

The City & the City



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF CHINA MIÉVILLE

China Miéville was raised by a single mother in London. He studied anthropology at the University of Cambridge, where he became a Marxist, and later completed a master's and PhD at the London School of Economics. His PhD thesis took the form of a "Marxist Theory of International Law." While still working on his PhD, Miéville began publishing fiction. His work tends to include elements of the fantasy and science fiction genres, though he dislikes the label "fantasy," because most people associate it with magical creatures like fairies and elves. *The City and the City* is one of his most popular and acclaimed books; it won several major awards, including the Locus Award, the Arthur C. Clarke award, and the Hugo Award. In addition to fiction, Miéville has also published comics, a children's book, academic writing, and a retelling of the 1917 Russian Revolution (*October*, published in 2017). He is also active in socialist politics.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Despite its setting in fictional twin cities and its fantastical elements, *The City and the City* does take place in the real world, with many references to real geographies, technologies, facets of pop culture, and historical events. One of the most important historical events looming in the background of the events of the novel is the existence of the Soviet Union and the "Iron Curtain," which divided Western Europe from the Soviet East. Relatedly, the novel makes reference to cities that currently are or historically were divided, including Berlin, Budapest, and Jerusalem. In the novel, it is not known whether Beszel and Ul Qoma were created by dividing one city (as occurred when Berlin was split into East and West Berlin) or by fusing two cities (as occurred when the towns of Buda, Óbuda, and Pest were unified to form Budapest). The border checkpoint that exists in the novel (at Copula Hall) reflects similar border checkpoints in the real world, such as the famous Checkpoint Charlie in Berlin or the checkpoints along the West Bank that currently exist in Israel/Palestine.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The City and the City combines a number of different genres, from "new weird" fiction to police procedural to urban fantasy. Yet this combination of genres is not actually as eclectic or unusual as it might seem. There is, for example, a strong tradition of science fiction detective novels, which includes Philip K. Dick's [Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?](#), Michael

Chabon's *The Yiddish Policeman's Union*, and Jedediah Berry's *The Manual of Detection*. Meanwhile, science fiction and fantasy novels that prominently explore invented cityscapes and urban life include Jeff VanderMeer's *City of Saints and Madmen* and Samuel R. Delany's *Dhalgren*. Of course, *The City and the City* also draws on classic police procedurals that do not involve fantastical or supernatural elements. Intriguingly, most of the well-known authors writing in the "golden age" of detective fiction were British women. They include Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers, Josephine Tey, and Margery Allingham.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The City and the City*
- **When Written:** Around 2009
- **Where Written:** London, UK
- **When Published:** 2009
- **Literary Period:** 21st-century British Genre Fiction; "New Weird" Fiction
- **Genre:** Weird Fiction; Police Procedural
- **Setting:** Beszel and Ul Qoma, two fictional overlapping city-states in Eastern Europe
- **Climax:** Borlú shoots and kills Yorjavic, thereby committing breach.
- **Antagonist:** Dr. David Bowden; Sear and Core
- **Point of View:** First person from Borlú's perspective

EXTRA CREDIT

Linguistic Worldbuilding. For the TV adaptation of *The City and the City*, a linguist named Dr. Alison Long was hired to devise 1800 words of Illitan, the language spoken in Ul Qoma.

Parting Gift. Miéville wrote *The City and the City* as a gift for his mother, who had a terminal illness, and was a fan of the police procedural genre.



PLOT SUMMARY

Inspector Tyador Borlú arrives at the scene of a murder. A constable named Lizybet Corwi is already there, looking at the body of the dead woman. The pathologist, Stepen Shukman, determines that the woman died from puncture wounds to her chest, although there are also significant gashes across her face. Another detective, Bardo Naustin, says the dead woman was probably a sex worker. However, after Borlú and Corwi go around the area asking local sex workers if they knew the woman, none of them does. Borlú goes to Shukman's lab, where

Shukman informs him that there are no signs of sexual intercourse or self-defense, and that it seems as if the killer approached the woman from behind.

On Borlú's request, posters go up around the city of Beszel asking for information about the dead woman. He gets a call from a colleague, Yaszek, informing him that the policzai (the police) have found the van that was used to transport the dead woman's body. The van is owned by Mikyael Khurusch, a man with a criminal record for theft and soliciting prostitution. Borlú and Corwi interrogate Khurusch, who claims his van went missing. They learn that he has an alibi for the night of the murder.

On the Monday after the body is found, Borlú receives a personal call from a man speaking strangely archaic, accented Besz. Nervously, the man says the dead woman is named Marya, and if she is dead, he and his friends are also in danger. He says that she lived in the other city, UI Qoma. UI Qoma and Beszel exist in the same physical, geographic space, but they operate completely separately from one another. The man tells Borlú that he knew Marya from the underground political scene. Despite the fact that the man is calling from UI Qoma, he admits that he saw Borlú's poster, then immediately hangs up. Simply knowing this information makes Borlú guilty of **breach**, the crime of engaging with the opposite city from the one you are currently in. In Beszel and UI Qoma, breach is "far worse than illegal."

Without wanting to implicate Corwi in this breach, Borlú suggests to her that they look into the local unificationists—dissidents who believe that the two cities should merge into one. Borlú explains that no one knows whether the two cities began as one that divided, or whether they were founded separately. Corwi and Borlú go to a unificationist headquarters, where they meet a man called Pall Drodin. Drodin says he knew the dead woman by the (obviously fake) name of Byela Mar. He says that she used to come to the headquarters to use the library, and that she was obsessed with Orciny, the mythical third city that exists between the other two.

After receiving information faxed over from UI Qoma, Borlú and Corwi learn that the dead woman's real name was Mahalia Geary, and that she was a 24-year-old American PhD student in the archeology department of Prince of Wales University, a Canadian University with a campus in UI Qoma. Borlú presents this information to the Oversight Committee, a governing body containing a mix of Besz and UI Qoman politicians that meets in **Copula Hall**. Years ago, at a conference about recently discovered ancient artifacts found at an UI Qoman dig called Bol Ye'an, Mahalia caused outrage by giving a presentation on Orciny. Borlú argues that—considering Mahalia lived in UI Qoma and her body was discovered in Beszel—her murder must have involved breach and should be turned over to Breach, the authority charged with policing breaches. However,

one member of the committee argues that Breach is an "alien power" that should only be invoked in rare circumstances. The committee reluctantly agrees to turn the case over to Breach nonetheless.

Mahalia's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Geary, arrive in Beszel to view their daughter's body. Mr. Geary becomes frustrated when Borlú reminds him of the restrictions involved in traveling to UI Qoma and tells him that he will not be able to know the outcome of Breach's investigation into the case, because they work in an extremely opaque manner. After the Gearys leave, Borlú suggests to Corwi that they keep working on the case while they wait for Breach to take over.

Borlú calls Mahalia's PhD supervisor, Professor Nancy, who scoffs at the idea that Mahalia would be studying Orciny within an archeology department. Nancy assures him that Mahalia left her interest in Orciny behind, and that her thesis focuses on the artifacts found at Bol Ye'an, which are highly technologically advanced for their era and are rumored to have mysterious, even magical properties. Nancy says that before Mahalia lost interest in Orciny, she was interested in the work of David Bowden, an adjunct professor at Prince of Wales who wrote a book called **Between the City and the City**, which argues for the existence of Orciny. Borlú looks up the book online and encounters conspiracy theory websites about the existence of Orciny. He learns that Mr. Geary breached, and that he and Mrs. Geary are immediately being deported.

Mr. Geary had been carrying a piece of paper with the address of the headquarters of the True Citizens, a Besz nationalist organization. Borlú and Corwi go there, but soon after they begin questioning the people, someone calls the True Citizens' lawyer, Harkad Gosz, who forces them to leave. The next morning, Commissar Gadlem tells Borlú that the Oversight Committee has, surprisingly, decided not to forward the case to Breach after all. Borlú is therefore still working on it, and will soon be sent over to continue the investigation in UI Qoma.

Borlú is driven to Copula Hall, where he passes the official border and enters UI Qoma. An UI Qoman detective named Qussim Dhatt is waiting to greet him. As they drive away together, Dhatt warns Borlú that his role in UI Qoma is as a "consultant" and "guest." When Borlú asks if he can explore the city on his own, Dhatt replies that it would be best if he didn't. The militsya (the UI Qoman police) get a call saying that Mahalia's best friend, another PhD student named Yolanda Rodriguez, is missing. That night, Borlú walks to Bol Ye'an and is intercepted by two members of the militsya, who politely escort him back to his hotel.

The next morning, Borlú and Dhatt go to Bol Ye'an together. They speak to Professor Nancy, David Bowden, and several of Mahalia's fellow students. One of the security guards, a young man named Aikam Tseh, expresses deep concern about the case. After Borlú tells Dhatt about the anonymous phone call, which he believes came from a unificationist, they go to a

unificationist headquarters and interrogate the people there, but this leads nowhere conclusive. Afterward, Borlú and Dhatt go to Bowden's apartment, where Bowden dismisses his own book, *Between the City and the City*, as the work of a "stoned young man." However, he also emphasizes that most of the research in the book is still cited and considered legitimate.

The same man who originally called with the anonymous tip calls Borlú again, introducing himself as Jaris, one of the people at the unificationist headquarters. He thanks Borlú for not turning him in and explains that Mahalia believed she was helping Orciny, and told him shortly before her death that "everyone who knows the truth about Orciny is in danger." Borlú gets a call from Dhatt saying that someone has sent a bomb to Bol Ye'an.

Showing up at the dig, Borlú learns that the bomb was addressed to Bowden and is the kind designed to target just one specific person. There is a message on it in Illitan (the language of UI Qoma), a line from a patriotic UI Qoman song. Borlú tells Dhatt about the phone call from Jaris, and Dhatt insists that they put aside their differences and commit to working together. This is made difficult when Dhatt's colleagues from the militsya harass Borlú for being Beszel. The next day, Borlú tracks down Yolanda, who is hiding in a derelict apartment on the outskirts of the city. Her boyfriend, Aikam, goes to visit her, indirectly leading Borlú to her. Yolanda explains that before Mahalia's death, Orciny had been contacting Mahalia, and now Yolanda is terrified that Orciny is going to kill her as well. Borlú suggests she commit breach to protect herself, but Yolanda thinks that Orciny and Breach might be the same thing. Borlú promises that he will get Yolanda to safety via Beszel.

Bowden is missing, but Borlú manages to get in contact with him via phone. Along with Dhatt and Corwi, he makes a plan to secretly smuggle both Bowden and Yolanda into Beszel by pretending that they are militsya. However, just as they are about to pass through Copula Hall, Yolanda and Dhatt are shot. Dhatt is just injured, but Yolanda dies.

Borlú runs after the shooter and shoots him, thereby committing breach (because the shooter is in Beszel). Breach surround Borlú, and he is enveloped in darkness.

Borlú wakes up inside a kind of prison cell, which he is told is in "the Breach." There are three people in there (Breach avatars) who do not introduce themselves by name, only as Breach. They tell him that he committed a particularly violent breach, and that it is up to them how long he stays there. They need to figure out the details of the case in order to make a decision.

