

Notes for Podcast: *Borne* Part 2

This section of the novel is long and we learn quite a bit about the world, about Rachel, and about Borne.

It strikes me that this novel resonates with our current situation. Rachel and Wick are essentially locked down in the Balcony Cliffs. It is dangerous to go outside, but they must do so to scavenge for supplies.

Borne

Borne essentially goes through the phases of childhood. He learns words and facts, he grows, eventually he decides he needs his own apartment. Wick notes that every living thing in the Balcony Cliffs has disappeared. They note too that Borne eats, but never excretes anything. Everything he absorbs becomes part of him and he gets bigger and bigger. Borne seems to have absorbed the feral children who attacked Rachel. He can speak with their voices and see with their eyes. He has read every book in the Balcony Cliffs. He asks existential questions about life, love, identity, and motives. He engages in complex wordplay. He wants to go out scavenging with Rachel. When she says no, he disobeys. Rachel loses control of Borne. Eventually, he comes and goes as he pleases.

On page 96, a scene begins in which Borne eventually ends up have to completely engulf Rachel and take the form of a rock in order to protect Rachel from an attack by a Mord proxy. From what we have begun to suspect at this time, confirmed later in this section, it must have taken a lot of willpower for Borne not to absorb Rachel. Borne is hurt when the Mord proxy bear bites him, but he saves Rachel.

Borne tells Rachel about conversations he has had with people he meets outside. Eventually, she learns that Borne has absorbed them. Borne calls this “knowing” them, not “killing” them. Borne also decorates his apartment with the three dead astronauts.

Eventually, Wick and Rachel find out that Borne has been impersonating both of them. They kick him out of the Balcony Cliffs. He is too dangerous. Even Borne seems to realize this.

Borne also has “pets,” foxes and other animals that may be biotech that follow him around.

Is Borne a monster? Is he still a child, or is he becoming an adult? Can he stop killing? Does he love Rachel? Can he be trusted not to absorb her or Wick? Could he be an ally against their enemies? Is Wick blind to the possible advantages of having Borne on their side? Is Wick jealous of Borne?

Stepping outside of the story for a moment, how does the author develop the character of Borne? What details make him seem like a person rather than a monster?

The Political Situation

Mord dominates the city. Apparently the Company created Mord, but it appears that those left at the Company now serve Mord. Mord may have once been human.

The Magician is trying to control more and more areas of the city. We see a battle between the augmented feral children controlled by the Magician and Mord proxies. The Mord proxies win. It is a slaughter.

The Magician offers Wick a deal. He will get protection, supplies, and more biotech if he allies with her. In return she gets access to the Balcony Cliffs and Borne. Rachel won't have it. Rachel has met the Magician once when she tried to recruit her. Rachel now knows that the children who attacked her were from the Magician, and were intended as a message to Wick. Wick knows that they don't have much chance if they turn down this deal.

But the Magician tries to kill Mord with a missile attack that fails. Mord destroys her headquarters and then attacks the Company building too. Whatever balance of power that existed in the city is falling apart.

It may be that Wick and Rachel have survived this long in the Balcony Cliffs not so much through their own cunning, but because the Magician considers them valuable potential allies and has refrained from attacking them. What do you think?

Is it possible that the situation in the city will become even worse as the balance of power crumbles? Are there any good guys here?

Wick

Wick is complex, conflicted, and hard to read. We find that Wick needs a medicine that he gets from the Magician to survive. He appears to be a genius biotech designer. He used to work for the company, and knows the Magician personally.

Wick designs biotech "beetles" that serve as memory enhancers, drugs, and weapons. He has worms that have medicinal and therapeutic powers. He has a swimming pool vat full of mysterious biotech.

Wick says that the Magician controls territory because she has a vision. Does Wick have a vision? What is Wick trying to do?

Does Wick love Rachel? What does "love" mean under these circumstances?

Rachel

Rachel is clearly a survivor. She can fight, recognize traps when she sees them, and summon up both courage and caution when she needs them. She is good at tactics and responding to a situation. She remembers good times with her parents and bad times as a perpetual refugee. The Magician calls her "a valuable commodity," which says as much about the Magician as it does about Rachel.

Read 122-25

Does the Magician really have a vision and a way forward? Could she make Rachel happy? Should Rachel have joined the Magician's cause?

At the end of this section Rachel sees Borne, now kicked out of the Balcony Cliffs, impersonating her in the city. Borne is trying on identities like clothes.