was it to her if more Earthens suffered in the meantime?

Related Characters: Prince Kai, Queen Levana (speaker), Emperor Rikan

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 207

Explanation and Analysis

When Levana visits Earth, she gives Kai one dose of the antidote for letumosis, which she explains that her researchers have just discovered. This revelation illustrates how Levana uses power for further political advantage and greed: first, she could have saved Kai’s father, Emperor Rikan’s, life with the antidote, but she felt that she would have greater bargaining success with Kai. Thus, she let Rikan die—and in doing so, risked massive political upheaval on Earth—simply for her own gain. In addition, she shows that she is uninterested in doing what is right and helping the Earthens overcome letumosis; instead, she only seeks greater wealth and power as she uses the cure as a bargaining chip between her and Kai.

Again, Kai impulses are opposite to Levana’s. First, he is aghast at her greed and all-consuming thirst for power. At the same time, his virtue shines through because he is willing to put others above himself, even if she isn’t. Levana is taking advantage of the fact that Kai acts for the good of society—which is why after this conversation, he seriously considers marrying Levana simply to save his citizens from letumosis and an impending war. Even though he understandably despises her for the way she betrayed him and his people, he still focuses on the good of society as a whole rather than his own needs.

Chapter 24 Quotes

☛ Instead of kissing her, he whispered, “Imagine there was a cure, but finding it would cost you everything. It would completely ruin your life. What would you do?”

The warm air enclosed her. So close, she could catch a faint soapy smell coming from him.

His eyes bored into hers, waiting, a tinge desperate.

Cinder wet her mouth. “Ruin my life to save a million others? It’s not much of a choice.”

His lips parted—she had no choice but to look at them and then immediately back into his eyes. She could almost count the black lashes around them. But then a sadness filtered into his gaze.

“You’re right. There’s no real choice.”

Related Characters: Cinder/Princess Selene, Prince Kai (speaker), Peony, Dr. Erland, Nainsi, Queen Levana

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 223

Explanation and Analysis

After Cinder returns Kai’s android Nainsi to him, he asks her advice about dealing with Queen Levana, who offered a cure for letumosis in exchange for marrying him. Here, he grapples with that decision, and their exchange affirms how both Kai and Cinder are virtuous because they are willing to put their own well-being at risk for the potential to help many others. Cinder has already done so in continuing to volunteer for the letumosis research (which is painful and dangerous) in the hopes of helping those afflicted, like her stepsister Peony. She even makes it explicit here that she would put the good of the society above herself in almost any scenario.

And while Kai at first asks for Cinder’s advice because of his doubt, he ultimately makes the same choice. He recognizes that the only solution is to “ruin his life” (that is, to marry Levana) in order to help those suffering from letumosis. And he follows through on this promise: even after finding out from Cinder that Levana intends to kill him after they wed, Kai wants to go through with the marriage to help his citizens. Like Cinder, Kai understands the importance of putting the people he is meant to serve ahead of himself, and it is this bravery and self-sacrifice for the good of society that proves his virtue and trustworthiness as a leader.

Chapter 25 Quotes



☛ Squinting, she juttied a finger at the doctor. “You *did* use your mind control on me. When we met. You...you brainwashed me, just like the queen. You made me trust you.”

“Be fair. You were attacking me with a wrench.”

Her anger wavered.

Dr. Erland opened his palms to her, “I assure you, Miss Linh, in the twelve years that I have been on Earth, I have not abused the gift once, and I am paying the price for that decision every day. My mental stability, my psychological health, my very senses are failing me because I refuse to manipulate the thoughts and feelings of those around me. Not all Lunars can be trusted—I know that as well as anyone—but you can trust me.”

Related Characters: Cinder/Princess Selene, Dr. Erland (speaker), Prince Kai, Queen Levana

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 241-242

Explanation and Analysis

When Cinder discovers that Dr. Erland is a Lunar fugitive, she begins to lose her trust in him because he hasn’t been open with her about who he is. This touches first on the self-defeating nature of secrecy and manipulation. Cinder knows that not all Lunars are untrustworthy, particularly after she found out that she herself is Lunar. And yet the fact that Dr. Erland lied and manipulated her when they first met makes her even more skeptical than if he had not lied or used his glamour (the Lunar ability to telepathically control people) on her at all. Even though it was for his own protection, it ends up making Cinder feel more betrayed than she would have otherwise.

Dr. Erland’s response, however, affirms his selflessness and bravery. Like Cinder, he puts his own health at risk for the good of society: because he doesn’t use his gift, he experiences debilitating mental effects. But he does so in order to live on Earth and hide his identity as he tries to help Prince Kai and the other Earthens find a cure for letumosis. This is particularly notable because Dr. Erland himself is immune to letumosis, so his actions are purely selfless. Despite his lies and manipulation, then, Dr. Erland’s intentions are pure—he’s acting for the good of society, which aligns him with the virtuous Cinder and Kai.

“Because she was a shell.” He picked his hat off the desk and analyzed it while he spoke, his fingers tracing the herringbone pattern. “I’d agreed with the laws in the past, thought the shells were dangerous. That our society would fall apart if they were allowed to live. But not my little girl.” An ironic smile twisted up his lips. “After she was born, I wanted to run away, to bring her to Earth, but my wife was even more devoted to Her Majesty than I had been. She wanted nothing to do with the child. And so my little Crescent Moon was taken away, like all the others. He stuffed the hat back onto his head and squinted up at Cinder. “She would be about your age now.”

Related Characters: Dr. Erland (speaker), Queen Levana, Cinder/Princess Selene

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 245

Explanation and Analysis

As Dr. Erland explains his own backstory, he confesses to Cinder that he fled Luna because Queen Levana killed his daughter. First, the quote elaborates on Queen Levana’s cruelty: since she cannot control a shell like Crescent Moon with her “gift” (the Lunar ability to telepathically control people), she views them as a threat to her regime because she relies so heavily on manipulation to rule. This illustrates how power can breed cruelty and greed, and it shows the lengths to which Levana will go—even killing innocent children—to maintain her power.

This passage also adds yet another layer of discrimination to the story, as Dr. Erland emphasizes how easy it is to discriminate against others when a person is not affected directly. Because Dr. Erland was a part of the majority of Lunars—those who have the gift—he agreed with oppressive laws and was unconcerned by them. But when his daughter was the one affected, he saw their injustice much more clearly. It is easy for a majority group to victimize people who are already weak because they are not affected by discrimination. But when someone identifies with a minority, like Dr. Erland with his daughter, or Cinder as a cyborg, the injustice becomes clear.

Chapter 32 Quotes

Levana knew he had been searching for Princess Selene. She would kill him. She would take over the Commonwealth. She would wage war on...on the whole planet.

She grasped her head as the world spun around her.



She had to warn him. She couldn’t let him make the announcement.


She could send him a comm, but what were the chances he was checking them during the ball?

The ball.

Cinder peered down at her drab clothes. Her empty ankle. Peony’s dress. The old foot that Iko had saved. The silk gloves. Her head bobbed before she knew what she was agreeing to, and she used the shelves to pull herself to standing. “I’ll go,” she muttered, “I’ll find him.”

Related Characters: Cinder/Princess Selene (speaker), Adri, Peony, Iko, Queen Levana, Prince Kai

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 323

Explanation and Analysis

After Cinder learns that Queen Levana is planning to kill Kai after they marry, Cinder decides to go to the ball to warn him, as she knows that he is likely going to announce his engagement to Levana there. First, this unhesitating resolution confirms Cinder’s selflessness and bravery: Queen Levana will likely try to kill her at the ball, because Cinder is a Lunar fugitive and is therefore a threat to the Lunar queen’s goal of manipulating Earthens. Cinder was also planning to escape New Beijing in the car she fixed up that evening, and going to the ball will mean putting that off and having to endure more cruelty from her stepmother Adri. Yet she does it all because she wants to save Kai’s life, and as she emphasizes here, because she wants to save Earth from Levana’s wrath. In ignoring her own desires and putting herself at risk, Cinder could potentially save society as a whole—and with this, the book emphasizes the immense value of courage and selflessness.

Additionally, unlike the original “Cinderella” story on which the novel is based, Cinder does not have a fairy godmother to make all of her wishes come true and get her to the ball. Instead, Cinder has to rely on her own hard work, resourcefulness, and kindness. Only through her hard work on the car is she able to get to the ball in the first place. Only through her ingenuity does she scrounge together her old

mechanical foot and Peony's dress so that she can attend. And only because of her kindness to Kai does she have an invitation to the ball and the gift of his gloves to cover up her prosthetic hand. She can only go to the ball because of her own virtues, which suggests that resourcefulness and kindness—not mere luck—are necessary to achieve one's goals.


Chapter 35 Quotes

☛ Dropping his hand, Kai met Konn Torin's gaze, his eyes hollow. "I know," he said. "I will do what is best for them."

Cinder gathered up the material of her skirt in both hands, hope stirring inside of her. He understood her warnings. He understood the mistake he would be making if he agreed to marry Levana. She had succeeded.

But then he turned toward her, and the hope shattered at seeing the helplessness etched in deep lines across his brow. "Thank you for warning me, Cinder. At least I won't be going into this blindly."

Related Characters: Prince Kai (speaker), Cinder/Princess Selene, Queen Levana, Konn Torin

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 347

Explanation and Analysis

When Cinder tells Kai about Levana's plot to kill him after their marriage, he thanks her for warning her but does not change his mind about marrying the queen. This shows Kai's immense growth over the course of the novel and underscores both his selflessness and bravery: at the beginning of the book, Kai was insistent that he would never marry Levana. But here, even faced with the possibility of his death in doing so, he chooses to marry her.

Kai does this, as he suggests here, because he wants to do what is best for his people—echoing words that he spoke at the coronation earlier that day. He is trying to make his decisions for the good of society as a whole. Even though he has helplessness and worry, as Cinder notes here, he also carries immense bravery and self-sacrifice in making this choice. The Prince exhibits a self-sacrificing impulse to put his country over himself, qualities that mark him as a true and just leader.

Chapter 36 Quotes


☛ On the fifth step, she heard the bolts snap. The wires tore loose, like tendons stretched to the max. She felt the loss of power at the base of her calf, sending a blinding warning signal up to her brain.

She fell, screaming, and tried to block her fall with her left hand. A shock of pain jolted up her shoulder and into her spine. Metal clattered against stone as she crashed down to the gravel pathway. [...]

His eyes drunk her in—a gleam of metal fingers, the wires sparking at the end of her battered metal leg. His jaw fell, and he looked momentarily as if he might be sick.

Related Characters: Adri, Queen Levana, Prince Kai, Cinder/Princess Selene

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 365-366

Explanation and Analysis

As Cinder tries to escape Queen Levana's guards and flies down the stairs, her small, rusted foot detaches from her calf. This is an important symbolic moment, as it is an analogue to the original "Cinderella" story, wherein Cinderella loses her glass slipper as she runs away from leave the ball. The two symbols, however, accomplish different things: Cinderella obtained her slipper via the Fairy Godmother's magic, and she also loses it by chance. Cinder, however, is forced to use this old, battered foot because her stepmother Adri selfishly and cruelly took away her new one. This foot, therefore, is a testament to her perseverance in the face of hardship.

There are some similarities between the two symbols, however. In both cases, the prince discovers an aspect of the protagonist's identity in recovering the slipper or foot. In the original tale, Prince Charming is able to find Cinderella using her slipper, and here Kai discovers that Cinder is a cyborg because of her metal foot. Yet the differences in endings are also crucial: whereas Cinderella lives happily ever after with Prince Charming, this moment marks the end of Cinder and Kai's friendship. Kai is disgusted when he sees her mechanical foot, which implies that even Cinder's resourcefulness and kindness cannot always save her. Whereas the original Cinderella is portrayed as an entirely virtuous character, Cinder is flawed in that she hid her cyborg identity from Kai—and it's this deception that ends up running their relationship. With this,

the novel implies that happy fairy tale endings aren't particularly realistic; instead, people's shortcomings tend to catch up with them in the end.

exchange hammers home the idea that lying and manipulating others, even with good intentions, can cause more harm than good.

☝ “Was it all an illusion?” he asked.


Pain lanced through her chest, squeezing the air out of her. “Kai?”


“Was it all in my head? A Lunar trick?”