Borlú walks through the cities along with another Breach avatar, who goes by Ashil. None of the citizens can properly see them. Ashil explains that they are not in one city or the other, but both. They go to the UI Qoma University library, where they find Mahalia's copy of *Between the City and the City*. They

then go back to Bol Ye'an, where they figure out that Mahalia was smuggling some of the artifacts to (what she thought was) Orciny. Borlú then realizes that Mahalia wasn't killed because she believed in Orciny, but rather because she eventually *stopped* believing in it, which jeopardized the smuggling operation.

Back at the Breach headquarters, Borlú realizes that a corporation called Sear and Core was behind the operation to smuggle the artifacts; they were using Mahalia in order to get the artifacts out of Bol Ye'an in order to sell them in Beszel for a profit. Orciny, it becomes clear, does not actually exist. Just as Ashil agrees to use the forces of Breach to apprehend Sear and Core, he gets news that unificationists have engineered a crash between two busloads of refugees. It is a massive breach event, and the wholes of both cities are being placed on lockdown.

Borlú and Ashil go to the Sear and Core building, where they find a representative from the company, Ian Croft, alongside a Beszel social democrat politician named Mikhel Buric and two Beszel nationalists. Buric admits to arranging the whole smuggling scheme for Sear and Core, boasting that he was enriching Beszel at UI Qoma's expense. A shootout takes place; Buric is killed and Ashil injured. Croft escapes, thereby evading punishment for his role in the scheme. After making sure Ashil is taken care of, Borlú tracks down Bowden with the help of Corwi and Dhatt, although his ability to communicate with them is limited by the fact that he is in Breach. In the confrontation that ensues, Borlú accuses Bowden of using and then killing Mahalia out of his own egoism. Bowden was the one who decided to use her as part of the Sear and Core smuggling operation, and he chose Mahalia because he wanted her to believe in Orciny in order to legitimize his scholarly work; he was furious when she realized the truth. Up until this point, Bowden has been moving in a perfectly neutral manner, such that no one can tell whether he is in Beszel or UI Qoma. However, Borlú forces Bowden to breach, and they are both taken by Breach.

At the end of the novel, Borlú remains in Breach, unsure of how long he will be there or if he will ever get out. He now lives "in both the city and the city."



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Inspector Tyador Borlú – Tyador Borlú is the main character in the novel, which is told from his perspective. A senior detective with the Beszel Extreme Crime Squad, Borlú is a conventional hero for crime fiction in that he is tough, intelligent, insightful, and maniacally devoted to his job. A somewhat isolated figure, he lives alone in an apartment that he deliberately chose because an UI Qoman train runs past it. Yet despite small gestures of rebellion against **Breach**, Borlú does not have a

strong position on the political matters of his city, including its divide from UI Qoma. At the end of the novel, Borlú confirms that he is not a political person. However, despite his lack of strong political opinions, Borlú is committed to his own principles. He has an innate commitment to fairness and the pursuit of justice, and this means he dedicates himself to solving the case of Mahalia's murder even when it means rebelling against his superiors and putting himself at personal risk. By the end of the novel, the risks Borlú has taken land him in Breach. As punishment for committing breach himself, Borlú must serve as an avatar of Breach for an undetermined amount of time. He is thus left in a kind of purgatory, held at the mercy of an "alien power."

Mahalia Geary (a.k.a. Fulana/Marya/Byela Mar) – At the beginning of the narrative, Mahalia Geary's dead body is discovered by the Beszel policzai, and the case of her murder becomes the central plot of the novel. Extraordinarily intelligent, Mahalia was an American PhD student in the archaeology department of Prince of Wales University, a Canadian university that has a campus in UI Qoma. Professor Nancy was her supervisor, and her thesis was on the artifacts at the Bol Ye'an dig. However, her real interest lay in Orciny, the mythical third city thought to lie between Beszel and UI Qoma. Dr. David Bowden ended up using Mahalia's interest in Orciny to get her to smuggle artifacts out of Bol Ye'an, which were then taken by the corporation Sear and Core. When Mahalia discovered that Orciny wasn't actually real and was just a front to cover up the smuggling operation, David killed her.

Lizybet Corwi – Corwi is Borlú's partner in the policzai, and she is also working on the case of Mahalia's murder. She is highly intelligent, courageous, and has impressive skills that Borlú desperately needs, including computer skills. Like Borlú, she is deeply dedicated to her job, and she willingly puts herself into extremely risky situations many times in her pursuit of justice. Corwi also helps Borlú track down David Bowden after the truth about Orciny comes out.

Detective Qussim Dhatt – Dhatt is Borlú's partner in UI Qoma, and the two begin working together after it becomes clear that Mahalia Geary was from UI Qoma. A detective with the UI Qoman militsya, Dhatt at first seems to be a pretty stark contrast to Borlú. Whereas Borlú is serious, level-headed, and committed to the job, Dhatt is jokey and erratic. He also uses violence in interrogations, which Borlú disapproves of. However, over time Dhatt overcomes both his goofiness and his competitiveness, and proves himself to be a committed detective and loyal friend. Dhatt helps Borlú track down David Bowden after the truth about Orciny comes out.

Dr. David Bowden – Bowden is an adjunct professor at Prince of Wales University in Canada who is based largely in UI Qoma. He found early fame through writing a book called **Between the City and the City**, which argued for the existence of a third city between Beszel and UI Qoma called Orciny. However,

while this book was popular, it was eventually dismissed as nothing more than a foolish conspiracy theory. As becomes clear at the end of the novel, this embittered Bowden, who regrets that his academic career came to nothing and feels embarrassed that people don't take him seriously. This led him to collaborate with the Sear and Core corporation by tricking Mahalia into believing that Orciny is real, and convincing her to start smuggling artifacts from Bol Ye'an in order to return them to the fictional city. When Mahalia discovered the truth, Bowden killed her in a fit of rage and shame. After Borlú discovers that Bowden is guilty of the murder, he apprehends him and forces Bowden to commit **breach**. Although Bowden's final fate is unknown, he is punished by Breach.

Yolanda Rodriguez – Yolanda is Mahalia's best friend. Less intelligent than Mahalia, Yolanda is Bowden's only PhD supervisee. She has a somewhat naïve, gullible nature, and when Mahalia is killed, Yolanda believes Orciny is responsible. Yolanda panics, and her boyfriend, Aikam Tsueh, hides her in an apartment in the outskirts of UI Qoma. She is killed by Yorjavic while Borlú is attempting to smuggle her to safety in Beszel.

Ashil – Ashil is a Breach avatar who watches over Borlú after he is brought into the **Breach**. Ashil is not his real name, but just a name he asks Borlú to use to refer to him when they are walking through the cities. Like other Breach avatars, Ashil is strangely devoid of emotion, although he frequently offers philosophical reflections and insights.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Professor Isabelle Nancy – Professor Nancy is a professor in the archaeology department at Prince of Wales University who is based in UI Qoma. She was Mahalia's PhD supervisor.

Aikam Tsueh – Aikam is a 19-year-old UI Qoman man who works as a security guard at Bol Ye'an. He is dating Yolanda, and helps hide her when she starts fearing for her life after Mahalia is killed.

Mr. Geary – Mr. Geary is Mahalia's father. When he comes to Beszel to view Mahalia's body, he **breaches**, which leads to him and Mrs. Geary getting deported.

Mrs. Geary – Mrs. Geary is Mahalia's mother.

Mikyel Khurusch – Mikyel Khurusch is the owner of the van used to transport Mahalia's dead body before it was dumped. Although he is a sketchy character with a criminal record, he is found to be innocent in the case of Mahalia's murder.

Mikhel Buric – Mikhel Buric is a Besz politician, a social democrat who sits on both the Oversight Committee and the Chamber of Commerce. At the end of the novel, it is revealed that he has collaborated with the Sear and Core corporation to facilitate the theft of the Bol Ye'an artifacts.

Ian Croft – Ian Croft is the head of CorIntech, a company owned by Sear and Core that is responsible for the theft of the

Bol Ye'an artifacts. He evades punishment for his role in the theft.

Yallya – Yallya is Dhatt's wife.

Yorjavic – Yorjavic is a True Citizen (Besz nationalist) whom Sear and Core employ (via Buric) to kill Yolanda.

Kai Buidze – Buidze is the head security guard at Bol Ye'an.

Jaris – Jaris is an UI Qoman unificationist who calls Borlú with an anonymous tip.

Syedr – Syedr is a Besz nationalist politician who serves on the Oversight Committee.

Harkad Gosz – Gosz is the lawyer for the True Citizens, a Besz nationalist group.

James Thacker – Thacker works at the American Embassy in Beszel.

Pall Drodin – Drodin is a Besz unificationist.

Taskin Cerush – Taskin works in the policzai station with Borlú.

Sariska – Sariska is one of Borlú's two lovers. She is a professor of economic history.

Commissar Gadlem – Commissar Gadlem is Borlú's boss.

Ramira Yaszek – Yaszek is another detective with the policzai.

Bardo Naustin – Naustin is another detective with the policzai.

Stepen Shukman – Shukman is a pathologist who works with the policzai.

Hamd Hamzinic – Hamzinic is Shukman's assistant; he is a Muslim refugee.

Vilyem Barichi – Barichi is one of the teenage drug users who finds Mahalia's body.

TERMS

Besz – Besz refers both to people and things from Beszel and to the language spoken there. Note that this is different from UI Qoma, where the adjective to describe things belonging to the city is UI Qoman, but the language is named Illitan.

UI Qoman – UI Qoman refers to people and things from UI Qoma. It is not the language of the city, which is Illitan.

Illitan – Illitan is the language spoken in UI Qoma. Its counterpart in Beszel is Besz.

Crosshatched – Crosshatched refers to areas of one city that are interspersed with the other city. This is the opposite of areas that are "total" (i.e., totally in one city or the other).

Total – Total refers to areas in one city that are very solidly in that city, with the nearest area of the other city distinctly distant. This is the opposed of areas that are "crosshatched."

ECS – ECS is the acronym for the Extreme Crime Squad, the division of the Besz policzai that **Borlú** works for.

Dissensi – Dissensi are areas that are neither in UI Qoma nor in Beszel, but which residents of each city think are in the opposite city. In *Between the City and the City*, **Bowden** argues that Orciny lives in these in-between areas. However, it is eventually revealed that it is actually **Breach** who reside there.

Policzai – Policzai is the Besz word for police, and describes the specific police force that operates in Beszel.

Militsya – The militsya is the UI Qoman equivalent of the policzai.

Unificationists – Unificationists are dissidents who want Beszel and UI Qoma to fuse into one city.

Nationalists – In some ways the term "nationalist" has the same meaning in the novel as it does generally. Besz and UI Qoman nationalists describe themselves as patriots who want to prioritize their own city-state over all else. At the same time, the nationalists also have a goal that is specific to their context—in opposition to the unificationists, they want Beszel and UI Qoma to remain entirely separate and distinct.

Dopplurbanology – This is a word used to describe the obsession of (non-Besz or UI Qoman) people who are fascinated by the two cities.

Grosstopically – This term serves to clarify how two places in the different cities can physically occupy the same or proximate space, even though they are not technically "near" each other according to the geographic regime of the cities' separation. For example, at one point **Borlú** observes that his apartment is grosstopically less than a mile away from **Dhatt's**, even though they actually live in entirely different cities and could not travel directly from one apartment to the other.



