

Discussion Guide: Alabaster

This guide is designed to help reading groups explore the themes of legacy, truth, and the intersection of technology and desert survival in the first book of the series.

I. The Burden of Truth & Secrets

1. **The Protagonist's Weight:** Hollis carried a truth alone for his entire life. How do you think this isolation shaped his character? Does keeping a secret to protect others justify the personal toll it takes?
2. **The Reveal:** When the "door" is finally opened, the truth is not what the characters imagined. Discuss a time when a long-held expectation was met with a completely different reality. How did the characters' preparation help or hinder their ability to handle the surprise?

II. The Philosophy of Work

3. **"The Work Needed Doing":** Prael tracks an aquifer for two years without a clear explanation of why. In our modern world of instant gratification, what can we learn from the characters' dedication to long-term, quiet labor?
4. **Building for the Future:** Hollis "trusted the future" with his secrets. If you were building a legacy today—physical or digital—what would you lock away for people to find 500 years from now?

III. Setting and Atmosphere

5. **The Desert as a Character:** How does the harsh, arid environment act as a catalyst for the plot? Would the story have the same emotional impact if it were set in a lush, resource-rich forest?
6. **The Tower:** The Tower has been "calling" for centuries. Discuss the symbolism of the Tower. Is it a beacon of hope, a warning, or a monument to the past?

IV. Community and Found Family

7. **Tomas's Certainty:** Eight-year-old Tomas looks at an empty room and says, "Not yet, but someday." How does the perspective of a child change the group's dynamic? Is his optimism necessary for their survival?
8. **Shared Vision:** The characters build "something worth having" without fully knowing what they are building toward. Does a group need a specific goal to be successful, or is the act of building together enough to create a community?

V. Science Fiction vs. Reality

9. **The Evolution of the Narrative:** The book begins with survival and building but ends with "the darkness between the stars." Did you find the transition into broader science fiction themes earned? How did the Foreword's explanation of the "textbook" origin influence your reading of the world-building?
10. **The Next Step:** The book ends with the characters walking through the door anyway, despite the unknown. Is this an act of bravery, curiosity, or necessity?

Activity: The Time Capsule Archive

If your group were to leave a "Reader Information Guide" or a single artifact for the next generation of readers—similar to how Hollis left his records—what would it be?

- **The Artifact:** One physical object.
- **The Message:** One sentence explaining who we were.
- **The Warning:** One thing they should be wary of when they "open the door."