Her stomach twisted. “No.” She shook her head, fervently. How to explain that she hadn't had the gift before? That she couldn't have used it against him? “I would never lie—”

The words faded. She had lied. Everything he knew about her had been a lie.

Related Characters: Cinder/Princess Selene, Prince Kai (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 367

Explanation and Analysis

After Cinder's foot detaches and Kai discovers that she is a cyborg, he confronts her about lying to him. Their exchange demonstrates the true cost of Cinder hiding her identity. She did so because she worried about the bias she would face if she told Kai that she's a cyborg, given that Earthens tend to view cyborgs as subhuman and therefore inferiors. This assumption isn't entirely unfounded, as Kai has a difficult time looking at her here and even calls her image “painful” later. Thus, her secrecy was for her own protection, trying to avoid this exact outcome.

And yet, because Kai *does* find out about her identity as both a cyborg and a Lunar, his trust is completely betrayed—even more so than if Cinder had been open about her identity. While he does seem to harbor some bias against cyborgs, he appears even more hurt by the idea that Cinder lied and manipulated him. This passage suggests that Kai doesn't only mean that Cinder manipulated her image and hid her identity, but that she might have also controlled him and manipulated his feelings for her. (Kai also just found out that Cinder is a Lunar, meaning that she has the “gift” of being able to telepathically control people.) And because Cinder lied about so many things during their exchanges up to this point, she can't convince him that their feelings for each other are legitimate. In this way, their

Chapter 38 Quotes

☝ Releasing the new prosthesis, Cinder covered her ears and buried her face against her knee. The draft. All those cyborgs. So many people convinced that it was the right thing. That it was better than humans. Once a science project, always a science project.

And he'd only wanted to find her.

Related Characters: Prince Kai, Queen Levana, Dr. Erland, Cinder/Princess Selene

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 382

Explanation and Analysis

When Dr. Erland visits Cinder in prison, he reveals that she is Princess Selene, Queen Levana's long-lost niece—and Cinder realizes that he only set drafted cyborgs for dangerous medical research in order to find her. This is another important example of how manipulation and secrecy can cause widespread harm. Dr. Erland manipulates the Eastern Commonwealth's policies and even sanctions government discrimination of cyborgs purely for the purpose of finding Cinder. Cinder notes how this led to even more harm: the policies justified discrimination on an individual level, as people assumed that because the government classified cyborgs as subhuman, they could treat cyborgs poorly as well.

The book does provide some justification for Dr. Erland's actions, as only in finding Princess Selene could Cinder and Kai have any hope of overthrowing Queen Levana and bringing peace and justice to both Luna and Earth. In this way, there is some argument to be made that the cyborg draft helped society as a whole. And yet, here Cinder questions the value of these actions when they also caused widespread harm to an already vulnerable population. Again, the book suggests that even manipulation undertaken with good intentions isn't justifiable, as it often causes more harm than good.

●● If she didn't try to stop Levana, what would happen to Kai? Though she tried to block out the question, it continued to plague her, echoing in her thoughts. Maybe Dr. Erland was right. Maybe she had to run. Maybe she had to try.

She felt for the prosthetic limbs in her lap and wrapped her hands around them. Lifting her head, she looked up at the grate in the prison door. The guard had never closed it.

A tingle passed down her spine. A strange new electricity was thrumming beneath her skin, telling her she wasn't just a cyborg anymore. She was Lunar now. She could make people see things that weren't there. Feel things they shouldn't feel. Do things they didn't mean to do.

Related Characters: Queen Levana, Prince Kai, Dr. Erland, Cinder/Princess Selene

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 386

Explanation and Analysis

After Dr. Erland visits Cinder in prison, she contemplates what to do next—she's not sure that she can overthrow Levana as queen, as Dr. Erland encourages her to do. But here, Cinder's characteristic determination and selflessness return once more. While she knows that it would be easier to give up, she refuses to back down. Mustering her bravery, the book once again emphasizes Cinder's virtues by showing that she cares more about Kai's safety and the well-being of people on Luna and Earth than about making things easier for herself. It is these wide-reaching effects on society that show how important bravery and self-sacrifice are.

Interestingly, Cinder also gains her Lunar glamour (the ability to telepathically control others) in this moment, which symbolizes her readiness to take on her newly-discovered identity. The short sentences in the final paragraph emphasize the power—and the potential menace—behind what she can now do. But while she gains this ability to manipulate others, the first part of the passage suggests that unlike Queen Levana, Cinder will not be using this gift in service of her own influence. Instead, she will use it to better society, as she has tried to do throughout the novel.

●● As her hands stopped shaking, she slid the stiletto knife out from the new titanium-plated finger and maneuvered the blade against her wrist. The cut was still fresh where she'd started to remove her ID chip before, so they would not be able to track her. This time, there was no hesitation.

Soon, the whole world would be searching for her—Linh Cinder.


A deformed cyborg with a missing foot.

A Lunar with a stolen identity.

A mechanic with no one to run to, nowhere to go. But they would be looking for a ghost.

Related Characters: Prince Kai, Queen Levana, Dr. Erland, Cinder/Princess Selene

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 387

Explanation and Analysis

In the book's final passage, Cinder resolves to escape to Africa to meet up with Dr. Erland and attempt to regain the Lunar throne from Queen Levana. This passage shows Cinder's complete transformation from the identity she once knew to her newly-revealed identity as Princess Selene. In this transformation, Cinder implicitly acknowledges how much this hidden identity has hurt her—if she had known who she was earlier, she might have been able to use this information to her advantage and join together with Kai to overthrow Levana. But because of the secrecy surrounding her background and childhood, she was unable to do so, again reinforcing the problem with concealing information.

Cinder's thoughts and actions here show how she is fully leaving the life she knew behind, casting aside that fake identity. She takes her ID chip out of her wrist, not only because it tracks her, but because it falsely identifies her as Cinder—an identity that she now knows is fake. She contemplates what the world knows about her: that she is missing a foot, that she has a stolen identity, that she is a mechanic. However, none of those things are true now: she has a new foot, she has a new identity, and she is a princess. In describing herself as a "ghost," she emphasizes that the person she used to be, Linh Cinder, no longer exists. Ending on this note stresses that Cinder wants to put this "ghost" life behind her and instead regain her true identity, ending the secrecy that has plagued her throughout the novel.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

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

CHAPTER 1

Sixteen-year-old Cinder is waiting for her android Iko to come back with a new foot for her—the metal **foot** that she currently has is rusted, and she’s worn it since she was 11 years old. Cinder is the only full-service mechanic at New Beijing’s market. As she peers out at the other booths, she spots Chang Sacha, the baker, telling her son Sunto not to play so close to Cinder’s booth because Cinder is a cyborg. Cinder continues to disconnect the wires between her mechanical foot and ankle, before cleaning her rusted socket.

Just then, a young man arrives in Cinder’s booth, and the retina display in Cinder’s eye identifies him as Prince Kai, the crown prince of the Eastern Commonwealth. Cinder bows awkwardly, hiding her missing foot. Kai asks her to keep his identity quiet before asking for Linh Cinder. When Cinder says that she’s Cinder, Kai is surprised that the best mechanic in the city is a teenage girl. He asks her to fix his android Nainsi, which isn’t turning on anymore. She suggests that he get a new model, but Kai says that he can’t get rid of her because she has sentimental value. Hearing this, an orange light blinks in Cinder’s retina—indicating that Kai is lying.

At that moment, Iko returns with a new steel-plated foot for Cinder, but Cinder pushes her to the back of the booth before Iko can reveal that the foot is for Cinder. Kai remarks on Iko’s bold personality, to which Cinder replies that she thinks Iko is faulty. Cinder then explains to Kai that fixing Nainsi might take a week. Kai offers to come back the following weekend to pick up the android. As he leaves, he gives her a polite bow and an easy smile before pulling his sweatshirt hood over his face.

The book’s opening pages establish the challenges that Cinder faces in her futuristic world. First, she experiences discrimination because she is a cyborg, as people like Chang Sacha warn their children not to play with her, likely because they believe that she’s subhuman. This passage also establishes Cinder’s tenacity: she has had the same metal foot for five years and yet has persisted despite outgrowing the foot and despite it rusting over time. The foot thus symbolizes Cinder’s ability to make the best out of her difficult circumstances and persevere in spite of them.



Although Cinder faces discrimination as a cyborg, there are advantageous aspects of this identity as well. Fixing problems on her own body has helped her become a renowned mechanic, and the retina display in her eye also helps detect when people are lying to her. These skills become crucial for Cinder throughout the book, illustrating how the aspects of a person that make them different from others can also be what makes them special.



This passage introduces the characters’ secrecy and manipulation. Both Cinder and Kai are hiding aspects of their identity: Kai is trying to protect his privacy in public (he probably doesn’t want to draw attention to himself, since he’s a prince and people are likely to recognize him). Cinder, meanwhile, is trying to hide her identity—likely because Kai wouldn’t think as highly of her if he knew that she’s a cyborg.



After Kai leaves, Iko fawns over the prince. Cinder is excited to tell her stepsister Peony about his visit, as she loves the prince. She then begins attaching her new foot—she’s thrilled that Iko found it, though she knows her stepmother Adri would kill her if she found out Cinder spent 600 univs on a foot. Suddenly, people start screaming in the street, yelling about the plague: there’s an outbreak at Chang Sacha’s booth. Cinder immediately closes the door to her booth and covers her nose and mouth with a rag. She and Iko then wait until they hear the sirens of an emergency hover take Sacha away.

Cinder’s thoughts characterize her as a kind and selfless person, as the first thing she thinks of after meeting Kai is Peony’s happiness when she tells her about him. However, not everyone shares her generosity: Adri would disapprove of Cinder buying a new foot even though she needed one, which perhaps suggests that Adri wants Cinder’s money for herself. Meanwhile, although the book doesn’t give much explanation about the plague yet, Cinder’s quick reaction to the outbreak at Chang Sacha’s booth once again characterizes her as a resourceful person.



CHAPTER 2

After the sirens fade, Cinder opens the door to her booth and watches as men in gas masks burn Chang Sacha’s booth to the ground. Hoping to avoid the men, Cinder and Iko sneak out with Nainsi and take back alleys out of the market. Cinder runs back to her own street, noticing netscreens blaring the news about the plague outbreak in the city center. When she also catches a glimpse of New Beijing Palace, it hits her that she just met Prince Kai—he even knows her name.

The fact that men in gas masks burn Chang Sacha’s booth after the outbreak implies that the plague is dangerous and highly contagious. News of the outbreak is broadcast in the city center for everyone to see, which further shows how dire and frightening the plague is for everyone in New Beijing. The plague—and finding a cure for it—will likely play a central role throughout the novel, as it clearly poses a dire threat to society as a whole. Cinder shows how brave she is in the face of this danger, as she runs home despite the risk of being exposed to the plague.



Cinder scans into her apartment building with the ID chip embedded her wrist and descends to the basement, where Adri lets her work. She sets Nainsi down and then rides the elevator to the 18th floor. There, Adri is instructing a seamstress to make adjustments on Pearl and Peony’s dresses as they get fitted. She wants the dresses exceptionally tight and flattering so that her daughters can find wealthy husbands at the upcoming ball for Prince Kai.

This passage introduces Adri as materialistic and somewhat cruel. She seems desperate for her daughters to go to the ball looking thin and beautiful solely for the purpose of finding wealthy husband—even if that means Pearl and Peony are uncomfortable in skin-tight dresses. This sets Adri up as someone who isn’t resourceful the way Cinder is. She relies on others (in this case, Pearl and Peony’s potential suitors) rather than providing for and her daughters.



Cinder tells Adri that she’ll get cleaned up and ready for her dress fitting. When Adri says that Cinder can only attend the ball if she fixes their hover, Cinder explains that she needs money to buy a new magbelt (which makes a hover run). She reminds her that the money she earns at the market is deposited directly into Adri’s account. Adri snidely replies that they can’t buy both a magbelt and a new dress for Cinder, so they’ll have to choose one or the other—or they could sell Cinder and Iko off for spare parts.

As harsh as Adri is with her daughters, she is even crueler to Cinder. While Cinder works to support the family, Adri simply takes the money and uses it for herself and her biological daughters rather than her adopted one. She even hints at the fact that she would give up Cinder for money. As the head of the family, Adri should presumably take care of Cinder—but instead, she uses her position of power to take advantage of her.