THEMES

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



BORDERS AND DOUBLES

The City and the City is set in two city-states—Beszel and UI Qoma—that occupy a single geographic space. The two cities are doubles, each with its own police force, university, fashion, language, and cuisine, although acknowledging these doubles is usually a serious crime, as this involves disrespecting the border that separates the cities. Simply acknowledging the other city, a crime known as **breach**, is the most serious offense that a citizen of Beszel or UI Qoma can commit. Yet through its depiction of these double worlds, the novel indicates that borders are arbitrary, violent, and needlessly harmful

inventions. Violating borders is necessary for various reasons, and doing so is a vital part of Inspector Tyador Borlú's pursuit of justice. In the novel, doubles serve as a reminder of the ultimate meaninglessness of borders, illustrating the fundamental similarities and connections that exist between separated worlds.

The novel is set in a double place—a geographic area where two separate city-states exist at the same time—and this duality is created by a strict border, a fact that highlights the connection between borders and doubles. Although they occupy much of the same *physical* space, residents of Beszel and UI Qoma must interact only with the city in which they live and ignore the presence of the other city. Of course, if this rule were not in place, then Beszel and UI Qoma would function as a single city (even if it was one that contained more than one language, style of architecture, religion, culture, and so on). The border between the two cities is the only thing that makes them a double rather than single unit.

Because the split between Beszel and UI Qoma is such a prominent aspect of life for residents of both cities, doubles are an important part of the culture in each place. Yet each set of doubles that appears in the book ends up reinforcing the fundamental connection between two apparently separate entities. For example, early in the novel the main character, Tyador Borlú, describes a traditionally common establishment in Beszel called a *DöplirCaffé*. These cafes are dual spaces containing separate Jewish and Muslim kitchens that prepare Kosher and Halal food, respectively. However, while patrons buy their food from the kitchen belonging to their own religion, the café itself is mixed, such that Jewish and Muslim customers sit and eat together. Borlú explains, "Whether the *DöplirCaffé* was one establishment or two depended on who was asking: to a property tax collector, it was always one." The ambiguity over whether the café is actually two places or one clearly reflects a similar uncertainty about the status of Beszel and UI Qoma. The cities may be strictly separated by a border, but they nonetheless remain intimately connected to each other, and thus exist as both two places and one at the same time.

The book also shows how the historical unity between two entities can be obscured over time, thereby creating a false sense of separateness. This is most clearly illustrated by another double: the two languages spoken in the cities, Illitan and Besz. On the surface, there is again a strict "border" or distinction between these two languages: they do not sound similar, and they are written in different alphabets. Yet as Borlú points out, Illitan and Besz are in fact "closely related—they share a common ancestor, after all." Illitan and Besz may not superficially resemble each other now, but they emerged from the same root language. After making this observation, Borlú admits that "It feels almost seditious to say so." This serves as a reminder that borders are political inventions, not just in the sense that they are enforced by government authorities, but

also because they rely on the erasure of history—particularly if that history points to an original unity.

The main way in which the novel explores the artificial nature of borders is through the crime known as breach, which involves illegally acknowledging or interacting with whichever of the two cities a person is not officially inside. Citizens of Beszel and UI Qoma are trained to ignore the other city in order to avoid committing breach. In this way, the border ends up living inside each person, enforced by all the residents of both cities on a daily basis. This makes the border extremely powerful and distracts citizens from the fact that it is an arbitrary invention. Its power operates through the fact that (almost) everyone acknowledges and respects it, yet if everyone suddenly stopped doing so, it would cease to exist, and the two cities would become one.

The socially constructed nature of the border separating Beszel and UI Qoma becomes even more pronounced through the contrast between illegal border violations (breach) and the official point at which the border may be crossed. Traveling between the two cities is possible (as long as one has permission from the authorities) but must take place at the official border in **Copula Hall**. The arbitrary and even ridiculous nature of this rule is emphasized by the fact that the two cities occupy the same area, which means it is *physically* possible to cross back and forth between them almost everywhere. Yet officially traveling between the two places requires bureaucratic approval as well as a journey via a single, specific place.

The novel's exploration of the arbitrary nature of borders through two double cities has significance beyond the fictional setting of Beszel/UI Qoma. The status of Beszel and UI Qoma as two distinct city-states that occupy the same place might seem unique, surreal, and even fantastical, but the novel shows that similar arrangements actually exist in the real world as well. Several real divided cities are mentioned in the narrative, and at one point Borlú recalls attending a conference in (what at the time was) West Berlin on "Policing Split Cities." The conference's focus on Berlin, Budapest, Jerusalem, and Beszel/UI Qoma reminds the reader that double cities are not unique to the world of the novel. Each of these real cities is or was split by the presence of a border, a social invention that, as the novel shows, creates a false and unnecessary divide within what would otherwise be one entity.



SEEING VS. UNSEEING

The City and the City explores people's sensory perception of the world, mostly focusing on a single sense: sight. Through depicting a world in which people's perception is strictly policed, the novel shows that perception of the world depends as much on active seeing as it does on selective *unseeing*. Not only that, but what a person

sees and doesn't see is shown to be shaped by their culture, environment, and politics. Furthermore, in the novel's setting in the twin city-states of Beszel and Ul Qoma, citizens' perception is itself policed by a mysterious, invisible system of surveillance (**Breach**). Breach watches what the citizens are watching, and "disappears" them if they breach—that is, see the wrong thing. (The term "breach" refers to the crime, the authority, and the space in which this authority resides.) In this way, the novel shows that perception is a form of power, and reclaiming one's perception from systems of surveillance can be a significant method of resisting unjust authority.

The City and the City challenges the idea that perception is natural and automatic, instead showing how it is influenced by cultural and political factors. Like everyone, residents of Beszel and Ul Qoma function within their environments by relying on their perception of their surroundings. Yet unlike others, in order to effectively orient themselves these citizens must also deliberately *unsee* the city in which they are not officially present. This is not a capability that these citizens naturally possess, but rather one that they acquire over time. Children are taught to unsee the city they are not in, and new immigrants and visitors undergo training courses designed to help them get used to seeing one city but not the other. Similarly, when a citizen of Beszel or Ul Qoma officially travels to the other city, they must undergo an acclimatization course in order to reverse the training they have received in their home city. The novel's protagonist, Tyador Borlú, describes the profound disorientation this process produces, which is due to the fact that it requires "unseeing all their familiar environs, where we lived the rest of our life, and seeing the buildings beside us that we had spent decades making sure not to notice." Perception can be trained, manipulated, and adapted, although this process of manipulation has bewildering and even traumatic effects.

Yet while unseeing may be a phenomenon that seems unique to Beszel/Ul Qoma, the novel indicates that it is actually a rather common feature of urban life in general. Being in a city is an overwhelming experience; there are so many sights, sounds, and smells that if a person doesn't exercise control over their sensory perception, they will not be able to properly orient themselves. Yet what a person chooses to "unsee" is not random or neutral, but rather influenced by social and political factors.

The political nature of seeing and unseeing is made especially obvious by the fact that in Beszel and Ul Qoma, people's perception is controlled by a system of surveillance—Breach. Citizens of the two cities do not unsee the other city voluntarily, but rather, they do so because they know they are constantly being watched by the mysterious government authority that remains unseen itself. The existence of Breach and the significant influence over people's sight that it possesses shows that people's perception is not really under

their control. Instead, perception is dictated by the social, cultural, and political norms of one's environment.

Breach exercises control by dictating what citizens see and don't see, yet an equally important source of its power is the fact that it remains invisible itself. Citizens of Beszel and Ul Qoma know that they are being surveilled constantly, yet the fact that they do not really understand the source or nature of this system of surveillance only increases its power. Borlú describes Breach as the "observing power that must, surely, invisibly have watched." This description shows that Breach makes itself extremely powerful by watching without being watched in return, an asymmetrical relationship that instills a sense of paranoia in citizens. Indeed, this paranoia emerges in Borlú's use of the words "must, surely, invisibly," which shows how Breach intimidates people by remaining somewhat mysterious. If Borlú and others had a clearer understanding of how Breach works, then they would likely feel some control over it and might thereby feel empowered to resist it. But through functioning as a kind one-way mirror, Breach retains near-total control of the perception of citizens while remaining largely untouchable itself.



CRIME VS. PUNISHMENT

Despite its surreal, fantastical elements, *The City and the City* is primarily a detective novel that explores the distinctions between different types of crime and their corresponding punishments. The novel's narrator and hero, Tyador Borlú, is a detective with the Beszel Extreme Crimes Unit, and he is devoted to the pursuit of justice. Yet Borlú's strong principles end up clashing with the legal norms of the world in which he lives, which end up obstructing his investigation of the murder of Mahalia Geary. Indeed, the novel makes a distinction between moral violations (such as murder) and illegal acts that don't harm anyone (such as **breach**). The fact that the laws governing the divide between Beszel and Ul Qoma are treated with more seriousness than the laws around moral violations indicates that the legal system of the two cities is seriously corrupt. Despite the fact that he is himself a police officer, Borlú learns that breaking certain laws can actually be a necessary part of the pursuit of justice.

The opening of the novel, which is conventionally faithful to the genre of detective fiction, establishes a deceptively simple account of morality, crime, and punishment—an account that unravels over the course of the novel. When Borlú and his team investigate the scene of the murder of a young woman (later revealed to be Mahalia Geary), they assume that the crime is relatively straightforward. Because of Mahalia's age and the seedy area in which her body is found, Borlú guesses that she might be a sex worker who was killed by a john or a pimp. This is the kind of crime that Borlú encounters regularly, and he therefore feels confident that he will know how to solve it. It is also straightforward in a moral sense; the murder is clearly

both a legal and a moral violation, and Borlú's job would simply be to find the perpetrator in order to make them face an appropriate punishment.

However, as the narrative goes on, the law surrounding the divide between Beszel and UI Qoma becomes a more and more prominent aspect of the case, and this prohibits Borlú from being able to carry out his investigation. He comes to realize that Mahalia had some involvement with dissident unificationists and nationalists, but he has trouble investigating these connections because these groups are so paranoid about the "wrathful" surveillance of Breach: "That terrible presence [Breach] might appear and disappear a unificationist for even a somatic breach, a startled jump at a misfiring UI Qoma car." The fact that Breach persecutes dissidents for instinctive bodily reactions shows that its authority is excessive, punishing those who have not even chosen to do anything wrong. Furthermore, the fact that this excessive punishment obstructs Borlú's investigation shows that Breach's disproportionate power can actually stop those who have committed serious moral violations (like murder) from being brought to justice.

The idea that the excessive focus on breach above other forms of crime actually exacerbates moral violations is further emphasized by Borlú's description of how the border between the cities enables petty crime to take place. Borlú recalls that when he was growing up, he was told to ignore UI Qoman pickpockets and muggers because "breach is a worse transgression than theirs." The fact that breach is elevated as a crime worse than any other effectively leaves citizens defenseless against criminals from the other city. Borlú himself becomes a victim of this dynamic when he shoots the man (Yorjavic) who kills Mahalia's best friend Yolanda Rodriguez, thereby inadvertently committing breach because Yorjavic is in Beszel, and Borlú himself is in UI Qoma. The fact that Borlú is a police officer who apprehended a murderer doesn't exonerate him, and he ends up being punished for breaching, which further obstructs his ability to solve the crime of Mahalia's murder. When he tries to argue with the anonymous Breach officers and make them understand that he only breached in order to stop a murderer, they simply reply, "He never breached. You did."

