

Notes for Podcast: *Borne* Part 3b, Pages 264-323

In this section, Rachel and Wick try to enter the Company building through a secret door, but it is jammed so they enter through a crack in the wall. Wick's shoulder is sliced by a venomous bear claw, so he is pretty much incapacitated for the rest of this adventure. Success is entirely up to Rachel.

As Rachel explores the building, the wrongness of the Company becomes more and more apparent. The holding ponds outside, full of biotech mistakes and discards, are the least of it. The Company has been in the business of making monsters for profit. The giant fish with a human face is one. Mord is another. But among the papers in the abandoned rooms she finds designs with Wick's face. Wick is not human. He is a biotech creation.

At this point in the novel we are getting to some big thematic questions. One might be, are there companies in our own world who would do these things? Who might they be, and what should we do about them?

The question about personhood is asked over and over by Borne. Now Rachel has to ask it about Wick. Is Wick, apparently an artificial human, a person?

Rachel and Wick, Wick barely conscious, descend further and further into the building. Wick needs his medicine and they need food. The way he knows is blocked, quite purposefully and permanently. However, Rachel sees a fox head peering out of a passage. She follows, pushing Wick along with her. Wherever she goes, the fox, and other animals, follow her.

The foxes are biotech. They are able to fade in and out of view like the Cheshire Cat in Alice in Wonderland. They have been living in this area of the building. Rachel calls them "people, of a kind" (294). So the question of personhood comes up again. Are the foxes people? Rachel thinks they are.

Rachel sees a footprint in the dust that wasn't there when she left Wick. And she has a sort of déjà vu experience as she explores this level. She thinks she has been there before. And then she meets the Magician, peering at a large silver screen which appears to be a portal to another world, or another part of the world. Apparently, supplies came in and products were shipped out.

The Magician makes another pitch for Rachel to join her. Instead, Rachel kills her with a rock.

This is a bit surprising for us as readers. Rachel has killed before, maybe, but she doesn't seem to be a natural born killer, even given her troubled life and strong survivor instincts. The Magician is a leader, perhaps a gang boss or even a warlord, who has been defeated and is on the run. Is Rachel right to kill her? On page 295, Rachel addresses the reader directly and asks, "What would you have done?"

We could ask why the author has Rachel address us at this point. Is it because he knows that readers might be surprised by her action?

Rachel discovers that the last shipment through the portal had been Borne, or rather, many, many Borne. She also reasons that the only ones who could have brought Borne to life and brought him outside were the biotech foxes. Borne is part of some kind of fox plan that she doesn't understand.

Prior to this, there is a flashback in which Rachel is recalling conversations with Wick and with Borne about whether Borne is a weapon. Even as she is thinking this, Borne is battling Mord. Is Borne a weapon? Is he a weapon deployed by the foxes?

But Borne was activated, raised, and educated by Rachel. Rachel gave Borne a home, and some idea of morality. If Borne is a weapon, is Rachel the trigger or the fuse?

Then there is the letter. The letter is a sort of exposition bomb. It explains many things. Wick is not who he seems to be. Rachel is not who she seems to be, Rachel HAS been in the Company building before. She has lost memories because she asked Wick to take them. The Magician knows her well because she bought those memories from Wick.

The author could have given us this letter, or details from it, at many points in the story. Is this the best place for it, after the events in the company building, but before Mord and Borne have engaged in mutual destruction? Would you have written it in this way?

Throughout much of this section, Mord and Borne have been battling off screen, like Godzilla versus King Gidera. Finally, in the sort of anti-climatic climax of the novel, Borne realizes that he cannot defeat Mord without sacrificing himself. He envelops Mord and there is a flash of light and they both disappear. Along with the flash, Rachel hears Borne say her name. Why does Borne say Rachel's name as he dies? Is he doing all this for Rachel?

Some semblance of life returns to the city. At the end of the falling action, Rachel finds Borne, who is now more like a plant. He can no longer speak, move or grow, but he is with Rachel.

This section revisits big themes about purpose, sacrifice, morality, life, death, and personhood. Everything comes together at the end.

Endings are often tough. Sometimes really good books have cheesy endings. How about this one? Is it satisfying?