Just then, a broadcast comes up on the netscreen: Prince Kai is giving a speech, explaining that research on a vaccine for letumosis is a top priority. The disease appeared a dozen years ago, and hundreds of thousands of people have fallen ill and died since. This includes Adri's husband Garan, who adopted Cinder from Europe when she was 11 years old. Cinder has very few memories of the man, as he died soon after they returned from Europe. Newscasters then state that Emperor Rikan, Kai's father, has just entered the third stage of letumosis.

As the book establishes the scale of the letumosis outbreak, it also reveals the difficult consequences of the disease. For Kai, whose father is gravely ill with letumosis, it means that he will soon take over the Eastern Commonwealth. His press conferences hints at his transformation from a teenager to a ruler, as he recognizes the need to do right by his citizens.



When the press conference ends, Pearl suggests that Cinder volunteer for cyborg plague testing. A year earlier, the cyborg draft was created: the government draws a cyborg's ID number each day, and those selected become guinea pigs for antidote testing. It's framed as a way of sacrificing oneself for the good of humanity, but it's really a reminder that cyborgs aren't like everyone else. Still, Cinder knows that Adri won't volunteer her for testing, because Cinder is the only one in the family who works.

Not only does Cinder experience discrimination for being a cyborg on an individual level, but there is also society-wide and government-endorsed discrimination against cyborgs. Using this group as guinea pigs for plague testing only reinforces the belief that they are subhuman and expendable. Meanwhile, Cinder hints that the reason why Adri wouldn't volunteer her for testing isn't because she cares about Cinder, but because Cinder is the breadwinner of their family.



CHAPTER 3

As Cinder works in her basement, Iko is excited by the prospect that Cinder might go to the ball. But Cinder tells Iko that there's no way she can attend—she doesn't have money for clothes, and Adri has no real intention of letting her go. Plus, even if she went, no one would dance with her since she's a cyborg.

Here, Cinder again highlights the discrimination that she faces as a cyborg, as she knows that no one would want to dance with her because of the prejudiced belief that cyborgs are lesser than human beings. In addition, Cinder acknowledges the obstacles standing in the way of her going to the ball: namely, lack of control over her finances and lack of support from Adri. Cinder has shown a great deal of resolve in her work and personal struggles, so it's possible that she'll be able to overcome these challenges even though she doesn't seem very confident.



At that moment, Peony comes into the basement in her dress, and Cinder compliments her. Peony complains that Adri isn't getting a dress for Cinder, but Cinder tries to assure her that she doesn't want to go to the ball. Cinder tells Peony that she and Iko are off to find a magbelt in a nearby junkyard, and Peony says that she wants to go with them.

Here, Peony aligns herself with her stepsister and against her mother. But because Peony has no real power in the family, she isn't able to help Cinder beyond offering moral support. This reason why Adri, by contrast, can be so greedy and unkind to Cinder is because she's able to take advantage of the power that her role as the head of the family affords.



CHAPTER 4

As Cinder, Iko, and Peony walk to the junkyard, Cinder tells Peony about Prince Kai's visit to her booth. While Iko and Cinder dig out a magbelt from the debris, Peony asks probing questions about what the prince was like. Peony is excited that Cinder will be seeing the prince again, though she says that the market is going to be closed the next weekend because of the outbreak, so Cinder will have to drop Nainsi off at the palace instead.

After retrieving the magbelt, Cinder replaces her wrench inside her prosthetic foot's calf compartment. Cinder and Iko then look for other hovers to scavenge, while Peony informs them that Prince Kai is going to look for a bride at the ball. She also mentions another rumor—that he's going to marry Queen Levana for a political alliance—but Cinder thinks this is absurd. Cinder looks up at the moon, where Queen Levana and the other Lunars live. Lunars aren't human anymore: they can telepathically alter a person's thoughts and control their actions, and this power makes them a "greedy and violent race."

There are other rumors about Queen Levana: that she murdered her older sister Queen Channary to take the throne away from her, and that she killed her niece Princess Selene (the only threat to the throne) by setting fire to her nursery. Cinder doesn't think Prince Kai could ever marry Levana, or any Lunar.

Cinder and Iko discover an old orange gasoline car that hasn't been used since the second era. Iko thinks the car looks like a "rotting pumpkin," but Cinder says that with some attention, it could be restored to its former glory. Cinder suggests that it could be her escape car to travel to Europe. As Iko and Peony protest that the car would never make it out of the city, Cinder notices a dark spot on Peony's collarbone. Holding her breath and examining the bruise, Cinder realizes Peony has letumosis.

While Peony is excited to go to the ball in order to meet Kai, Cinder has already been able to meet him because of her reputation for hard work. This highlights the difference between the two stepsisters: while Peony leads a privileged life full of glamor and excitement, Cinder has to work hard to earn money for her family. Even though the stepsisters are from the same family, Cinder is forced to develop skills like persistence and resourcefulness, while Peony seemingly doesn't have to work for anything.



Even though Cinder faces discrimination as a cyborg, she, too, buys into stereotypes about the Lunars—describing them as "greedy and violent" paints the entire Lunar population with a broad brush. At the same time, the book highlights how holding power (like Queen Levana and the other Lunars' telepathic ability) can enable people to use their abilities for evil and wreak havoc on a society as a whole.



While Cinder again shows her general bias against the Lunars, she also specifically references rumors about how Levana's power went to her head and caused her to desire even more—maybe even to the point that she was willing to kill her own family members. This begins to suggest that positions of power have the potential to make people greedy—and that, if left unchecked, this impulse can be incredibly destructive.



Describing the car as a "rotting pumpkin" connects the car to the pumpkin in the original fairy tale "Cinderella" that the novel is based on. In that story, a fairy godmother transforms into a carriage so that the titular protagonist can get to a ball. However, the fact that Cinder has to fix up the car herself suggests that hard work and resourcefulness are more valuable and admirable than a reliance on luck or magic. The revelation that Peony has letumosis, meanwhile, presents another challenge that Cinder will have to overcome.



CHAPTER 5

Realizing that she has letumosis, Peony begins to scream, telling Cinder to back away so that Cinder doesn't get the disease. Cinder checks her own skin, wondering if she brought the plague home from the market. She calls an emergency hover while Peony starts to cry. Cinder apologizes, worried that she is the reason that Peony is sick.

Suddenly, emergency androids arrive. Cinder directs them to Peony, and they ask if Cinder has had contact with Peony in the past 12 hours. She says yes, even though she knows that she might get shipped off to the quarantines—but if she lies, she could spread it to others. The med-droid pulls out a syringe and tests her blood, but after a minute it informs Cinder that she doesn't have letumosis. Cinder is relieved that she isn't going to die, but she's overcome with dread as she watches the med-droids take Peony away.

CHAPTER 6

As Cinder and Iko walk home from the junkyard, Cinder feels nauseous knowing that Peony is already dying. When Cinder arrives home, med-droids are already there, and Adri and Pearl have already tested negative for letumosis. After Adri instructs Iko to dispose of all of Peony's things, she tells Cinder that the med-droids informed her that they picked up Peony in a junkyard and took her to the quarantines. She wonders bitterly why Peony was there. Cinder explains that they went together to look for a magbelt, and Adri blames Cinder for getting Peony sick. But Cinder tells her that she doesn't have letumosis; Peony couldn't have gotten it from her. She assures Adri that she loves Peony too. Furious, Adri asks if Cinder's "kind" even know what love is.

Adri then informs Cinder that she never wanted to adopt—Garan was the one who took Cinder in. Upset, Adri insists that Garan died because of Cinder, and now Peony is going to die because of Cinder as well. Cinder protests that she didn't ask for anyone to adopt her, and that what's happened isn't her fault. Adri then says that she is volunteering Cinder for plague research, to help find a cure for Peony. Cinder is stunned: no one survives the plague testing. Realizing that Adri will receive a payment for Cinder's sacrifice, Cinder accuses Adri of volunteering Cinder to get money. As the med-droids approach to take Cinder away, she tries to attack them and escape, but they shock her into unconsciousness.

Cinder's concern for her stepsister again illustrates her selflessness. She's not worried that she has the disease herself; instead, she's worried that she might be the reason Peony caught it.



Cinder thinks not only of Peony in this moment but also of society as a whole. While she could lie and say that she wasn't in contact with Peony, she knows that it is more important to protect other people to whom she could spread the plague than to protect herself. Given the name, the quarantines are likely a facility where sick people are kept isolated from the general population. It's implied that this is where the emergency androids are taking Peony.



Adri's words reinforce the stereotype that cyborgs are inferior to non-cyborg human beings. In saying that Cinder's "kind"—referring to cyborgs—can't feel love, she suggests that Cinder is abnormal and subhuman, even though Cinder clearly loves her stepsister. Additionally, even though Adri blames Cinder for what happened to Peony, in reality Adri's selfishness arguably also played a role in her daughter's illness. If she had simply given Cinder the money (which Cinder earned) to pay for a magbelt and a dress, Cinder would never have tried to scavenge in the junkyard, and Peony wouldn't have gone with her and gotten exposed.



Whereas Adri could use her position of power as the head of household to comfort and protect Cinder, instead her power only makes her greedy. She abuses her role as Cinder's stepmother, essentially choosing to have Cinder hurt (or even killed) against her will. And while Adri claims that this is for Peony's sake, Cinder's accusation suggests that Adri is only doing this for the monetary compensation she'll receive.



CHAPTER 7

Dr. Erland is screening potential cyborg candidates for their research. He decides to give one older man who has a son a placebo rather than letumosis. His assistant, Fateen, asks why he's been turning away so many candidates. Another assistant, Li, then informs Dr. Erland that they have a volunteer—a teenage girl. Erland grows excited and immediately goes to the room in which Cinder is being held. She is unconscious and fastened to the table.

Dr. Erland's different reactions to the older man versus Cinder hint at the fact that he is manipulating the cyborg draft for his own purposes. It seems that he's searching for someone who fits a specific type (seemingly a teenage girl, given his excitement about Cinder), though it's not yet clear what his motivations are.



CHAPTER 8

Cinder dreams about the night of her surgery; she feels as though she is on fire as surgeons attach her prostheses. But this time, in her dream, she is surrounded by letumosis victims who are all in agony—including Peony. Then, suddenly, she can open her eyes, and in a **mirror** on the wall, she sees herself without her gloves and boots; she thinks that she is essentially a machine. From behind a wall, Dr. Erland talks to Cinder, asking her to cooperate. Cinder protests that she didn't sign up for the research.

Cinder's dream illustrates her selflessness and her desire to help society. Even though she's not willingly partaking in the research, she's still haunted by those, like Peony, who are suffering from the disease. Additionally, the mirror on the wall symbolizes Cinder confronting the truth about her identity. As much as she tries to hide her cyborg parts, she understands that they are a reflection of who she truly is.



An android unlatches the back of Cinder's control panel and inserts two prongs there, scanning her brain. There's no pain, but she squirms at the invasion inside her head. Next, Dr. Erland tells her that a med-droid is going to inject her with a diluted solution of letumosis, against which they will test the most recent batch of antibodies that they've developed. Cinder tries to resist, but she has nowhere to go as they inject her with the antibodies.

Cinder's resistance to the invasion in her head reinforces how upsetting it can be to be manipulated and controlled. Even though this experiment isn't physically painful for Cinder, it does violate her privacy and bodily autonomy. And all of this discomfort is happening simply because being a cyborg means she's seen as expendable—if Cinder were fully human rather than a cyborg, she wouldn't be used as a test subject.



CHAPTER 9

Li reports to Dr. Erland that Cinder's condition has stabilized, and that they can expect signs of stage two the following morning. Before they leave, Dr. Erland and Fateen observe Cinder's biometric holograph, noticing that Cinder has a chip plugged into her nervous system. As they look at it, they start to notice that the letumosis microbes they injected into Cinder are disappearing. Dr. Erland is astonished, and he tells Fateen that if all of the microbes disappear, she should take Cinder to lab four so he can speak with her.

The fact that Cinder is healing from the letumosis foreshadows the fact that she may not be exactly who and what she seems. Dr. Erland and Fateen's surprise at Cinder's apparent immunity to the plague implies that there's something special about Cinder that not even she is aware of. If this is the case, there may be secrets being kept about Cinder's identity, and this lack of knowledge could end up hurting her.