The focus on Breach is also shown to obstruct justice due to the fact that many believe that people who violate social and political norms (including the sovereignty of the two cities) deserve any bad things that happen to them. Borlú realizes this while he is investigating Mahalia's murder and encounters more and more people who believe that, due to her obsession with the mythical third city, Orciny, Mahalia brought her fate upon herself. Borlú must struggle to push past this widely held view in order to bring Mahalia's killer to justice. This struggle conveys how people can be treated as disposable because they violate norms and laws on political grounds, even if they don't actually harm anyone in doing so.

Breach also illustrates the unjust and illogical nature of the law because, unlike laws preventing theft or murder, it doesn't have a clear purpose but seems to exist largely for its own sake. Indeed, the only point of Breach is to keep the cities separate. The uncertainty over why Breach exists, how it is so powerful, and why it is so strictly enforced emerges through the fact that Breach is the name for the crime, the punishment, *and* the authority charged with policing the crime. When people commit breach (the crime), Breach (the authority) takes them into the Breach (the punishment), an ambiguous zone described as a "void full of angry police." All this serves to indicate that breach is a self-justifying crime, and one that exists purely in order to punish people for committing it. In this sense, Breach exists only to maintain a certain level of control over the population and to enhance the authority of those charged with policing it. This is clearly a contrast to the kind of crime and punishment that Borlú addresses, as his determination to solve the murder of Mahalia Geary demonstrates that he is committed to a more logical and functional perspective on law and order.



URBAN LIFE AND ALIENATION

The City and the City explores the impact of urban life on individual psychology and social relations, emphasizing how life in a city can alienate people from one another. As the novel's depiction of seeing and unseeing illustrates, urban existence often necessitates ignoring aspects of one's environment, including particular people and populations. Indeed, the strict codes governing the way in which Beszel and UI Qoman citizens are permitted to interact with their surroundings could be read as a metaphor for how urban life encourages people to ignore those deemed to be foreign, criminal, or disposable. Yet as the novel shows, ignoring unwanted people and aspects of the city is not only immoral—it creates space for sinister, shadowy powers to operate unnoticed. In a sense, it is the curious, observant, and "untrained" eye of migrants, visitors, and children that is held up as a more ethical way to encounter the city, a necessary counterpoint to the cynical alienation produced by urban life.

Throughout the novel, it is made clear that there is a connection between the demand that Beszel and UI Qoman citizens ignore the other city and the dismissive way they treat certain elements of their own cities. When the main character, Tyador Borlú, arrives at the murder scene at the beginning of the novel, he ignores key details due to the alienation that life in Beszel creates. Like any good Beszel citizen, he ignores any parts of his surroundings that are part of UI Qoma (something later revealed to be a mistake when Borlú learns that the victim, Mahalia, was actually a resident of UI Qoma). He also assumes that Mahalia was a sex worker and that her murder might be drug-related, or the act of an angry pimp. All of these false assumptions originate in the way that urban life alienates a

person from their surroundings (both other people and the environment).

The idea that life in Beszel and UI Qoma creates a sense of alienation is further emphasized by the contrast between the experienced, trained perspective of citizens like Borlú and the fresh eyes of newcomers. Several times the novel mentions that **Breach** is more lax for refugees, new immigrants, tourists, and children. These populations are understood to have not mastered the art of ignoring the other city, and thus if they accidentally acknowledge it, they are treated with some forgiveness.

The presence of foreigners and children is shown to have a disruptive, even chaotic effect on the cities, because thanks to their lack of experience (and lack of alienation), their behavior is unpredictable. Toward the end of the novel, a breach takes place when two buses carrying refugees crash into one another. Describing the aftermath of the crash, Ashil notes that the refugees are now “out, and they haven’t been trained; they’re breaching everywhere, wandering between the cities without any idea what they’re doing.” Borlú, meanwhile, pictures the “scores of afraid, injured intruders, without intent to transgress but without choice, without language to ask for help, stumbling out of the ruined buses, weeping children in their arms and bleeding across borders [...] oscillating back and forth between countries.” Refugees are usually kept under strict control in order to prevent them from disrupting the status quo of life in Beszel and UI Qoma. When the bus crash interrupts this norm, chaos is unleashed, as a tightly controlled and suppressed population suddenly explodes from its designated place in society—simply by behaving in an ordinary, typically human way. This incident highlights how the citizens of Beszel and UI Qoma have, in a way, become less human through their deep alienation from their surroundings.

In the end, the non-alienated way of interacting with the city associated with foreigners ends up becoming vital to the pursuit of justice. In particular, it is significant that both Mahalia Geary and Yolanda Rodriguez—whose interest in the mythical third city, Orciny, leads to the revelation that Orciny is a myth designed to distract from ongoing criminal activity—are foreigners. Because these women are not actually *from* UI Qoma (or Beszel) but have temporarily migrated there to complete their PhDs, they have not yet become alienated from their surroundings. They do not dismiss Orciny offhandedly as a “myth,” as Borlú and most other long-time residents of Beszel/UI Qoma do. Instead, they remain curious and open-minded, and this allows them to access the truth that has remained concealed from others.

knowledge is subject to strict control. As a detective, protagonist Tyador Borlú’s job is to discover the truth in order to solve crimes, yet in the case of Mahalia Geary’s murder, this duty ends up coming into conflict with Borlú’s duty as a Besz citizen to stick to the official version of the truth. The result is that Borlú feels gripped by paranoia and conspiratorial thinking, leading others around him to doubt him and even making him doubt himself at times. However, the novel ultimately shows that paranoia and conspiratorial thinking are often signs that one is actually accessing the truth—particularly in an environment where powerful authorities control knowledge.

Over the course of the novel, Borlú realizes that conventional ways of thinking will not help him solve the case of Mahalia’s murder, and that what he originally dismissed as paranoid thinking is actually necessary to access the truth. Because he is an experienced detective, Borlú is initially confident that he will be able to solve Mahalia’s murder through his existing knowledge, sources, and assumptions. Yet this is all upended when each of these sources and assumptions turns up nothing, and it is eventually revealed that Mahalia was not even a resident of Beszel, but rather of UI Qoma. Even this fact is illicit in the sense that solving the crime suddenly involves thinking about UI Qoma, which counts as Breach and is thus illegal. As a result, Borlú must learn to embrace illicit, dissident, and conspiratorial sources of knowledge in order to effectively access the truth.

Borlú’s initial confidence in approaching Mahalia’s murder corresponds to the role he plays in explaining Beszel/UI Qoma and their history to the reader. In the beginning of the novel, Borlú positions himself as an authority and dismisses the conspiracies that dissidents such as the unificationists favor. For example, when he learns that Mahalia frequented the Besz unificationists’ library in order to read about the mythical third city of Orciny, he comments dismissively: “Orciny was where the Illuminati lived. That sort of thing.” Yet as time goes on and it becomes more and more clear that people with knowledge about Orciny are in danger, Borlú is forced to challenge his own assumptions about the world in which he lives. His authority is undermined as it is revealed that he actually knows far less about the cities than he originally thought.

The character most closely associated with paranoia, conspiracy, and illicit knowledge is Mahalia herself, who shows the importance of the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake—even if that pursuit comes at great personal risk. Unlike many other characters in the novel, Mahalia was not gathering knowledge for a particular purpose, but rather as an end in itself. This provokes the ire of a large variety of people, from Besz and UI Qoman nationalists to unificationists. All of these different groups are united by the fact that they choose to pursue knowledge in order to advance their own causes. While causes like theirs can provide an impetus to gather information



PARANOIA, CONSPIRACY, AND ILLICIT KNOWLEDGE

In the authoritarian world of *The City and the City*,

(an idea Borlú expresses when he observes of the Besz unificationists: “Like any dissidents they were neurotic archivists”), this information is inherently limited by the fact that it is designed to serve a certain political purpose. Such political bias limits the pursuit of knowledge as it leads people to disregard knowledge that doesn’t suit their aims.

In contrast, Mahalia’s desire to learn the truth regardless of what that truth is proves effective: thanks to her relentless research and willingness to embrace seemingly conspiratorial ideas, she discovers the sinister reality behind the myth of Orciny. The danger of illicit knowledge is underlined by the fact that Mahalia is killed for knowing this information. Yet at the same time, the novel also shows that truth itself cannot die so easily. Mahalia’s death sets off a chain of events that in turn allows Borlú to discover the truth for himself.

Because the corporation behind the Orciny myth is never properly brought to justice, it might be tempting to interpret the end of the novel as indicating that the pursuit of illicit knowledge is not worth it: Mahalia and Yolanda end up dead, and the sinister powers that killed them remain in operation. Yet the novel also indicates that the illicit knowledge Mahalia accessed has had an impact on the world, the ultimate effect of which remains unclear. Although both Beszel and UI Qoma rush to return to the status quo and hide the evidence of the rupture that Mahalia’s revelations caused, the novel ends with an ambiguous feeling of potential change. Indeed, Ashil himself expresses this when he observes to Borlú, “Times are changing.” This ambivalent ending confirms the idea that the genuine pursuit of knowledge cannot be done in service of a particular goal, but rather must be done for its own sake. The ultimate consequences of revealing concealed truths will always be impossible to predict or control, but pursuing the truth will inevitably alter the world in some way, and this makes it worth it.

it (when it is capitalized as Breach) and the area in which citizens guilty of breach are taken, which is known as “the Breach.” The fact that each of these three aspects of breach all have the same name is confusing, intensifying the atmosphere of mystery and obscurity that surrounds breach. It also further emphasizes the idea that breach is a self-justifying crime, a crime that exists mainly in order for people to be charged and punished for doing so.

Borlú spends most of the novel struggling to investigate the murder of Mahalia Geary without committing breach, a difficult task considering her body was found in a different city (Beszel) than the one in which she lived (UI Qoma). The fact that avoiding breach makes it difficult for Borlú to complete his detective work shows the counterproductive effect that breach has on the world. Rather than making Beszel and UI Qoma safer and more functional, it does the opposite, allowing crimes to take place and go unsolved. Part of why this happens is because, somewhat inexplicably, breach is considered worse than any other crime, including murder. Again, this strange hierarchy shows how crime can be self-justifying. There is no proper reason given for why breach is the worst of all crimes, yet because it is the most harshly punished, everyone has no choice but to accept this hierarchy. Finally, breach also symbolizes the frightening power of the unknown. Citizens know that if they commit breach (the crime), then Breach (the authority) will “disappear” them. However, beyond this almost nothing is known about what Breach actually is and how Breach manages to make people disappear. When Borlú commits breach toward the end of the novel and it is revealed that people who breach are taken into the Breach (the area) and made part of Breach (the authority), this rather simple explanation is actually somewhat anticlimactic. Being taken into a void and forced to punish others for the same crime you committed is certainly sinister, but this reality is less frightening than the mystery of not knowing what B/breach is at all.



SYMBOLS

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



BREACH

Breach symbolizes the fundamentally illogical nature of crime and punishment in the novel, highlighting that there are some laws that don’t exist for any reason other than to exert control over citizens. Breach is the term given to the crime of acknowledging or engaging with the opposite city; this can mean anything from looking at the other city or verbally acknowledging its existence to actually *entering* the other city (without doing so at the official border checkpoint at **Copula Hall**). However, breach is not only the name for the crime, but also the authority charged with policing



COPULA HALL

Copula Hall is a very large, ornate building that symbolizes the arbitrary and irrational nature of borders and the comic yet sinister nature of government bureaucracy. One of the few places in both Beszel and UI Qoma, it is the only place where the border between the cities can officially be crossed (without committing **breach**). In order to do so, travelers must have a visa and be checked by staff at the border. In this sense, Copula Hall is no different than many other border crossings that exist in the real world, including border checkpoints inside divided cities and nations such as Berlin and the West Bank. However, what makes the border checkpoint at Copula Hall somewhat unique (and arguably uniquely irrational) is that Beszel and UI Qoma occupy the same geographic space, such that it would be possible (but illegal) for a citizen to step in and out of each city within

moments. The fact that officially crossing the border requires going all the way to the ornate, imposing establishment of Copula Hall thus becomes a symbol of the illogical, inefficient, and arbitrary nature of borders. This is further illustrated by the fact that Copula Hall itself is crosshatched, such that some of its rooms are in Beszel and some in UI Qoma, meaning that simply walking through the building involves crossing and re-crossing the border between two entirely different worlds. The fact that Copula Hall is the meeting site of the Oversight Committee—a committee formed of half Besz and half UI Qoman politicians charged with adjudicating matters that concern both cities—makes it a symbol of the strained unity between the two cities.



BETWEEN THE CITY AND THE CITY

Dr. David Bowden's book *Between the City and the City*—which argues the existence of a mythical third

city, Orciny, between Beszel and UI Qoma—symbolizes both the power and pitfalls of illicit, dissident knowledge. The book was published some years before the time at which the novel is set by a “long-gone anarcho-hippy press.” When it first came out it was very popular, but is now seen as a “mildly embarrassing throwback.” It is technically banned, although like most censorship of books, this is not strictly enforced. Overall, then, *Between the City and the City* is presented in a somewhat paradoxical light—it would be treated as dangerous if people took it seriously, yet because they don't, it is largely dismissed as silly and unimportant. This illustrates the way in which dissident knowledge only becomes powerful if people actually take it seriously. In Beszel and UI Qoma (as in the rest of the world) conspiracy theories abound, but only the ones that are persuasive enough for people to actually believe them have any power. For much of the novel, Borlú thinks that Mahalia believed in Orciny, and sees her heavily annotated copy of *Between the City and the City* as proof of this. However, the twist at the end of the novel is that Mahalia *didn't* believe in Orciny and realized that Orciny was in fact a cover for the theft committed by Sear and Core. Borlú eventually comes to understand that her annotations in the book reflect this realization. *Between the City and the City* thus illustrates that when it comes to subversive knowledge, distinguishing between truth, myth, and conspiracy is extremely difficult, requiring people to reverse their assumptions about the way the world works often more than once.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Random House edition of *The City & The City* published in 2009.

Chapter 2 Quotes

☞ A common form of establishment, for much of Beszel's history, had been the *DopliuCaffé*: one Muslim and one Jewish coffeehouse, rented side by side, each with its own counter and kitchen, halal and kosher, sharing a single name, sign, and sprawl of tables, the dividing wall removed. Mixed groups would come, greet the two proprietors, sit together, separating on communitarian lines only long enough to order their permitted food from the relevant side, or ostentatiously from either and both in the case of freethinkers. Whether the *DopliuCaffé* was one establishment or two depended on who was asking: to a property tax collector, it was always one.

Related Characters: Inspector Tyador Borlú (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 22

Explanation and Analysis

Borlú has given an explanation of the word “ébru,” which originally meant Jew in the Besz language. It is now an epithet more commonly applied to Muslims and other new immigrants to Beszel, and it has been reclaimed by some of those it is meant to insult. In this passage, Borlú provides a further reflection on the history of ethnic and religious diversity in Beszel via the traditional establishment of the *DopliuCaffé*.

Although a translation of the term is not provided, the reader can reasonably assume it means “double café.” As such, the *DopliuCaffé* is an important aspect of the novel's exploration of borders and doubles. Borlú's description demonstrates the value in double establishments. The *DopliuCaffé* brought Muslim and Jewish residents of Beszel together across difference without erasing that difference—both populations could get the food suited to their own dietary requirements, and then sit and eat together.

Importantly, the reason why this works is because there is no border running through the *DopliuCaffé*, which allows patrons to mix together freely. Of course, this is a marked contrast to the cities of Beszel and UI Qoma themselves, which are split by a strictly enforced border. Like the *DopliuCaffé*, the cities could plausibly be counted as one entity or two, but the presence of the border through the cities means that any sense of unity between them is forcefully destroyed.

Chapter 4 Quotes

☞ It was, not surprisingly that day perhaps, hard to observe borders, to see and unsee only what I should, on my way home. I was hemmed in by people not in my city, walking slowly through areas crowded but not crowded in Beszel. I focused on the stones really around me—cathedrals, bars, the brick flourishes of what had been a school—that I had grown up with. I ignored the rest or tried.

Related Characters: Inspector Tyador Borlú (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 36

Explanation and Analysis

Borlú has just received a disturbing call from an anonymous man in UI Qoma. The man claimed that the dead woman was named Marya, saying that she lived in UI Qoma and was active in the political underground. Borlú is dizzied by this news, and in this passage he describes how hard it is to properly navigate home from the office. Although the relationship between Beszel and UI Qoma has not yet been fully explained, this quotation provides crucial hints regarding the two cities' connection.

As Borlú has mentioned before, he is surrounded not only by Beszel—its buildings and inhabitants—but also by people and entities that are *not* in Beszel. At this point, the reader may be beginning to guess that there is another city parallel to Beszel. Borlú's determination to “see and unsee only what [he] should” indicates that the division between the environment around him is controlled by an unknown authority. It suggests that someone or something is monitoring what he sees. The difficulty of seeing and unseeing the right things is illustrated by the fact that Borlú is “hemmed in” by people who are not from his own city. Yet he is able to navigate this chaotic situation due to his familiarity with the way his environment works, as indicated by his focus on the things he has “grown up with.”

☞ My informant should not have seen the posters. They were not in his country. He should never have told me. He made me accessory. The information was an allergen in Beszel—the mere fact of it in my head was a kind of trauma. I was complicit. It was done.

Related Characters: Inspector Tyador Borlú (speaker)

Related Themes:     

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 37

Explanation and Analysis

After Borlú receives an anonymous call about the case from a man in UI Qoma, he drinks two bottles of wine at home while poring over everything he knows so far. He is in a state of great distress, and in this quotation he explains why. Because he lives in UI Qoma, the anonymous informant committed breach by seeing the posters asking for information about the dead woman, which are hung in Beszel. Not only did he commit this violation, but he also made Borlú complicit by telling him about the violation and indicating that in order to solve the case, Borlú will have to engage with UI Qoma.

Borlú's description of the information the man gave him as an “allergen” is significant. In the world of the novel, perception and knowledge are strictly controlled such that learning illicit information is akin to exposing oneself to a dangerous substance. The crucial part of the allergen metaphor is that once Borlú is exposed, he is in trouble. He doesn't even need to act on the information in order to be complicit, and so this passage underscores the enormous power that Breach holds over even the thoughts and inner lives of the two cities' residents.

Chapter 5 Quotes

☞ Anyway whether in its original or later written form, Illitan bears no resemblance to Besz. Nor does it sound similar. But these distinctions are not as deep as they appear. Despite careful cultural differentiation, in the shape of their grammars and the relations of their phonemes (if not the base sounds themselves), the languages are closely related—they share a common ancestor, after all. It feels almost seditious to say so. Still.

Related Characters: Inspector Tyador Borlú (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 42

Explanation and Analysis

Chapter 5 opens with Borlú's reflections on the two languages spoken in Beszel and UI Qoma: Besz and Illitan. These languages do not sound alike and use different scripts, so to an outsider they appear to be extremely

different. However, in this passage Borlú clarifies that the languages are actually not as different as they initially seem, due to their common ancestor.

Here, the seemingly different but in fact connected languages represent the cities of Beszel and UI Qoma themselves. While much work is invested in making the cities seem distinct, in reality they are intimately connected due to their historical relation to one another (and, of course, their overlapping geographies). While the book never reveals the precise nature of this historical connection, it is obvious that—like Beszel and Illitan—the distinction between them is arbitrary and even somewhat illusory.

●● A political irony. Those most dedicated to the perforation of the boundary between Beszel and UI Qoma had to observe it most carefully. If I or one of my friends were to have a moment's failure of unseeing (and who did not do that? Who failed to fail to see, sometimes?), so long as it was not flaunted or indulged in, we should not be in danger. If I were to glance a second or two on some attractive passerby in UI Qoma, if I were to silently enjoy the skyline of the two cities together, be irritated by the noise of an UI Qoman train, I would not be taken.

Here, though, at this building not just my colleagues but the powers of Breach were always wrathful and as Old Testament as they had the powers and right to be. That terrible presence might appear and disappear a unificationist for even a somatic breach, a startled jump at a misfiring UI Qoma car.

Related Characters: Inspector Tyador Borlú (speaker), Mahalia Geary (a.k.a. Fulana/Marya/Byela Mar), Pall Drodin, Lizybet Corwi

Related Themes:     

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 52

Explanation and Analysis

Borlú and Corwi have gone to a unificationist headquarters after learning that Fulana (one of Mahalia Geary's fake names) used to go there when she was alive. They speak to one of the unificationists, Drodin, who tells them that Fulana (whom he calls Byela) used to use the library and that she was "obsessed" with Orciny, the mythical third city between Beszel and UI Qoma. Drodin insists that Fulana

was dangerous, and here Borlú explains why she put Drodin on edge to such an extreme extent.

All residents of Beszel and UI Qoma have to worry about Breach, but—as Borlú points out here—most ordinary citizens have a small amount of leeway to occasionally look at the other city without being punished. For ordinary people, it would take actually engaging with the other city or mentioning it in order to be taken away by the Breach authorities. Unificationists, however, are watched much more closely, which is ironic considering they are the ones who are opposed to the border separating the two cities in the first place. This quotation highlights not only this irony, but also the strange irony of the double surveillance Breach involves. The authorities charged with monitoring Breach scrupulously watch people in order to make sure they are not watching the wrong thing. This creates a complex web of surveillance, which leaves many people—such as Drodin—feeling jumpy.

●● Very occasionally a young UI Qoman who does not know the area of their city that UI Qomatown crosshatches will blunder up to ask directions of an ethnically UI Qoman Beszel-dweller, thinking them his or her compatriots. The mistake is quickly detected—there is nothing like being ostentatiously unseen to alarm—and Breach are normally merciful.