CHAPTER 10

A med-droid wheels Cinder into another room, releases her from the table, and leaves. Cinder sits up and puts on her gloves and boots. She takes out the wrench that she stored in her calf, glad to feel a little less vulnerable. The door is locked, but Cinder is able to look at the netscreen that contains her holographic image. Suddenly, the door opens behind her, and Dr. Erland enters. He introduces himself as the leading scientist on the letumosis research team. Cinder raises the wrench to strike him, but suddenly she freezes—she doesn't want to hurt him. She drops the wrench and notices that the orange light on her retina display is flashing—but how could Dr. Erland be lying if he hasn't said anything?

Here, it's revealed that Cinder has a lie detector light as part of her mechanical brain interface. This is an example of how her cyborg identity makes her more capable than the average person, not less. Cinder doesn't yet understand how Dr. Erland could be lying without speaking, but the light nevertheless lets her know that Dr. Erland is keeping something from her—he's probably not being entirely forthright with Cinder about who he is.



CHAPTER 11

Dr. Erland shows Cinder what is unusual about her biometrics: the letumosis microbes have disappeared. He tells her that she doesn't have the plague, that she's not going to die, and that she's not contagious. Cinder, relieved, asks how this is possible. Dr. Erland explains that it's possible that something in her DNA predisposes her immune system to fight off the disease. Cinder says that her stepfather Garan died of letumosis five years prior, when he adopted her in Europe. She says she can't remember much from before her cybernetic surgery—they had to install a brain interface because she was in a hover accident.

Here, Cinder provides some context about what she believes about her own history. And while Dr. Erland remains intentionally vague about how her background could contribute to her immunity, the novel foreshadows how unique parts of Cinder's background—including her cybernetic operation—might actually have provided her with advantages, even though most people view her as subhuman.



Dr. Erland tells Cinder that with her help, they could save hundreds of thousands of lives. They could also stop the cyborg draft, and he could pay her as well. Cinder thinks of Peony, hoping that what Dr. Erland says is true. She agrees to continue participating in the research, but only under the condition that she can leave any time she wants to. She also asks for payment, but in a separate account that Adri can't access—and Peony has to be the first person to get an antidote. Dr. Erland agrees, but with one caveat: Peony can get the second dose, but Emperor Rikan must get the first.

Cinder's sacrifice now becomes much more realistic, as she's been offered a concrete way to save lives and prevent fellow cyborgs from being exploited. Still, both she and Dr. Erland are sacrificing much of their time and well-being in order to benefit society as a whole. There's a great deal at stake here: their actions have ramifications not only for the health of Peony and other Earthens, but also for political reasons. If Emperor Rikan were to die, there would be political upheaval, and Dr. Erland also wants to avoid this outcome.



CHAPTER 12

Prince Kai watches Emperor Rikan through a glass pane as a med-droid tends to him. Rikan's advisor, Torin, tells Kai that Rikan likely only has days to live. As Kai watches his father wheeze, he recalls how vibrant the emperor was a week earlier. Torin tries to tell Kai that he must prepare for his coronation, but Kai is in denial that his father will die soon. He says that he's going to go find Dr. Erland.

At this point, Kai is just an 18-year-old trying who's terrified of losing his father. He's not yet willing to think about taking up the emperor's mantle and making sacrifices for the good of society as a whole.



As Kai walks to the lab with Torin, he sees Sybil Mira, the head thaumaturge to the Lunar crown. She is beautiful, but she is the last person he wants to see. Sybil offers her condolences about Emperor Rikan. She says that this is particularly bad timing, given the alliance discussions that Rikan and Queen Levana were in the midst of. Sybil hopes that Kai will be more amenable to their demands, but Kai says that he will pursue the same policies as his father.

Sybil Mira's underhanded comment about Rikan's death being bad timing hints that she, as Levana's head advisor, is manipulative and cruel. Readers also know that Lunars have a unique power to control others, so it's possible that Sybil Mira's beauty is a false front—a way for her to make herself look more attractive to others in order to get her way. But this deception is self-defeating, as it only make Kai distrust them and remain staunch in his loyalty to his father.



Kai and Torin leave Sybil, and Torin suggests that Kai should formulate a plan about Levana. Kai insists that he will not marry the Queen—she would turn Earthens into slaves. Torin says that he should simply hold out for a peace agreement—if she wanted to start a war, she would have already done it. Kai wishes he'd already married, so that this wouldn't be an issue. Torin suggests that perhaps he can find a girl at the ball.

Although Kai isn't fully ready to take up the Emperor's mantle, Kai's discussion with Torin illustrates how he is already trying to prioritize the good of the country over himself (though this sense of responsibility also aligns with his personal desire not to marry Levana).



Kai also notes that there have been rumors that Princess Selene is still alive—if this is true, he could marry the true Lunar heir. Torin points out that that the whole bloodline is greedy and violent, so Kai shouldn't marry any of them. If Queen Levana found out that he's searching for Princess Selene, it would destroy their chance at a peace treaty, and Kai knows that they would not win a war against Luna.

Torin continues to reinforce the stereotypes about the Lunar people as a whole, using them as justification for Kai not to marry a Lunar. Still, Kai is trying to find a solution that will help his society avoid a war with Luna, even if it means putting his own safety at risk.



CHAPTER 13

Dr. Erland tells Cinder that she's got some of the most complex technology he's ever seen in a cyborg. She asks if that has anything to do with her immunity, and Dr. Erland says he isn't sure. When Cinder asks if they'll be saving lives anytime soon, Dr. Erland says he has to analyze her blood sample and map her DNA sequencing. He also puts a hand on her neck, pinching the vertebrae where her chip is. He asks her if she feels anything unusual, and suddenly she cries out and falls off the table in agony.

Cinder continues to put her concern for others over herself, even if it means enduring horrific pain like what she experiences here. Meanwhile, this passage hints at the fact that Dr. Erland may know more than he is letting on, as he's being vague about what he knows and probing into Cinder's wiring without explaining why he's doing so.



CHAPTER 14

As Cinder starts to wake up, Dr. Erland assures her that she's going to be all right. Kai, who has just walked into the lab, helps her sit up. Cinder is grateful that her gloves and boots are on, so that Kai can't see the metal underneath. When she asks what Dr. Erland what he did, he replies that he was simply adjusting her spine. Cinder waits for him to tell Kai that she is a cyborg, but he doesn't.

In this exchange, both Dr. Erland and Cinder are concealing aspects of her identity from Kai, which will force both of them to keep up the ruse going forward. Dr. Erland's willingness to conceal information also alludes to the possibility that he's hiding other aspects of his and Cinder's identities as well.



Kai helps Cinder to her feet and asks what she's doing there. Dr. Erland lies again and says that she's there to look at a med-droid. Kai is confused, but he doesn't question the story. He asks if Cinder has had a chance to look at Nainsi, and Cinder promises to take a look at Nainsi as soon as she can. Kai then asks Dr. Erland if he's made any progress. Dr. Erland assures him that they have a potential lead, and that he'll keep the prince posted. Cinder tells Dr. Erland that she'll be back to look at the med-droid again tomorrow.

The more that Dr. Erland and Cinder continue to lie, the more they'll be forced to keep up the ruse later, illustrating the problem with secrecy and manipulation. Dr. Erland isn't being fully open with Kai about their progress, giving him false hope that they might have an antidote to letumosis.



CHAPTER 15

Cinder heads out of the palace's research wing. She knows she has to return home to fix Nainsi and to protect Iko, but she resolves to get away from Adri. When Cinder arrives at the apartment, Adri and Pearl are stunned to see her alive. Cinder comments that the research center didn't want her and that she'll go earn her living so that Adri won't get rid of her as easily. When Adri tells Cinder that she doesn't appreciate being spoken to in a disrespectful manner, Cinder counters that Adri betrayed her.

Adri's is the person who is supposed to protect Cinder, yet she completely abandoned her in order to get revenge and receive payment for Cinder's participating in the testing. Cinder knows that Adri is still motivated by selfishness and greed, which is why she feels that she has to protect Iko from being sold and work hard so that Adri won't try to get rid of her again.



Cinder storms off, meeting up with a stunned Iko in the hall and heading down to the basement. She fills Iko in on everything that happened; Iko is excited that Cinder is getting paid for her time, because now she can buy a dress and go to the ball. Cinder, however, points out that Adri probably won't let her go anyway. Just then, Cinder notices Peony's dress in a corner of her workspace. It's wrinkled and dirty, but it's still beautiful. Cinder tells Iko that she's going to use all her time and money to fix the gasoline car in the junkyard so that they can get out of New Beijing.

This exchange represents a major difference from the original "Cinderella" fairy tale that Cinder is based on. Rather than waiting around and hoping to go to the ball, like the original protagonist, Cinder takes matter into her own hands. She is even willing to forego the ball completely and work tirelessly to escape Adri's wrath. This places an emphasis on hard work rather than magic and luck.



CHAPTER 16

Prince Kai runs into Emperor Rikan's room, where his father has just passed away. Exhausted and upset, Torin says that he'll set up a press conference for the next day so that Kai can announce what has happened. Devastated, Kai feels as though he's lost his youth and his freedom as well as his father. At that moment, the netscreen starts broadcasting an incoming communication from Queen Levana.

Emperor Rikan's death is a major turning point for Kai. Alongside grieving his father, he must assume the immense responsibility of becoming emperor and considering the Eastern Commonwealth's citizens over his own priorities. This is why Kai is lamenting is lost youth—he knows that his father's death means letting go of his innocence and the freedom to put his own needs first.



The screen shows only Queen Levana's outline, as her "glamour"—the ability to manipulate people's brainwaves and see her as divinely beautiful—doesn't translate over the netscreens. Queen Levana offers her condolences for Emperor Rikan and also says that she looks forward to their new alliance talks and she can visit as soon as possible for a meeting between them. After she signs off, Kai affirms again that he will refuse to marry her.

The book emphasizes how reliant on manipulation the Lunar people are. They want to control how they are seen by others—and because their ability to make themselves look beautiful doesn't translate over screens, they choose instead to obscure themselves entirely. This again makes people distrust them, as it's clear that they rely on telepathic control rather than honest means of winning people over.



CHAPTER 17

Cinder wakes up after spending all night pushing the old car from the junkyard to the apartment's parking garage. As soon as she opens her eyes, she receives a notification on her interface that Peony has entered the third stage of letumosis. Immediately, she calls a hover for the first time in her life and travels to the quarantines. There, the med-droids largely ignore her—they're not programmed to deal with healthy people in the quarantines.

Cinder shows just how hard she is willing to work in order to achieve her goals, as she stays awake all night in order to fix up the car. This is quite different from the original "Cinderella" story that Cinder is based on, in which a pumpkin is magically transformed into a carriage for Cinderella with ease. That Meyer chose to adapt the original fairy tale in this way sends the message that resourcefulness and perseverance are more admirable than relying on other people (or on sheer luck).



Hundreds of beds are lined up in the facility, with med-droids moving between them to deliver food and water. Cinder finds Peony asleep, shivering and sweating. Peony wakes and begs Cinder to take her home, but Cinder can't. She assures Peony that Pearl and Adri are healthy and informs Peony that she (Cinder) is immune. She's working with the letumosis researchers to find a cure, and Peony will be the first to get the antidote if she does. Peony begs Cinder not to let her die, reminding Cinder that she was going to introduce her to Prince Kai.

Cinder risks her safety for Peony—both in visiting her at the quarantines (she's not sure whether they will let her leave) and in participating in the experimental research. She tries to assure Peony that she is working towards an antidote for society and also for Peony, thinking of her stepsister above all else.



Cinder promises Peony to return as soon as she can. As she turns to leave, she hears someone else call her name: it's Chang Sacha, who is in a nearby bed. Sacha asks if Cinder can bring her son Sunto to her, and Cinder assures her that she will try. Then, she watches as the life fades from Sacha's eyes. An android comes over, pulls out a scalpel, and presses the blade into Sacha's wrist, taking out her ID chip and collecting it.

Whereas before, Chang Sacha discriminated against Cinder for being a cyborg, now Chang Sacha begs for Cinder's help. Chang Sacha previously viewed Cinder as subhuman and warned Sunto to stay away from her—yet here, ironically, Cinder is the only person who can help because she's immune. Cinder again demonstrates the value of prioritizing other people over oneself: rather than clinging to her pride, she decides to be compassionate, could help someone in a dire situation. But unfortunately, Sacha dies before Cinder is able find Sunto.



CHAPTER 18

Cinder leaves the facility and returns to the research wing of the palace. When she gets into the elevator there, Kai dashes in at the last minute. As Cinder and Kai walk through the lab together, many of the researchers offer their condolences. Cinder realizes that Emperor Rikan has died, and she offers her sympathy. Kai tells Cinder that his father's death isn't his only issue—Queen Levana is visiting Earth that day. Kai then asks if Cinder can fix Nainsi as soon as possible. Something in his tone makes Cinder realize that Nainsi has vital information, and she assures Kai that she'll fix Nainsi as soon as she returns home.

When Kai and Cinder reach Dr. Erland's office, Kai asks about the progress, but Dr. Erland again assures him that he'll be the first to know if he's made any concrete discoveries. Kai gives a bow to Cinder and kisses her hand. After hesitating, he asks if she would be his personal guest to the ball. Cinder is surprised and says that she's not going to the ball. Kai asks if she'd reconsider, but Cinder is planning to escape with Iko on the night of the ball. She respectfully declines, and Kai tries to avoid looking dejected as he leaves.

CHAPTER 19

After Kai leaves, Cinder turns back to Dr. Erland. She tells him that she visited the quarantines and saw the med-droids take an ID chip from someone. Dr. Erland explains that the chips can be sold off illegally for people who want a new identity—like Lunars who have escaped Luna and fled to Earth. Cinder says that this makes it sound like they're escaping a prison, and Dr. Erland says that they are. Cinder is suspicious of these "savages" coming to Earth and manipulating Earthens.

Cinder also asks Dr. Erland about the Lunars' glamour. He explains that it's the ability to manipulate bioelectric energy, and glamour is an illusion of themselves that they can project into the minds of others. This is why the Lunars often look beautiful—they keep up this manipulation all the time. It's also why they don't like **mirrors**, because their glamour doesn't work in mirrors.

Even though Kai's father has just died, he's focused on his newfound responsibility for his people rather than his own grief. Rather than being allowed to mourn his father and behave like a regular teenager, he instead has to prepare for upcoming diplomatic negotiations. He also has to ensure that people in the Eastern Commonwealth are safe, which is why he is going to Dr. Erland's to check on the progress being made on the letumosis antidote. Kai is essentially sacrificing his own needs and emotions for the common good—and given how many citizens stand to benefit from the peace negotiations and the letumosis cure, the novel implies that this is a virtuous way to rule.



This is another big change between the original fairy tale "Cinderella" and Cinder. While in the original, Cinderella was an anonymous girl who attended the ball and dazzled Prince Charming with her beauty, here Prince Kai has already gotten to know Cinder. Furthermore, she's able to go to the ball because of her kindness toward Kai and their budding romance, not because of luck or magic.



Dr. Erland's knowledge about Lunar fugitives implies that he may be more connected to the Lunar world than he's letting on. Likewise, the book introduces the idea that many people in Earthen society might also be concealing their identities, creating a sense of secrecy throughout Earth and Luna. Meanwhile, Cinder again reinforces harmful stereotypes about the Lunars in describing all of them as "savages"—even though she herself is the victim of harmful stereotypes about cyborgs.



Glamour enables Lunars to manipulate others—but this will likely end up backfiring because people like Cinder and Kai will recognize this manipulation and distrust the Lunars for it. Here, the book also connects mirrors to this secrecy. As symbols of self-reflection and truth, the Lunars' dislike of mirrors emphasizes how they would rather control their image and obscure the truth than portray themselves as they really are.



Dr. Erland asks why Cinder is so interested in the Lunars, and Cinder replies that Kai said Queen Levana is visiting that day. The doctor is aghast and tells Cinder that she has to stay out of the palace. Cinder is confused as to what Levana has to do with her, and he tries to explain quickly that from Cinder's blood samples, it appears that she is Lunar. Cinder protests, saying that she doesn't have magic, but Dr. Erland explains that not all Lunars are born with magic (those without are called "shells"), and that parents with shell children often try to escape to Earth because those children can be killed. This also explains Cinder's immunity, because Lunars are immune to letumosis—they were the original carriers of the disease to Earth.

These revelations finally illuminate some of Dr. Erland's secrecy, and how that secrecy has actually been harmful to Cinder. First, Dr. Erland has kept Cinder not because her immunity is useful, but because she is Lunar. It's not yet clear why this matters so much to Dr. Erland, but it seems that he may be trying to protect Cinder and prevent other people from finding out about her Lunar identity. However, this also means that the testing she's undergone is irrelevant, because her natural immunity won't translate to Earthens. Separately, Dr. Erland's exposition about "shells" shows that there is discrimination in Lunar society as well. Gifted Lunars target and kill shells because they cannot be controlled and are believed to be dangerous.



Cinder is horrified at these revelations: Lunars are cruel people, and she does not want to be one of them. Plus, to be Lunar in addition to being cyborg makes her a complete outcast. Dr. Erland tells Cinder that she can't let Queen Levana see her, because the Queen hates shells, whom she can't control, and that the Queen would likely kill her. Cinder realizes that everything she knows about herself—her childhood, her parents, her identity—is a lie.

Cinder recognizes that she will now face discrimination both from Earthens (because she's a cyborg and a Lunar) and from Lunars (because she's a shell). This speaks to the universality of stereotypes and discrimination—it seems that every society has at least one marginalized group. Even now, knowing that she herself a Lunar, Cinder clings to negative stereotypes that paint all Lunar people as cruel. Dr. Erland's warning also hints at the lengths to which Queen Levana will go to control and manipulate those around her, rooting out anyone whom she cannot brainwash.



CHAPTER 20

Kai watches as Queen Levana descends from her Lunar spacecraft. She wears a long white veil and dress, and she has auburn hair, unblemished ivory skin and red lips. Seeing her, Kai thinks that she's unnaturally beautiful. Nevertheless, he welcomes her to Earth, kissing the back of her hand. In that instant, he realizes that he loves her and wants to do anything for her—but when he digs his fingernails into his palms, he is able to shake off this feeling. Torin commends Kai on resisting Levana's glamour, but he notes that it will only get harder.

Here, Kai experiences the Lunar glamour for the first time, demonstrating how Queen Levana can literally manipulate his thoughts and feelings. But, as his reaction illustrates, the effect is fleeting—and when Kai is able to snap out of it, he only dislikes Levana even more for it. This illustrates the self-defeating nature of this manipulation, because it has the opposite effect from what Queen Levana intends, making Kai trust her even less.



CHAPTER 21

Two days later, Cinder is at her workspace again. She's been spending all night working on the car, leaving her exhausted during the day; the car will take a lot of work to be ready by the ball. She doesn't regret saying no to Kai's invitation, knowing that she would likely reveal herself as a cyborg and embarrass herself and the prince at the ball. Cinder also doesn't want anyone to know that she's Lunar, and she hopes that Dr. Erland will be the only person who ever knows.

The book again departs from the original "Cinderella" fairy tale, implying that Cinder's hard work and resourcefulness is more admirable than relying on other people's help (or sheer luck) to help her, as Cinderella did. While Cinder worries about people recognizing her as a cyborg and persecuting her, her identity as a cyborg is exactly what enables her to fix up the car and make this escape, once again emphasizing how the traits that people mistreat Cinder for are the very qualities that allow her to excel.



Cinder then begins to examine Nainsi, and Iko notices a chip plugged into the android that looks very out of place. It's a direct communication chip, which aren't usually plugged into androids. Cinder takes the chip and plugs it into her own netscreen, and it starts initiating a link with an unknown user. As the netscreen continues to try to link up, Nainsi powers back on and starts talking, explaining that Princess Selene was brought to Earth approximately four months after her alleged death. Then, the android realizes where she is and abruptly stops talking. Wondering who could have put the chip there, Cinder then takes Nainsi back to the palace.

The information Nainsi divulges, as well as the fact that there is a mysterious chip plugged into her, reveal further layers of secrecy. The fact that Kai's android is equipped with information about Princess Selene means that Kai is actively trying to find Princess Selene (who is apparently still alive). But the mysterious communication chip plugged into Nainsi also suggests that someone else is seeking out this information.



CHAPTER 22

As Cinder travels back to the palace, she remembers Dr. Erland's warnings about Queen Levana, but she feels she has to deliver Nainsi back to Kai. On the road to the palace, she sees a crowd protesting against Levana's presence on Earth, some with signs asserting that war is better than slavery. Cinder approaches the door with Nainsi—the guard allows Nainsi in, but Cinder doesn't have a pass. Nainsi says that she'll inform Prince Kai that Cinder would like to see him. As Nainsi leaves, Cinder realizes that she doesn't *have* to see Kai—she simply *wants* to.

Earthens seem to generally dislike Queen Levana, just as Prince Kai does. They recognize that Queen Levana's manipulation is akin to a mental slavery, in which they are constantly being manipulated, again illustrating the self-defeating nature of the Lunar glamour on Earth. The fear of being brainwashed makes them more resistant to the Lunars, not less. These protests will likely also help Kai recognize what his citizens want, so his actions can benefit the society as a whole.



Suddenly, the crowd stops chanting, and Queen Levana appears on the balcony. Cinder starts to back away, until she realizes that Queen Levana is warm, welcoming, and generous. But as the little orange light blinks in Cinder's retina, she knows that Queen Levana's effect is a lie—she's brainwashing the crowd—and Cinder snaps out of it. As Cinder steps back and collides with someone, the queen looks at her. Levana is surprised and then disgusted, and she turns back into the palace. After the queen leaves, the crowd departs in a daze. Cinder thinks that she is not entirely immune to the glamour, the way that shells are supposed to be—and worse, the Queen saw her.

Here, Cinder feels Queen Levana's brainwashing firsthand—and she, like Kai, resents the fact that her thoughts are being manipulated. Cinder's susceptibility to Levana's glamour also hints at the fact that Dr. Erland wasn't fully open with Cinder about her identity—a fact that puts her in grave danger, since it seems that Levana may be able to take advantage of Cinder after all. This speaks to the pitfalls of deception, as it can often cause harm even when someone, like Dr. Erland, is trying to protect another person. At the same time, the fact that Cinder is a cyborg also helps her rather than hinders her here: the little orange light on her interface helps her recognize that Queen Levana is lying, which makes her less susceptible to manipulation. Even though others discriminate against Cinder for being a cyborg, this aspect of her identity is also a positive thing.



CHAPTER 23

Kai is unsettled as he watches Queen Levana easily quiet the crowd. He comments to Sybil Mira that brainwashing isn't the way to handle unruly citizens. When Queen Levana returns, she angrily confronts Kai for harboring Lunar fugitives—she's just seen one in the courtyard with the protesters. Kai says that this is the first he's heard of Lunars in his country, and Torin chimes in that they monitor all spacecraft coming into and leaving the Commonwealth. Queen Levana insists that fugitives must be found, and Torin promises that they can search for them after Kai's coronation.

The conversation turns to Kai's coronation: Queen Levana has brought him a gift. She presents him with a vial, explaining that she's been dedicating a research team to studying letumosis for some years now. Her scientists have finally discovered an antidote: the vial contains a dose for one adult man. Kai erupts in anger, asking how long she's had this cure. The queen assures him calmly that it was only confirmed as an antidote hours before she left, but Kai knows that she's lying. The queen assures him that it is in both their interests to rid Earth of letumosis, but that she'll require compensation. Kai is shocked that she'd let so many die for a political bargaining chip.

Just then, Nainsi appears, and Kai coldly thanks Queen Levana for the gift and leaves. In the hall, he lets out a scream and slams his fist against the wall. He tells Nainsi how glad he is to see her, hoping that they can continue their search for Princess Selene and give Dr. Erland the antidote to duplicate it; he does not want to become a "puppet." He then asks Nainsi why Cinder isn't with her. When Nainsi replies that Cinder is likely waiting outside, Kai goes to find her, hoping that she's changed her mind about the ball.