Related Characters: Inspector Tyador Borlú (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 54

Explanation and Analysis

After leaving the unificationist headquarters, Borlú and Corwi go to have lunch in UI Qomatown, a small neighborhood in Beszel that serves as a hub of the UI Qoman expat community. Borlú has described the uncanny experience of suppressing the instinct to unsee, unhear, and unsmell the UI Qoman things in this neighborhood. Here, he explains that on rare occasions, someone in UI Qoma who is lost will accidentally mistake UI Qomatown for a part of their own city and inadvertently breach. This passage illustrates the surreal, chaotic, and illogical consequences of the way the two cities are divided. Residents of the two cities are not only alienated from each other, but even from their own instincts.

Chapter 6 Quotes

☛☛ A Besz dweller cannot walk a few paces next door into an alter house without breach.

But pass through Copula Hall and she or he might leave Beszel, and at the end of the hall come back to exactly (corporeally) where they had just been, but in another country, a tourist, a marvelling visitor, to a street that shared the latitude-longitude of their own address, a street they had never visited before, whose architecture they had always unseen, to the UI Qoman house sitting next to and a whole city away from their own building, invisible there now they had come through, all the way across the Breach, back home.

Related Characters: Inspector Tyador Borlú (speaker)

Related Themes:     

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 70

Explanation and Analysis

Having concluded his meeting with the Oversight Committee, who promised to take the case of Mahalia Geary's murder to Breach, Borlú thinks about how Beszel and UI Qoma are governed by an "alien power" (Breach). Passing Copula Hall, he reflects on the absurdity of the fact that in order to enter an establishment in the opposite city, Besz and UI Qoman citizens must go through the official border, even if the place they want to go is physically located right next to their own house. The strange consequences of this policy are apparent in the seemingly paradoxical statements made in this quotation, including that a traveler may visit a street they (effectively) live on that is nonetheless "a street they ha[ve] never visited before." This passage highlights the way the doubleness of the two cities is both strictly enforced and essentially an illusion.

Chapter 8 Quotes

☛☛ Okay I need to be a little bit careful here, Inspector, because honestly I never really, not *really*, thought he *did* believe it—I always thought it was kind of a game—but the book *said* he believed it [...] A secret colony. A city between the cities, its inhabitants living in plain sight [...] Unseen, like UI Qomans to the Besz and vice versa. Walking the streets unseen but overlooking the two. Beyond the Breach. And doing what, who knows? Secret agendas. They're still debating that, I don't doubt, on the conspiracy theory websites.

Related Characters: Professor Isabelle Nancy (speaker), Mahalia Geary (a.k.a. Fulana/Marya/Byela Mar), Inspector Tyador Borlú, Dr. David Bowden

Related Themes:     

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 90

Explanation and Analysis

Although Breach is due to take over the case of Mahalia Geary's murder at any moment, Borlú cannot help but continue his investigations, even though it is no longer technically his responsibility. He has called Mahalia's PhD supervisor, Professor Nancy, and asked her about Mahalia's research. Here, Professor Nancy explains the argument of David Bowden, whose book *Between the City and the City* had been an inspiration to Mahalia. As is evident in this quotation, Nancy is rather dismissive of Bowden. In fact, she finds it so absurd to imagine that anyone would believe in Orciny (the mythical third city) that she isn't even sure if Bowden himself does, despite the fact that he claims to in the book.

Nancy's words illustrate why a person would (reasonably) believe the whole idea of Orciny is ridiculous; at the same time, they also illustrate that in the context of Beszel and UI Qoma, the existence of Orciny is perhaps not such a ridiculous prospect after all. The inhabitants of most other cities would find it difficult to believe that there could be another city existing "in plain sight" within their own. Yet this is already the truth facing Besz and UI Qoman citizens. Why shouldn't they entertain the possibility that there is another, third city that exists alongside the first two?

Chapter 18 Quotes

☛☛ "Of course it's ludicrous, like you say. Secret overlords behind the scene, more powerful even than Breach, puppetmasters, hidden cities."

"Crap."

"Yeah, but the point is that it's crap a bunch of people believe. And"—I opened my hands at him—"something big's going on, and we have no idea what it is."

Related Characters: Detective Qussim Dhatt, Inspector Tyador Borlú (speaker), Dr. David Bowden, Yolanda Rodriguez

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 193

Explanation and Analysis

The stakes of the case Borlú and Dhatt are working on have escalated fast. Yolanda is missing, a bomb has been sent to Bol Ye'an addressed to David Bowden, and now Bowden can't be found, either. The two detectives go to a cop bar to try and figure out what's going on. Here, they discuss the myth of Orciny laid out in Bowden's book, *Between the City and the City*. As their comments show, it is easy to dismiss the ideas about Orciny as quintessential conspiracy theory nonsense.

At the same time, they are forced to take the myth of Orciny seriously due to the fact that a lot of people believe it is true. This raises the question of the extent to which the legitimacy of knowledge is simply a matter of collective agreement. Do ideas have to have inner logical coherence or external evidence to support them in order to be true? Or are ideas actually considered plausible simply because a critical mass of people believe in them? These questions are especially relevant in the context of the two cities, in which the daily lives of all citizens are shaped by their collective choice to perceive the world in a way that does not match literal reality—people's beliefs are essentially the only thing that makes UI Qoma and Beszel two cities rather than one.

Chapter 21 Quotes

☝☝ "I'm getting paranoid," I said.

"Oh no, they're really watching you."

Related Characters: Detective Qussim Dhatt, Inspector Tyador Borlú (speaker), Dr. David Bowden, Jaris, Yolanda Rodriguez

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 222

Explanation and Analysis

After Yolanda, Bowden, and Jaris all go missing, Borlú manages to find Yolanda hiding out in a decrepit apartment, being taken care of by her boyfriend, Aikam. He hatches a plan to smuggle Yolanda out of UI Qoma and into Beszel, but while they are waiting to execute this plan, Borlú and Dhatt try to act normally. This short exchange between the

two reveals how difficult it is to keep one's own paranoia in check as a citizen of Beszel or UI Qoma. Borlú may want to dismiss all the talk about Orciny as nothing more than a conspiracy theory, but he also cannot escape the reality that he is being watched all the time—both by the hostile UI Qoman militsya and, of course, by Breach. As Dhatt points out, the two factors are closely linked; being paranoid may seem irrational, but at same time, it's also a reasonable reaction to living in a place where the authorities really *are* watching at all times.

Chapter 23 Quotes

☝☝ "Yorjavic didn't breach, Borlú. He shot over the border, in Copula Hall. He never breached. Lawyers might have an argument: was the crime committed in Beszel where he pulled the trigger, or UI Qoma where the bullets hit? Or both? He held out his hands in an elegant *who cares?* "He never breached. You did. So you are here, now, in the Breach."

Related Characters: Detective Qussim Dhatt (speaker), Yolanda Rodriguez, Inspector Tyador Borlú, Yorjavic

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 244

Explanation and Analysis

A shooter, an UI Qoman nationalist named Yorjavic, kills Yolanda and wounds Dhatt while they are trying to escape to Beszel via Copula Hall. Borlú follows Yorjavic and shoots him, thereby committing breach, and is taken into the Breach, a strange, plain, prison-like void. Here, figures who identify themselves only as Breach question him about the crime. This quotation, by one of the men from Breach, reiterates the idea that breach is considered a greater crime than any other. The circumstances that caused Borlú to breach (namely, that Yorjavic had just killed Yolanda) do not mitigate the violation of breach.

The man's words show how crime and punishment can be highly illogical. As a representative of Breach, he possesses a kind of tunnel vision. He doesn't care about the circumstances leading up to the crime, nor the full nature of what the crime actually involved. All he cares about is whether breach occurred. This overly rigid and senseless version of the law is shown to be highly dangerous, and antithetical to true justice.

☛ The Breach was nothing. It is nothing. This is a commonplace; this is simple stuff. The Breach has no embassies, no army, no sights to see. The Breach has no currency. If you commit it it will envelop you. Breach is void full of angry police.

Related Characters: Inspector Tyador Borlú (speaker), Yorjavic

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 248

Explanation and Analysis

After committing breach by shooting Yorjavic, Borlú has been taken into *the Breach*, a mysterious area that seems halfway between an office building and prison. People who call themselves Breach interview him about his crime, and they continually emphasize that his fate lies entirely within their hands. However, they are difficult to reason with, and keep their decision-making process mysterious. In this quotation, Borlú reflects on the nothingness that defines the Breach. It is not a city or country, but a very pure force of punishment. Indeed, the phrase “void full of angry police” evokes a kind of hollowness, suggesting that there is something empty, arbitrary, and insubstantial about every system of crime and punishment, not just Breach. Borlú’s words here also highlight how Breach—whether that word refers to the crime, the enforcement agency, or this mysterious place of punishment—exists only for its own sake; nothing about it serves any higher purpose or ideal of justice. All the rigid rules of Breach do is increase the power of Breach itself.

Chapter 26 Quotes

☛ I could imagine the panic of bystanders and passersby, let alone those innocent motorists of Beszel and Ul Qoma, having swerved desperately out of the path of the careening vehicles, of necessity in and out of the topolgangster city, trying hard to regain control and pull their vehicles back to where they dwelt. Faced then with scores of afraid, injured intruders, without intent to transgress but without choice, without language to ask for help, stumbling out of the ruined buses, weeping children in their arms and bleeding across borders. Approaching people they saw, not attuned to the nuances of nationality—clothes, colours, hair, posture—oscillating back and forth between countries.

Related Characters: Inspector Tyador Borlú (speaker), Mahalia Geary (a.k.a. Fulana/Marya/Byela Mar), Ashil

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 275

Explanation and Analysis

Borlú has made several important realizations about the case: Mahalia lost her belief in Orciny, but prior to this, the corporation Sear and Core manipulated her interest in Orciny and pretended to be the secret city in order to get her to smuggle artifacts for them. Having understood this, Borlú and Ashil plan to assemble a large number of Breach avatars in order to successfully confront Sear and Core. However, just as they begin arranging this, Ashil receives news that two buses carrying refugees have crashed, thereby triggering an epidemic of breaching.

In this quotation, Borlú imagines the scene immediately following the bus crash. His words highlight the way that urban life—and particularly strict laws over borders—alienate people from others. The refugees are vulnerable, confused, and injured, but none of the local citizens will want to help them in case they accidentally commit breach. The phrase “bleeding across borders” in particular shows the futility and needless suffering created by border rules, which prevent people from showing compassion purely thanks to arbitrary rules and distinctions. This description also seems to tie back to what Borlú has just learned about Mahalia’s story, since her interest in the hidden city of Orciny is what led to her own bloody death.

Chapter 27 Quotes

☛ Smuggling’s not my department; take what you want. I’m not a political man—I don’t care if you mess with Ul Qoma. I’m here because you’re a murderer.

Related Characters: Inspector Tyador Borlú (speaker), Ashil, Mikhel Buric

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 284

Explanation and Analysis

While both cities are on lockdown following the bus crash, Borlú and Ashil race to the Sear and Core building in order to stop those responsible for the theft from escaping. There, they are surprised to find Mikhel Buric, the social democrat who serves on the Chamber of Commerce. Buric boasts that by facilitating the smuggling of the Bol Ye'an artifacts, he was strengthening Beszel, and he accuses Breach of trying to undermine Beszel to UI Qoma's advantage. At this point, Borlú delivers a defiant speech, part of which is quoted here.