CHAPTER 24

Cinder crouches against the palace wall, confused as to why Levana's glamour affected her the same as everyone else. She wonders if Dr. Erland lied to her about being a shell, or about being Lunar. Just then, an android approaches and asks her to follow it into the palace—Kai has requested a word with her. When he sees her, he thanks her for fixing Nainsi. He asks her to walk with him to Dr. Erland's office and tell him what was wrong with the android.

While Kai is self-sacrificing and empathetic, he recognizes how the Lunars compromise the integrity of their leadership positions by brainwashing innocent citizens. Rather than oppress his people further, as the Lunars do, Kai acknowledges the legitimacy of their demands and wants to work with rather than against them. This is a testament to how those who work on behalf of others are virtuous, while those who abuse their power can potentially destroy individuals as well as entire societies.



Again, the book emphasizes a contrast between Kai and Queen Levana. While Kai would do anything for Earth's citizens, Levana is just the opposite: she uses her power not to help those below her but instead to help herself. Kai suspects that she's had the letumosis cure for some time, which would mean that Levana was willing to risk political upheaval by letting Emperor Rikan die. Here, she also demonstrates that she's willing to let millions of people die, simply to leverage her own power and wealth.



Kai again emphasizes how he does not want to be manipulated as a "puppet," as he describes, suggesting that he lacks agency in the situation and feels that Levana is completely in control of him. This again illustrates the problem with the Lunar gift, as it only makes Kai and others more resistant to their control and their demands.



Cinder recognizes that Dr. Erland wasn't being entirely truthful with her, and this causes her to distrust his information on the whole. This shows how secrecy and manipulation often backfire: whereas Dr. Erland wanted to make Cinder trust him more, this new information makes her trust him even less than if he had been open with her.



Cinder explains that someone implanted a chip in Nainsi, and that the person who installed likely knows the research Kai was doing. As Kai and Cinder get into the elevator, Cinder asks how things are going with Queen Levana. Kai explains that he hates her more than anyone else, and their talks aren't going well. She thinks that there are Lunar fugitives on Earth, though he explains that the last thing he wants is more "power-hungry Lunars" in his country. This makes Cinder nervous.

Kai then pivots, saying that he thinks Cinder should go to the ball with him. When Cinder asks why her, he says he can't go alone, and he can't go with Levana. Cinder protests that there are thousands of single girls in the city, but Kai asks why *not* her. She thinks because she's cyborg, Lunar, and a mechanic, but she simply says that he doesn't want her. He tells her that he needs her so that he can avoid Queen Levana. Cinder tries a final protest, explaining that her little stepsister Peony has letumosis, and she can't go without her. Cinder then tells him about Peony and asks Kai if he'll ask her to dance at the ball if Peony survives. Kai says that it would be his pleasure.

Kai returns the conversation to Levana—he's worried that he's going to destroy the country. Cinder assures him that he'll be a great emperor. As she starts to protest that they should get out of the elevator, he leans forward and whispers in her ear, asking her to imagine that there's a cure for letumosis, but it would ruin her life. She says that that's not much of a choice. He sighs resignedly, agreeing with her. As Kai pulls away, he brushes Cinder's elbow, and she doubles over in pain. She tries to assure him that she's fine, but he insists on bringing her to Dr. Erland.

CHAPTER 25

Kai brings Cinder into Dr. Erland's office and informs him of Cinder's pain, but she assures them both that she's fine. Kai then says he has to go—the prime minister of Africa has called a world leaders' meeting. Before leaving, Kai hands Dr. Erland the vial with the antidote and asks if he can try to duplicate it. Dr. Erland says that he'll try his best. Kai then asks Cinder to let him know if she changes her mind about the ball, and she agrees.

Kai exposes his own stereotypes about the Lunars, but Cinder has experienced and interesting shift. Now that she knows she is Lunar, she starts to become nervous about his assessment and perhaps even wishes to prove him wrong about "power-hungry Lunars," knowing that she does not belong in this category even though she is Lunar. Now that she is a part of this group and experiences the discrimination firsthand, she is much more resistant to it.



Cinder shows how much she has internalized the discrimination that she's faced as a cyborg and a Lunar (both marginalized groups on Earth) as well as a mechanic—a low-status profession compared to a royal. Even though Kai explicitly tells Cinder that he wants her to go with him, she's been conditioned to believe that she's subhuman simply because she's a cyborg—and now she knows she's also part of a race that Earthens hate. Because of this, her self-doubt overshadows Kai's assessment of her. This also shows the problem with secrecy, because if Cinder were more open with Kai, he might still want to be with her—but because she has been hiding these aspects of her identity, she only grows more nervous about him finding out.



Both Kai and Cinder are willing to make decisions that are unpleasant or dangerous for them if their actions can potentially save the lives of many others. Cinder's confidence that Kai will be a great emperor supports the idea that these qualities are virtuous, particularly for those in positions of power.



Kai wants to take care of those who are personally close to him (especially Cinder), but he also has greater duties to fulfill for the good of society as a whole. In this way, he has to juggle different levels of self-sacrifice and caring for others, and he decides that potentially helping people on a global scale (through the world leaders' meeting) rather than a personal scale is his primary responsibility.



After Kai leaves, Dr. Erland angrily asks what Cinder is doing at the palace, because Queen Levana might see her. Cinder says that she had to deliver Nainsi to Kai, and that the Queen already saw her. Hearing this, Dr. Erland grows concerned. Cinder then asks why Levana's glamour worked on her in the courtyard, accusing him of lying. He assures her that she is Lunar, but he then reveals that he's been doing research on her adoptive family. Her stepfather, Garan, designed a bioelectrical security system that ties in with a person's nervous system. It prevents outside manipulation of personal bioelectricity, and on a Lunar, it keeps them from manipulating others' bioelectricity.

Cinder then asks why people touching her causes her to pass out. Dr. Erland explains that putting a biological lock on her gift protected her identity, because otherwise she would have drawn too much attention to herself—it's hard for Lunars to control their gift at a young age, and those who do manage to control themselves experience debilitating physical effects. Cinder suddenly realizes that Dr. Erland himself is Lunar—that's how he knows so much about it. He used his gift on her the first time they met, to stop her from attacking him with the wrench. Dr. Erland assures her that he's never abused his gift once, and as a result, his senses are failing him. He tells Cinder that she can trust him.

Cinder asks if Kai knows that Dr. Erland is a Lunar, and he says no. He understands the prejudices against Lunars, but not all of them are greedy and self-serving. She asks why he decided to run away, and Dr. Erland reveals that Queen Levana killed his daughter because she was a shell. Dr. Erland then says that Cinder's gift is starting to return to her, overwhelming her cyborg system, which is why she's been experiencing pain. Eventually, it won't cause this reaction, and she'll be able to use her gift.

Cinder then asks Dr. Erland if he's immune to letumosis, and he says yes—that this is how he's been developing the antidotes so far. Cinder realizes that her immunity won't actually help them find a cure. At that moment, she receives a notification on her brain interface that Peony has entered the fourth stage of letumosis. When she tells Dr. Erland this, he gives her a quarter of the liquid in the vial, explaining that he promised her she would get the antidote. But, Dr. Erland says, she must promise not to come to the palace again while Queen Levana is there.

As Dr. Erland continues to unravel new aspects of Cinder's background, he reveals how Cinder's identity as a cyborg has actually been advantageous to her growing up: the bioelectrical security system has actually been protecting her from Lunars who might have wanted to do her harm. This again shows that the very qualities that make Cinder different and target her for discrimination are also the things that help her.



The information that Dr. Erland finally reveals to Cinder speaks to the pros and cons of secrecy: putting a "lock" on Cinder's gift has allowed her to remain anonymous among Earthens, which is helpful. But at the same time, Dr. Erland lying about himself being a Lunar ends up undermining his intentions. While he wanted Cinder to trust him, it only makes her feel less sure that he is on her side. Even when secrecy has good intentions behind it, it can sometimes run counter to one's goals.



Dr. Erland counteracts the stereotypes about Lunars here. While he acknowledges that people like Queen Levana and Sybil Mira are willing to perpetuate crimes against their own citizens to maintain their power, not all Lunars would do the same. In this way, the stereotypes that Cinder (and Earthens more generally) harbor about Lunars are misguided. Dr. Erland has sacrificed himself just like Cinder has, putting his own well-being at risk so that he could escape oppression, come to Earth, and help with letumosis research.



This is another example of how Dr. Erland's secrecy has caused harm, even though he kept information from Cinder in order to protect her. Because he wasn't honest about his and Cinder's identities, Cinder and Kai both held false hope that Dr. Erland would be able to find a cure for letumosis. As a result, Cinder has been continuing to visit the lab, despite the fact that the tests are dangerous.



CHAPTER 26

Kai arrives at the government officials meeting, where ambassadors from every Earthen country—the United Kingdom, the European Federation, the African Union, the American Republic, and Australia—have gathered on a video conference. They start to discuss how the relationship between Earth and Luna has been strained for many years—they need to find a way to prevent a war. Queen Levana's talks indicate that she wants a marriage alliance with Kai, but Torin says that Emperor Rikan was firm in avoiding this alliance.

Kai then informs the other officials that Queen Levana claims to have found a cure for letumosis—his research team is investigating a dose she brought. At this, the officials start to consider other marriage options, like with Levana's stepdaughter, Princess Winter. Torin points out that Winter has no royal blood, and Levana still needs an heir. The American president says his sources indicate that war is imminent if Levana cannot marry Kai. They have images of genetically engineered Lunars that are a cross between human and beast. Kai points out that Queen Levana is trying to scare them into accepting an alliance.

Kai's meeting demonstrates that he is not the only one who is trying to work in the interest of his people. All of the leaders on Earth are working to counteract Queen Levana's power, trying to find a solution for the tension between Earth and Luna without allowing Levana to take advantage of their citizens.



Levana's offer of an antidote tips the balance of power significantly. While Kai wants to avoid a war and doesn't want to marry Levana, he is adamant about not letting the people of Earth suffer—even if he has to make sacrifices to prevent that suffering.



CHAPTER 27

Cinder races to the quarantines as fast as she can and finds Peony, whose whole body is covered in dark splotches. As Cinder tries to get Peony to sit up to drink the antidote, Peony goes limp. Cinder begs her to stay awake, but she knows that Peony has died. She rocks her stepsister, telling her that she wanted to save her and that she got Kai to promise he would dance with her. Pain rips through Cinder's head, but it passes, less severe than the last time.

Cinder sees a med-droid coming to take out Peony's ID chip—but before it can, she grabs the scalpel, jams it through the android's sensor, and then takes Peony's chip out herself. As Cinder leaves, she sees Sunto, Chang Sacha's son, on a bed nearby. She takes out the vial and gives it to him to drink. As Cinder leaves, a voice comes over the speaker, informing Cinder that Adri has labeled her a runaway cyborg—their orders are to apprehend her by force and return her to Adri.

Peony's death is another tragic turning point in Cinder's life, particularly because Peony was Cinder's only ally within their family. This makes the reader (and Cinder) more aware of the high stakes of finding a cure for letumosis and helping society, knowing that so many other people are experiencing the same pain and sadness that Cinder is here.



While Cinder didn't arrive in time to help her stepsister, she wants to make a difference for Sunto, just as she promised Chang Sacha. Even though Sacha treated Cinder terribly, Cinder proves her kindness once more. Given the chance to save someone Sacha loved, Cinder chooses to take it rather than being vengeful.



CHAPTER 28

At dinner, Kai forces himself not to look at Levana, though the task is difficult. Levana starts to talk about the annual festival and ball, which Torin explains are celebrations of the end of the Fourth World War. Levana says the war was probably a good thing, as it forced the countries to conglomerate in larger groups and find peace. Kai fumes at this assessment—whole cultures were devastated in the war, along with countless natural resources. Levana says that Luna, having one country and one government, is a fairer arrangement. Kai points out that this means assuming that the ruling government is fair. Sybil Mira says that she hopes that Earth and Luna can find a new agreement under Kai's leadership, and Kai goes over his choices in his head: marriage or war.

Suddenly, Queen Levana screams—under the platter that was served to her lay a small hand **mirror**. Levana demands that the servant who set the platter be punished, but Torin points out that they don't know the woman is to blame. Sybil takes out a knife and holds its handle out toward the woman. Kai watches in horror as the woman takes the knife herself and points it toward her own eye. Kai hastily shouts that he ordered the kitchen to put a mirror on Levana's tray as a joke, and that they should blame him instead of this woman. The knife clatters to the floor, and Levana accepts his apology, though she knows that he is lying. She leaves, no longer hungry.