Up until now, Borlú's position on the various contentious matters raised in the novel has not been clear. He seems vaguely resistant to all forms of extremism, yet he is also somewhat skeptical of the status quo. Here, he clarifies that he is not particularly "political," but that he does have a strong commitment to the pursuit of justice. Moreover, it is not just justice in general that Borlú cares about, but rather the very kind of crime—murder—that he is tasked with addressing in the Extreme Crime Squad. Borlú may not have many principles, but his commitment to the ones he does have makes him an excellent detective. Indeed, Borlú's single-minded and highly rational approach toward justice is presented as being rather admirable, especially compared to the convoluted and illogical systems of justice that Breach operates.

escaped, Buric has been killed, and Bowden has been arrested. Meanwhile, both Beszel and UI Qoma are reeling from the bus crash that led to "Riot Night," a night of chaos, violence, and martial Breach. Here, Borlú describes one of the consequences of Riot Night, which is reinvigorated state repression in UI Qoma. The name "Vigilant Neighbours" shows how urban life—and particularly borders, police, and the law—alienate people from one another. Neighborliness should be about community, care, and solidarity, but here it becomes a way of emphasizing the separation between people and the enforcement of the rule of law—including the violent and arbitrary border between UI Qoma and Beszel.

☞ It's not just us keeping them apart. It's everyone in Beszel and everyone in UI Qoma. Every minute, every day. We're only the last ditch: it's everyone in the cities who does most of the work. It works because you don't blink. That's why unseeing and unsensing are so vital. No one can admit it doesn't work.

Related Characters: Ashil (speaker), Inspector Tyador Borlú

Related Themes:     

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 310

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of the novel, Borlú remains with Breach, held for an indefinite period of time. He and Ashil take to walking around the cities, discussing Breach and other things. Here, Ashil reflects that most of Breach's job is done for them by the ordinary citizens of Beszel and UI Qoma. His words convey the idea that power works not only by being exerted by an authority—ordinary people also discipline themselves (and each other). In this sense, the border between Beszel and UI Qoma remains so strong because the citizens of the two cities internalize it.

Although they may do so out of fear of Breach, each citizen chooses to respect the border and dutifully see/unsee only what they are supposed to. The implication of this is that if everyone decided to stop observing the border and breach together, Breach's power would be undone instantly.

Coda: Chapter 29 Quotes

☞ UI Qoma's government announced a new campaign, Vigilant Neighbours, neighbourliness referring both to the people next door (what were they doing?) and to the connected city (see how important borders are?).

Related Characters: Inspector Tyador Borlú (speaker), Mahalia Geary (a.k.a. Fulana/Marya/Byela Mar), Dr. David Bowden, Ian Croft, Mikhel Buric

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 307

Explanation and Analysis

The case of Mahalia's murder and the stolen artifacts has been resolved in a rather dramatic way: Ian Croft has



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

Tyador Borlú arrives at a crime scene, a patch of concrete between two buildings dotted with dead trees and “weedy” grass. He is the most senior detective there. Examining the corpse, he notices that it is a young woman with her limbs bent into strange positions. She is wearing nothing except ripped tights and one shoe, and her face is disfigured such that only one open eye is visible. A constable named Lizybet Corwi explains that a wet mattress, which is now lying between two garbage bins, was on top of the corpse when they found her. Another detective named Bardo Naustin squats by the corpse, staring at a pile of soil surrounding her.

The corpse was discovered by two “kids” who saw her being mauled by an animal and then called the police. They are now sitting nearby with two girls. They are “chewers” (drug users) who dumped their khat nearby, where it was discovered by the officers. Borlú introduces himself to them, explaining that he is from the Extreme Crime Squad. One of the boys introduces himself as Vilyem Barichi. Borlú asks if there was anyone else around when they found the corpse, and Vilyem says there were a couple of guys, plus a van that drove up onto the grass for a moment before driving away. Borlú explains that they will be given some breakfast while they wait for their parents to arrive.

Stepen Shukman, the “patho,” arrives with his assistant Hamd Hamzinic. Shukman examines the body, announcing that she’s been dead for around 12 hours and that she wasn’t killed in this spot. He turns the body over, and Borlú sees that there is a lot of makeup smeared across the woman’s badly beaten face. Shukman observes that the cause of death must be the gashes on her chest, although there is also a deep gash across her cheek. After taking photographs, Shukman announces that the corpse is ready to be moved. Borlú speaks to Naustin, who says that the corpse is probably a “hooker,” who was potentially killed by a client because she wouldn’t do what he wanted.

The narrative opens like any other detective novel. Borlú, the detective from whose perspective the story is told, arrives at the scene of a violent crime. The clues provided here—the mattress, the almost total nudity of the woman, the disfiguring of her face—encourage the reader to start thinking of answers to how she died.



It is obvious that the place where this scene is set is somewhat deprived and crime-ridden. Not only has a murder taken place, but the people who found the body are themselves criminals (of a kind). The fact that these drug addicts are very young suggests that there are not many opportunities or resources available to them, which is why they have become drug users.



For Shukman, Nausitn, and Borlú, their job involves strategically relying on previous experience and knowledge in order to determine the most likely explanation for a given crime. At the same time, this method relies on assumptions that are not always correct. Certainly, Naustin’s assumption that the dead woman was a “hooker” is reasonable in some ways—but does it also betray a bias born in treating some life as more expendable than others.



However, the gash across the corpse's face suggests that the murderer was a "sadist," and the dumping of her body indicates that they didn't care about being caught. Borlú advises Naustin to talk to the local sex workers and bring in Ramira Yaszek, who is an "excellent questioner." Corwi suggests that they should consider the possibility that the dead woman wasn't a sex worker. She notes that the woman's makeup is in natural, earthy colors, and that her hair is undyed and fairly clean. Borlú asks if Corwi is familiar with the area, and she says that she is, somewhat, although it is so far out that it is hardly even part of the city of Beszel. It is a deprived, largely desolate neighborhood.

Corwi says that she has only dealt with a couple of murders in the area; most of the crime here is drug- or gang-related. Borlú tells her to investigate the local area. A small group of journalists have assembled and are now trying to get Borlú's attention. In recent years, the local press has become more aggressive, with a "trend to sensation"—however, the problem is that they tend to always follow the same formulaic script, borrowing clichés from the British and American press. Borlú tells the journalists that there will be a press conference that afternoon. He gazes at an elderly woman walking nearby at the end of GunterStrász, before realizing with a start that she is not on GunterStrász at all and looking away.

CHAPTER 2

Borlú is dropped off north of Lestov, where he boards a tram. He calls Naustin and requests that the mattress be tested for "trace." As the tram winds its way through old buildings, "at least half" of what it passes is Beszel. Currently, Beszel is experiencing a trickle of foreign investment. Borlú gets off downtown, where the streets are busy with citizens and tourists. He calls Corwi and asks if there's any chance the case involves **breach**, but Corwi replies that it's unlikely, because the "area's mostly pretty total." Borlú points out that some of GunterStrász is crosshatched, but Corwi replies that she still thinks the murderer(s) would never have taken such a risk.

Borlú reviews his other cases: one an instance of domestic violence, another a racist hate crime. Yaszek calls with the news that the interrogation is complete, and the kids' stories add up. The girl who saw the van described it as having sped away. Later, she and the others went to try to find the van to see if it had been dumped and could be looted for any "old stereos, shoes, books, all kinds of shit." Instead, they found the body of the dead woman. After Borlú's conversation with Yaszek, Commissar Gadlem calls him in to get an update on the case. Gadlem encourages him to "follow [his] nose."

The dissenting opinion Corwi provides here suggests she will be an important character with an ability to think in an insightful, counterintuitive manner. Furthermore, the details she gives to support her argument show that being a woman can provide particular insight not available to men who might not notice or understand these details.



The reader does not yet know much about where the novel is set, which is significant, as the setting will become the most important aspect of the narrative. At this point, it is reasonable to assume from the linguistic cues that the story takes place somewhere in Central/Eastern Europe. It is also clear that this country is heavily influenced by British and American culture, suggesting it is itself considered a more minor player on the global stage.



This passage introduces crucial details about the place where the novel is set, which the reader now knows is the fictional city of Beszel. Although "breach" has not yet been explained, Borlú and Corwi's conversation indicates that it is some kind of crime or violation that cannot take place in areas that are "total," but only ones that are "crosshatched."



Borlú's mention of his other cases raises the question of how unusual the murder of the woman is. Perhaps it is a fairly straightforward matter of a sex worker being killed by a sadistic, vengeful client, as Naustin suggests. On the other hand, the fact that this is the case that opens the novel suggests that it is likely not as straightforward as Naustin assumes.



At 10pm, 40 hours after the corpse was discovered, Corwi drives herself and Borlú down GunterStrász. The area is neither busy nor totally deserted. Although they are in an unmarked car rather than a “bruise” (Besz police car), Corwi still wears her uniform because she doesn’t want any potential sources to think she is “entrap[ping]” them. Most of the people around are in Beszel, recognizable from their “fashionless fashion,” and Borlú and Corwi quickly “unsee” those who aren’t. Corwi says that her conversations with local people earlier didn’t yield very much. She didn’t even have a photograph of the victim, and everyone she spoke to knew “nothing” about the crime.

Now Borlú has a photo, and he holds it out while approaching a group of sex workers so they know he is not trying to arrest them. The women say they do not recognize the victim, and Borlú believes them. They keep talking to more people, some of whom know Corwi from when she used to work in the area. However, they cannot find any information about the victim, and by two a.m. they agree to give up. Borlú says he’ll have posters put around the neighborhood; when Corwi expresses uncertainty that Commissar Gadlem will approve this plan, Borlú says he will put the posters up himself.

Borlú goes to Shukman’s lab. Shukman’s assistant Hamzinic is what racists term an “ébru,” a word originally meaning Jew that is now usually mostly directed at Muslims and other new immigrants, and which is sometimes reclaimed by those it is meant to insult. Borlú reflects on an old joke about the Besz Orthodox Church being the “middle child” between Judaism and Islam. He explains that, for much of Beszel’s history, there existed an establishment known as the *DöplirCaffé*, which had both a halal and kosher kitchen but a mixed eating area. Borlú notes that “Whether the *DöplirCaffé* was one establishment or two depended on who was asking.”

“Fulana” (the name for an identified female victim) lies between Borlú and Shukman, covered up. Shukman says that she was 24 or 25, in good health, and that she died from puncture wounds to the heart. She has many strange wounds and was hit on the side of the head with a blunt object before being killed. There are no recent signs of sexual intercourse or of self-defense, suggesting that the murderer approached her from behind. Her body also looks as if it has been dragged along the ground.

This passage provides more key information about the setting. Clearly, not everything around the characters is in (or part of) Beszel. There are other people, not dressed in Besz fashion, who Borlú and Corwi must quickly “unsee.” At this point the reader may connect this information to the title of the novel and conclude that what is not in Beszel is in the other city alluded to in the novel’s title.