Kai picks up the **mirror**, noticing that the handle is made of a sparkling material—Lunar material. Torin deduces that Queen Levana was testing Kai. Just then, Kai receives an urgent message from the Secretary of Public Health and safety—a girl attacked a med-droid in the quarantines and escaped. The girl also spoke with a young boy, Sunto, who is now recovering from letumosis.

Levana's thoughts on the Fourth World War are emblematic of her political philosophy as a whole. For her, the cost of war to society is almost irrelevant, so long as that society comes out the other side without upheaval. She doesn't care about the citizens that she is supposed to protect, instead she is merely worried about maintaining political structures that are advantageous to her. Meanwhile, Kai is faced with the opposite choice—pondering what is the best decision for society as a whole, even if it means his own unhappiness.



The mirror in this passage symbolizes Levana and Sybil's refusal to portray themselves as they really are. Mirrors traditionally represent self-reflection and truth, so Levana's hatred of them suggests that she can't bear to let others see her for who she is—not can she bear to face who she is beneath her false exterior. This incident also illustrates and the lengths to which Levana and Sybil will go to manipulate others and maintain power: rather than using their Lunar gift to pursue justice, they use it for cruelty. This power allows them to threaten and even force others to harm themselves against their will. While leaders are usually charged with caring for the weak and poor in a country, Levana and Sybil do the opposite. This is an example of how power can be morally corrupting if it goes unchecked, leading those in power to destroy other people (and even entire societies) for their own benefit.



The revelation about the mirror again shows the contrast between Kai and Levana. While Kai is willing to sacrifice himself to protect others, Levana's power prompts her to manipulate and destroy those around her to buoy that power further, purposefully lying to test Kai's mettle. Meanwhile, given that the girl who attacked the med-droid spoke to Sunto, it's implied that the message is referring to Cinder resisting arrest.



CHAPTER 29

When Cinder returns home, she's furious that Adri had her arrested like a common criminal. Adri asks what Cinder was doing at the palace today, why she took a hover to the outskirts of the city, and why she stole 600 univs on a new foot. Cinder realizes that Adri screened Iko's memory and has been tracking her ID chip. Adri says that she's sold off some of Cinder's belongings so that they can pay for a plaque for Peony's funeral.

Adri tells Cinder that she isn't a part of this family—she's not even human, she can't even cry. Adri says it isn't fair that Cinder is alive while Peony is dead. Cinder says it's not her fault that Peony died, or that she's a cyborg, or that she's a part of the family. Cinder says that she can earn the 600 univs back, but Adri asserts that Cinder can't be trusted anymore. Adri says that Cinder won't be allowed to go to the ball, and orders her to leave her foot so that Adri can find a cheaper replacement.

Cinder leaves, furious, but she can't do anything about it. She legally belongs to Adri. She just needs time—a week or two until the car is ready. In the bedroom, Cinder sees some of the useless parts that Adri couldn't sell—including Iko's personality chip. Cinder gives a dry, grateful sob.

Adri is in a position of power over Cinder as her legal guardian—but rather than using her role to protect and support her stepdaughter, she uses it to take advantage of her. Even though Cinder is the only one who works and only spent money to buy a necessary prosthetics for herself, Adri sells Cinder's things for her own benefit. The power she has only makes her greedy for more.



Here, Adri ties her cruel treatment of Cinder to the fact that Cinder is a cyborg. The combination of her greed and prejudice against cyborgs (she believes that Cinder is subhuman because she has robotic body parts) enables Adri to mistreat her stepdaughter, to the point that she's even physically disabling Cinder by taking away her prosthetic foot to earn money.



Not only has Adri sold off Cinder's possessions but she also sold Iko for parts—leaving Cinder without her one ally. Still, these losses only push Cinder to try and escape Adri, demonstrating how she perseveres in the face of Adri's cruelty.



CHAPTER 30

On the day of the ball, Cinder sits in her booth as Adri and Pearl shop for some last-minute accessories in the market. Cinder doesn't take any business, however, as she plans to leave the city in only 12 hours. Every night for the past week, she went on homemade crutches to the parking garage to work on her car—and last night, she got the engine to work for the first time. Cinder used money from Dr. Erland's research on a tank of gasoline; her freedom is near.

Kai appears suddenly, wondering why Cinder hasn't been answering his messages. When she says that she's been busy, Kai pulls out a box with gold and white wrapping. Cinder is amazed at the gift—knowing that they could never be together, she wanted to disappear so that Kai could go on with his life. She is surprised that he still likes her even though she's just a poor mechanic—but she knows that telling him that she's cyborg and Lunar would be too much. She fidgets with her gloves but decides against taking them off to show him her metal hand.

Cinder again demonstrates her intense work ethic and perseverance. Only through her hard work on the car and her self-sacrifice at the letumosis research lab is she able to get everything she needs to make her escape—even overcoming the challenge of fixing up the car on one foot.



Cinder recognizes the problem with her own secrecy here. Because she has been hiding parts of her identity for so long, she knows that to reveal them now would be potentially more harmful than if she had been open with Kai in the first place. Even though Kai seems to genuinely like Cinder for who she is, she's internalized the discrimination she's faced as a cyborg (as well as the prejudice that she and other Earthens have harbored toward Lunars) to the point that she doesn't believe Kai could ever accept her true identity.



Kai asks again if Cinder all right—she hasn't even stood up. Covering for her missing foot, Cinder says that she's been here since dawn and she's tired, so he Kai that she take a break and go to lunch with him. She refuses, saying that she can't leave the booth unattended. Kai says that this may be the last time they see each other, and Cinder says that she's resigned herself to that fact. Kai dejectedly tells her that he has real feelings for her, but he will have to marry Queen Levana to get the letumosis antidote and to maintain peace.

Kai pushes the box toward Cinder and says that he wanted her to have what's inside for the ball. Hopefully, she'll think of him when she uses them. Suddenly, Pearl returns, throwing a set of boxes at Cinder to store for her. Kai confronts Pearl for her rudeness, and Pearl's jaw drops when she sees who he is. Kai tells Cinder that his invitation still stands, and he leaves without saying goodbye to Pearl.

After Kai leaves, Pearl snatches up the gold and white box and gapes at the beautiful silver-white silk gloves inside—gloves fit for a princess. Pearl starts to laugh, realizing that Kai must not know that Cinder is a cyborg. Pearl says that if he knew the truth, he would never have given Cinder a passing glance. Pearl then throws the gloves on the floor and flips over a toolbox on top of them, sending nuts and bolts flying. When Pearl leaves with her boxes, Cinder retrieves the gloves, which are now caked with dirt and grease.

CHAPTER 31

After the market closes, Cinder limps home, grateful that she only has one more night in the apartment. As Pearl dresses, she and Cinder trade sarcastic jabs until Pearl says that she's going to tell Kai that Cinder is a cyborg. Cinder bristles and says she could have asked Kai to dance with Pearl—he agreed to dance with Peony before she passed away. Pearl angrily tells Cinder that she shouldn't even use Peony's name, because it's Cinder's fault she was in the junkyard and got sick. Cinder assures Pearl that she loved Peony just as much as Pearl did.

Just then, Adri comes in and commands Cinder to wash their hover during Prince Kai's coronation. As Cinder does so, she watches some of the coronation coverage via her retina display. Representatives from the other Earthen countries officiate the lavish coronation as Kai vows to govern the Eastern Commonwealth according to its laws and customs, ruling with kindness and patience, and honoring the rights of all people. The European Prime Minister proclaims him the emperor, and the crowd cheers.

Kai's revelation illustrates his willingness to make an immense sacrifice for his people, demonstrating that he is a true and just leader. Even though he likes Cinder, and being with her would make him happy, he chooses to marry Levana because he knows this will do the most good for the Eastern Commonwealth.



Kai's relationship with Cinder versus his reaction to Pearl highlights the value of Cinder's kindness in contrast to Pearl's cruelty. It is this kindness that prompted Kai to ask Cinder to the ball in the first place. With this, the novel suggests that kindness is one of the highest virtues a person can have—and that treating others well is mutually rewarding.



The gloves illustrate the tension in Cinder's life. She wants to feel that she is a princess, as Kai's gift suggests she can be, but her family's cruelty makes her feel downtrodden and unworthy. Still, one of the morals of both Cinder and "Cinderella" is to judge a person by their character rather than their appearance or other superficial traits. Cinder's resourcefulness and kindness makes her just as worthy of wealth and happiness as anyone else.



Pearl's abuse of Cinder is an extension of Adri's abuse, as Pearl parrots many of the things that Adri says about Cinder. As Adri completely shirks the responsibility to care for Cinder, she destroys the trust, love, and support that is supposed to define a family and creates an atmosphere where Pearl feels equally free to mistreat Cinder.



Kai again demonstrates the opposite impulse of a leader like Queen Levana: he does not take advantage of the new power that he has been given. Instead, he recognizes that his job is to support the Eastern Commonwealth, not to destroy it or manipulate it for his own political gain.



Kai then gives a speech, explaining that he wants to serve the people over his tenure. He promises to find a cure for letumosis and to return the country to its former glory. He also addresses the strained relationship between Earth and Luna, hoping that a time of true peace between them is approaching. He says that he will do whatever it takes to ensure the well-being of his country. As the camera pans to Queen Levana, Cinder notes her smug expression.

Kai genuinely wants to serve his people rather than ruling with an iron fist. From his speech, it's clear that he's willing to put the people and the society above himself—demonstrating that he will be a true and just leader.



CHAPTER 32

After Adri and Pearl leave for the ball, Cinder returns to the apartment to pack. She tucks Peony's ID chip and Iko's personality chip in her calf compartment before returning to the basement, where Peony's gown is still draped over the welder. She rummages for parts should her own body or the car malfunction, and she sees her old, small **mechanical foot**: Iko must have saved it.

As Cinder packs, the objects in the basement remind readers how much she's already lost: her stepsister, her best friend, and even her foot. But her perseverance now allows her to make her escape in spite of these obstacles and tragedies.



Cinder then takes a knife out, planning to cut her ID chip out of her wrist so that no one can track her. But before she does, the direct link still loading on her netscreen pops up. Cinder accepts the link, and a girl's image pops up the screen. The girl says that she needs to speak with someone at the palace. She starts to cry, saying that Sybil will kill her if she finds out she's talking to Cinder—Sybil treats her like a prisoner and a slave. Cinder realizes that the girl is Lunar.

The girl communicating with Cinder through the netscreen is just one of many people whom Sybil and Levana are abusing and manipulating. As they do with so many others, they treat this girl like a slave and literally threaten her life in order to keep their political machinations a secret. But this is another example of how that manipulation backfires—the girl feels so oppressed and abused that she finds it necessary to betray the Lunars.



The girl reveals that Levana knows that Princess Selene is alive, and that Kai is searching for her. Once Kai and Levana marry, Levana is going to try to kill Kai and then brainwash the Earthens into following her. Cinder realizes that she has to warn Kai—she knows he's likely going to announce his intent to marry Levana at the ball that evening. Picking up Peony's dress, the small mechanical **foot**, and the silk gloves, Cinder resolves to go to the ball.

The book once again shows the lengths to which Levana will go to maintain and gain political power, killing people and causing massive political turmoil solely for her own benefit. Meanwhile, Cinder demonstrates her resilience in the face of obstacles as well as her self-sacrificing nature, as she gives up her chance for escape in order to warn Kai and save his life.



CHAPTER 33

Cinder quickly pulls on the dress, the gloves, and installs her 11-year-old-size **foot** before putting on a set of Pearl's discarded boots. Cinder knows she looks like a disaster, but she has no other choice. She hops into her orange car and drives over to the palace. The ride is jerky and harsh, but she's proud that she was able to get it working. However, when it starts raining, Cinder can no longer see, and she collides with a cherry blossom tree. When she recovers her breath, she gets out and walks, knowing that her chance for escape is gone.

All of the objects that Cinder uses underscore how her hard work, perseverance, and kindness are what allow her to go to the ball—not luck or magic like in the original "Cinderella" tale. Cinder has worked hard to fix up the car; she has scrounged for clothes and recovered her foot; and she acquired the gloves and an invite to the ball because of her kindness to Kai.



Cinder runs over to the palace's double doors and walks without letting anyone stop her, willing herself to look as graceful as possible in her soaked, disheveled condition. She heads down the main hall toward the music, where guards flank the stairs that cascade into the ballroom. From the top of the steps, she notices Kai dancing with Queen Levana. All she has to do is find a way to speak with him.

When the music ends, Kai and Levana separate, and Cinder thinks that this is her chance. But then she notices Pearl approach Kai. Suddenly, a guard addresses Cinder, asking to scan her ID to make sure that she has RSVPed. Cinder tries to deflect, but she has to give her information. The man gasps when he reads his scanner, realizing that she is Kai's personal guest. The man brings Cinder to the top of the stairs, and before she knows what's happening, trumpets blare, and the man announces her arrival to the whole room.

CHAPTER 34

Hundreds of faces turn towards Cinder, taking in her damp hair and muddy dress. Kai's jaw drops, and Cinder feels guilty for embarrassing him. She also realizes that Queen Levana is likely watching her and will probably try to kill her. Still, she makes her way down the steps as carefully as she can and approaches Kai, wondering if Pearl has already told him that she's a cyborg.

Before Cinder reaches Kai, Adri confronts Cinder about Peony's dress, and Pearl glares at her for stealing her boots. Adri calls Cinder a thief and lifts her hand as if to slap Cinder, but before Adri can move, Kai grabs her wrist. Adri apologizes, saying that Cinder shouldn't be there, but Kai assures her that Cinder is his personal guest. Kai urges his guests to resume dancing, and as the music starts up again, he takes Cinder's hand and begins to dance with her.

Kai guides Cinder through the dance as she tries not to limp on her small **foot**. Cinder apologizes for Adri's behavior, and Kai grows serious, asking her why she didn't tell him. For a moment, Cinder thinks that he knows she's a cyborg—and that he's dancing with her anyway, that he might still like her. But soon, Cinder realizes that Kai is asking why she didn't tell him about Peony's death. He says he feels bad that he didn't know. Cinder is devastated, realizing that he still doesn't know that she is a cyborg.

Cinder continues to show her perseverance as she arrives at the ball. Even though she's just crashed her car and looks like a mess, she doesn't let anyone stop her as she makes her way to the ballroom.



This exchange with the guard again reinforces how Cinder's kindness, rather than luck, is what has enabled her to go to the ball. The guard likely wouldn't have let her in if he'd seen her disheveled appearance without knowing who she is. But because of Cinder's kindness and hard work—which allowed her to build trust and friendship with Kai—she is able to attend the ball as Kai's personal guest.



Cinder underscores how she has come to the ball at great personal risk, as Queen Levana seeing her there could mean being imprisoned or even killed. Still, she puts Kai's safety over her own in the hopes of saving the Eastern Commonwealth from Levana's wrath, demonstrating the value of bravery and self-sacrifice.



Here, Cinder is finally able to reverse the dynamic between herself and Adri. Because of Kai's power and status, he is able to protect Cinder in a way that Adri never has. This again distinguishes the protagonists from the antagonists as those who help vulnerable people versus those who take advantage of vulnerable people.



Cinder feels the weight of the secrets she has been keeping about her identity. Her devastation at the fact that Kai doesn't know she is a cyborg shows how much she wishes she could be honest with him. Instead, she's deprived of that relief as she feels forced to keep hiding her identity, underscoring the counterproductivity of keeping secrets.



Cinder pushes away her disappointment and explains that she came to tell Kai something: he can't marry Levana. Levana knows the information about Princess Selene that Kai was looking for, and if they marry, she's going to try and kill him. Just then, Torin approaches Kai and informs him that it's time for his announcement.

Cinder explains her reason for coming, once again demonstrating her willingness to endure any backlash from Levana in order to protect Kai and the Eastern Commonwealth at large.



CHAPTER 35

After Cinder's revelation, Kai tells Cinder sadly that he has to marry Levana, even though he knows she'll likely kill him or start a war anyway. In desperation, Cinder kisses Kai and says as she pulls away that perhaps Levana will not accept his proposal when she finds out that Kai is in love with Cinder. Levana, standing nearby, says she doesn't care if Kai is in love with someone else, but she *does* care that Cinder is Lunar and a shell. Levana insists that Cinder be taken into captivity.

Just as Cinder is risking her well-being by warning Kai of Levana's plot, Kai also resolves to make a self-sacrificing choice, demonstrating how much Kai since his initial hesitance to give up his freedom and take over his father's role as emperor. He wants to put the health and safety of his people over his own life, potentially saving millions of lives.



A guard grabs Cinder, but Kai protests, saying that Cinder isn't Lunar. Warnings flash on Cinder's retina display as she feels a spike of adrenaline. She tells Levana that if she had not been brought to Earth, she would be a slave under the queen. Kai's face falls in shock, but he tells Levana that he doesn't care where Cinder was born—she's a citizen of the Commonwealth and will not be arrested. Levana asks Kai if he's prepared to bargain for Cinder.

Even though Kai is devastated by Cinder's deception about her identity, he still overcomes his bias against Lunars in an attempt to protect Cinder. Even though he, like most other Earthens, is prejudiced against Lunars, he now knows and cares about someone who is Lunar. As a result, Kai is much keener to protect a Lunar from Queen Levana's oppression.



CHAPTER 36

Queen Levana tells Kai that Cinder can live if he marries her, and Cinder pleads with him not to agree to this. Kai says that hours ago, he told his country that he would do anything, but he cannot have peace at the expense of freedom—he will not marry Levana. Relieved, Cinder thinks that she's not worth starting a war over. Queen Levana tells Kai that they will no longer continue their alliance discussions.

Queen Levana continues her manipulative streak here, using Cinder's life as a political bargaining chip. Yet at the same time, both Cinder and Kai choose to put the good of the country over their individual desires to save Cinder. Recognizing how far Levana is willing to go for power, Kai realizes that the most important thing is to protect his citizens from her: living under her rule would be worse than any disease or war.



Suddenly, Cinder gasps as she starts to see pasts Queen Levana's glamour—she isn't beautiful at all. Levana steps forward, telepathically forcing Cinder to snatch the gun from the guard and press it against her own temple. Kai rushes toward her, but she can't move. She can feel her finger slowly pull down on the trigger, but her retina display starts to initialize a resistance to the biological manipulation, and she forces the gun away from her head and towards the ceiling as it fires.

Queen Levana shows her complete abuse of power as she tries to cause Cinder to harm herself. But luckily, because of Cinder's cyborg operation, she is able to resist the Queen's gift. Again, the very aspect of her identity that people have discriminated against is actually what protects her and makes her more capable than others.



Cinder crumples and doubles over—she feels like she’s on fire. Her glove begins to melt away in front of Levana and Kai. Cinder then takes the gun and points it at the queen. But when she pulls the trigger, a guard jumps in front of the bullet, and it hits his shoulder. Cinder drops the gun and runs for the exit, down the garden stairs. Suddenly, she feels her **foot** unlatch, and she falls down the stairs. Kai looks at her over the railing, taking in her metal legs and arms.

Sybil and Levana join Kai on the balcony, commenting that Cinder isn’t a shell after all. Kai sneaks down the stairs, a look of disgust on his face. He picks up the rusted cyborg **foot** and asks Cinder if everything was in his head. Cinder assures him that she wouldn’t lie, though she knows that she has lied about many things. Kai tells her that she’s more painful to look at than Levana. He turns back to Levana and says that he’ll imprison Cinder until they decide what to do with her. In exchange, Levana will not wage war against his planet. Levana agrees that she will not wage war on Earth for *this* infraction.

CHAPTER 37

Cinder is sitting in a prison cell, replaying the first time that Kai visited her booth. Soon, she’ll be transported back to Luna. A guard interrupts her thoughts, bringing in Dr. Erland to visit. He insists on speaking to Cinder alone, explaining that she’s a test subject and he needs her blood sample. When the guard refuses, Dr. Erland uses his gift on the guard, who opens Cinder’s cell and leaves. Cinder explains what happened at the ball, and Dr. Erland says that Kai made the right choice—particularly because Levana probably wouldn’t have let Cinder live long anyway if they married.

Dr. Erland then explains that he wants Cinder to come to Africa with him. He gives her a new metal hand and metal foot. Inside the hand is a hidden flashlight, knife, gun, and a screwdriver. Cinder reminds Dr. Erland that if she leaves, Levana will start a war—and she’s not worth starting one over. Dr. Erland replies that Cinder *is* worth starting a war over. He tried to tell her last week, but she’s not only Lunar, and not only *not* a shell—she’s Princess Selene, Queen Levana’s niece and the true heir to the Lunar throne.

Cinder losing her entire foot on the stairs ties back to the original tale of “Cinderella,” wherein the titular character lost one of her glass slippers at the ball. In the original, the slipper symbolized luck, as it was given to her by magic and ultimately allowed the prince to find her. Here, by contrast, Cinder’s mechanical foot represents her perseverance in the face of difficulty. Even on her small, rusted foot, Cinder does her best to warn Kai and escape Levana’s wrath, even if it means Kai finding out the truth about her.



Kai clearly carries some of the typical bias that most fully human Earthens harbor against cyborgs. But at the same time, the book implies that he is more hurt by the fact that Cinder lied about her identity than he is disgusted by her robotic parts. Notably, this is another connection between “Cinderella” and Cinder: both Cinder’s mechanical foot and Cinderella’s slipper help the respective princes in the story discover the women’s true identities. But while Prince Charming of the original tale remains in love with the humble Cinderella, here Kai feels betrayed and no longer wants anything to do with Cinder. Thus, Cinder’s deception was actually harmful to her relationship with Kai because the truth came out later—more so than if she had been open in the first place.



Here, Cinder experiences the fallout of her decision to put Kai and the Eastern Commonwealth above herself. Dr. Erland—and, by extension, the novel itself—affirm that this was the right decision, and that putting others above oneself is a worthy course of action that makes Cinder a heroic protagonist.



This final revelation helps explain so much of Dr. Erland’s deception, as he was hiding this massive secret from Cinder in order to protect her from Levana’s wrath. Yet it shows the problem with this kind of deception, too. Kai spent a great deal of time and effort looking for Princess Selene, and had Cinder known about her own identity, perhaps much of the book’s conflict could have been avoided.



CHAPTER 38

Cinder shocked to learn that she's Queen Levana's niece, but she knows that Dr. Erland is telling the truth. Dr. Erland tells her that she's the only one who can dethrone Queen Levana. He's been searching for her for many years, knowing that she was a cyborg teenager because her body was badly damaged in the fire that Levana set. Cinder suddenly realizes that Dr. Erland set up the cyborg draft to try and find her—she's furious that he was willing to sacrifice those people's lives to do so.

Cinder asks if Queen Levana knows who she is, and Dr. Erland says that Levana likely does, but she wants to keep Cinder's identity hidden. Dr. Erland says that Cinder needs to escape to Africa so that he can help her dethrone Levana. Cinder starts to protest that she can't be a queen, but he assures her that she can do it. After Dr. Erland leaves, Cinder searches for all the information she can find about Princess Selene via her brain interface and feels as if she has no idea who she is anymore. But then she thinks back to the image of Kai in the market, and she knows that she can't give up yet.

Cinder feels a strange electricity course through her as she realizes that she is finally in control of her Lunar gift. She takes the knife out of her hand compartment and removes her ID chip from her wrist. She knows the whole world would be searching for her—for Cinder. But they'll be looking for a ghost.

Cinder recognizes another layer of Dr. Erland's manipulation: the cyborg draft. He likely sacrificed many other cyborgs just to be able to find her. In this way, his secrecy and manipulation caused more harm than good to an already vulnerable population.



Cinder's thoughts here reinforce her bravery as well as her perseverance. Even in the face of these shocking revelations about her identity and her uncertainty about ruling, she feels a responsibility to Kai and the society at large to help take Levana out of power.



The book's final pages leave Cinder's story on an ambiguous note: she is leaving behind her identity as Cinder and attaining the power of Lunar glamour. But thus far, the book has suggested that unlike Levana, Cinder will use these powers not to take advantage of others, but to support them. And she will do so not by hiding who she is, but by embracing her true identity as Princess Selene.





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