This passage contains two more important tropes of the detective novel: firstly, Borlú and Corwi have already reached their first dead end by getting nothing from their conversations with the sex workers. This indicates that the initial assumption about the case was wrong. Secondly, Borlú engages in an act of rebellion against his boss (albeit a rather minor one) by saying he will put up the posters if Gadlem opposes.



Like all of Eastern Europe, Beszel has a multiethnic, multilinguistic, and multifaith history. At the same time, this diverse history clearly does not prevent racism from existing in the present, as illustrated by the racist epithet “ébru.” The changing meaning of this term over time shows that racism more commonly adapts to different circumstances rather than going away.



The details given here suggest that while “Fulana” died a violent death, she wasn’t killed in the context of a physical conflict or confrontation with her attacker. She wasn’t sexually assaulted, and was approached from behind. This suggests that her murder was deliberate; she was targeted by someone who, for some reason, wanted her dead.



CHAPTER 3

The posters go up. Borlú himself lives southeast of Old Town, the city center, near the top of a small tower block. There is a fish market nearby, plus a raised railway line that runs past his window, although this is not in his city. He could look out his window and at the “foreign travelers” going past, but he does not. Borlú is in “early middle age” and is usually in his apartment alone, although he has casual relationships with two women, one a professor of economic history and the other an art critic. As he leaves his apartment, he sees one of the posters, which features a photo of Fulana and a request to call the Extreme Crime Squad with any information.

While Borlú is walking to work, he gets a call from Yaszek informing him that they have found the van. He gets a taxi to the spot where his colleagues are already examining the van, which is in “very bad condition.” In the back of the van there is a strong smell of “mould” and “piled-up junk.” Yaszek tells Borlú that a smear was found on the van’s floor, believed to be Fulana’s blood. Corwi arrives, and Borlú postulates that Fulana was already dead or unconscious by the time she was placed inside the van. Before long, the police acquire the name and address of the van’s owner, and by the next day the lab confirms that the smear is indeed Fulana’s blood.

The van owner is named Mikyael Khurusch; he has a criminal record for theft and soliciting prostitution. By this point, many people have called the hotline from the posters with information about Fulana, although most of this information clearly nonsense. The two plausible leads are that Fulana is a legal assistant who was recently reported missing, or a “tart” called Rosyn who is nicknamed “The Pout.” Gadlem gives Borlú permission to visit Khurusch and try to get him to voluntarily give fingerprints and saliva samples. When Borlú finds him, Khurusch expresses joy that his van has been found, explaining it was stolen three days before. Borlú responds that it’s strange that Khurusch didn’t report the van missing, considering he needs it for his job.

Khurusch says that he didn’t have time to report the van as missing because he was “busy.” Borlú shows him a photo of Fulana, asking if he knows her, and Khurusch, distressed, asks if she was killed by the van in a hit and run. Khurusch then explains that the night Fulana was killed, he was at a Gamblers Anonymous meeting, after which he and a group of the GA attendees went to a bar. Borlú follows this up, and finds seven witnesses who confirm it. Yaszek notes that although Khurusch didn’t report the van missing officially, he had been complaining about it to people he knew for days.

“The City and the City” is not a very character-driven novel; this is typical of genre fiction, including crime novels and science fiction and fantasy. From the information that has been provided thus far, Borlú appears to be a rather typical protagonist for a detective novel: somewhat isolated, intelligent, and a little rebellious, with a deep sense of commitment to his job.



Once again, there are indications that the case is going to be straightforward, as there is now a clear connection between Fulana and a possible perpetrator (the owner of the van). At the same time, because this is a detective novel, the reader is likely aware that any seemingly straightforward solutions are in fact no such thing.



Lots of evidence certainly indicates that Khurusch is guilty. At the same time, it is again also likely that none of this evidence is as straightforward as it seems. Thus far, the narrative has shown that doing detective work means interacting with a lot of people whom society deems to be criminal (drug users, sex workers and clients), but that doesn’t mean that these people are actually implicated in the crime being investigated.



Another thing that this part of the novel makes clear is that people often behave in “suspicious” or less-than-upstanding ways for a variety of reasons. However, this again does not mean that they are criminals, or guilty of the particular crime under investigation.



Yaszek also learned that Khurusch makes money by going abroad, to Varna, Bucharest, Turkey, or UI Qoma, picking up items like “cheap clothes [and] dodgy CDS” to sell back in Beszel. When Borlú speaks to Khurusch again, Khurusch says that some of the junk in the van—including a “ripped-up cord”—do not belong to him. Back at the office, Borlú expresses his frustration to Corwi that, so far, none of the pieces of the story are adding up.

This passage helps the reader to geographically place the fictional city of Beszel. If Khurusch can travel by car to Bucharest, Varna, and Turkey, then Beszel is likely somewhere around Romania, Bulgaria, or possibly Serbia. (Note the mention of UI Qoma here—another fictional place.)



CHAPTER 4

Neither of the leads about Fulana’s identity turn out to be legitimate; both the legal assistant and “The Pout” are still alive. Meanwhile, no DNA evidence definitively links Khurusch to her. On the Monday after the body is found, Borlú gets a call from a man speaking in a foreign accent. The line is bad, and the man’s Besz is good but strangely old-fashioned. When Borlú asks why the man isn’t calling the information line, he replies, “I can’t,” before adding, “Borlú, shut up.” He explains that he learned that Borlú is the detective working on the case from the newspaper. When Borlú asks where the man is calling from, the man replies that he already knows. It’s true: Borlú can hear that his accent is from UI Qoma.

In this part of the novel, Miéville provides more and more hints about what UI Qoma actually is. Again, the reader may have already connected the mention of other people who are in-but-not-in Beszel to the “other city” of the novel’s title. The fact that UI Qoma is the only other fictional place mentioned thus far may therefore prompt the reader to figure out that the other city is UI Qoma.



Borlú reminds the man that the call he is making is not illegal, and switches to Illitan. However, the man switches back to Besz, grumbling that “it’s the same damn-faced language anyway.” Borlú is desperately trying to think of a way to trace the call, although he’s not sure if it will be possible. The man says that he knows the woman who was killed, whose name was Marya. He is calling because if Marya is dead, it means that he and other people he cares about are in danger. The man continues that he met Marya through “politics.” She lived in UI Qoma. Borlú begins to deny this, but the man insists. He explains that Marya went “everywhere” in the political underground because “she needed to know everything.”

This passage provides more information about the divide between Beszel and UI Qoma. Although Borlú says that calling from one place to the other isn’t illegal, it is clear that there are certain (very strict) rules regarding how the two cities relate to one another. Indeed, the fact that Borlú finds it impossible to believe that Marya lived in UI Qoma when her body was found in Beszel suggests that there is some kind of barrier between them.



Borlú asks how the man learned about Marya’s death, and the man angrily replies, “I saw your fucking poster,” before hanging up. Next to the notes Borlú has made in his notepad, he has written “shit/shit/shit.” Soon after, he leaves the office, and as he walks home he struggles “to see and unsee only what [he] should.” He calls Sariska, the history professor, but hangs up while the phone is ringing, not wanting to make her “accessory to **breach**.” Instead, he slowly gets through two bottles of wine with dinner while sketching what he knows about the case.

By receiving the call from UI Qoma, Borlú himself seems to be implicated in some kind of crime. Again, however, the call itself doesn’t seem to be the issue, as Borlú made clear that this was not illegal. Instead, it seems that the information the anonymous man conferred during the call is what could get Borlú in trouble.



Borlú knows it's unlikely that the call was a hoax. However, he now faces a dilemma: if he acts on the information the man has given him, he will be in **breach**, which is "far worse than illegal." He is tempted to shred or burn the notes from his phone conversation, although he won't actually do it. He recalls how, when he was a child, he used to "play Breach," drawing chalk lines on the ground and chasing each other. There is a sect that worships Breach, and although this religion is not technically illegal, it still makes people nervous. By three a.m., Borlú is drunk and unable to sleep.

Borlú calls Corwi's desk and leaves her a voicemail saying that he likely won't come in the next day. He says that it's clear by now that Fulana was not a sex worker, and claims that he's been talking to a friend in the Dissident Unit, which has inspired him to start looking into unificationists. He suggests that Corwi start this work tomorrow, adding that he will be in touch by phone. He then calls someone he knows in the "admin pool" called Taskin Cerush and asks what he would have to do if he were to "hypothetically" need to forward a case to **Breach**.

Pausing for a moment of reflection, Borlú concludes that Marya and the informant must both be unificationists. He looks out the window at a passerby who is not in Beszel, and keeps looking. When the train passes, he looks at the passengers, some of whom, frightened, look back.

CHAPTER 5

To those who don't know much about them, Illitan and Besz seem very different; they sound different, and where Besz is written in a Cyrillic-like script, Illitan is in Roman script. Illitan used to have its own script, but it was erased overnight in 1923 by a leader named Ya Ilsa, who served as inspiration for Atatürk. Besz and Illitan are actually not very different because "they share a common ancestor," but it would be provocative to even admit this aloud. Beszel was founded around 1700-2000 years ago in the "curl of coastline" where it still sits today. Another city was founded at the same time. It is not known if the two cities began as one and were later split. Even those who study "the Cleavage" do not actually know.

Although Borlú still hasn't fully explained what breach is, this passage gives some important clues. The lines in chalk suggest that breach involves borders (and their violation). Moreover, the fact that the children chase each other indicates that there is a punitive aspect to breach, such that people who commit it get into trouble.



Here, Borlú tries to use the information he was given during the anonymous phone call to help guide his approach to the case while keeping the case hidden from Corwi. Already it seems clear that Borlú trusts Corwi, so this is likely not the reason why he is lying to her. Instead, he appears to be protecting her from being implicated.



Again, at this point the reader may realize that if the train passing Borlú's window is not in Beszel, that means it is in Ul Qoma.



This passage contains a vital explanation of Beszel, Ul Qoma, and the history of their relationship. Both cities emerged alongside one another a long time ago, although no one knows if they were always two cities, or were originally one. This information is crucial, as it helps contextualize the controversy and danger that defines the cities' relationship to one another.



Corwi calls Borlú and says, “Boss you are on fire.” She asks him to meet her on BudapestStrász in a northern industrial suburb of the city. She explains that she followed Borlú’s tip, trying to intimidate people, and eventually found out that 68 BudapestStrász is a “unificationist HQ.” Like other political groups, unificationists are divided along many different issues. Some target newcomers to Beszel, aiming to “weaponize [the] urban uncertainty” of those who don’t yet know how to see and unsee the right things. Other unificationists criticize this tactic. There are also squabbles over what the unified city would be like, what its name and language and laws would be.

BudapestStrász is crosshatched. The Besz side has grown desolate in recent years thanks to the death of the river industry, but the UI Qoman part is becoming busier as the neighborhood becomes more prosperous. Borlú has the ability to selectively mute UI Qoman conversations such that they register only as a vague hum. Now, Corwi introduces him to a unificationist named Pall Drodin, and to both Corwi and Drodin’s shock, Borlú brings up **breach**. After a brief conversation, Corwi asks in an angry whisper why Borlú is bringing up “that spooky shit.” They go inside.

The unificationist group here is called the Beszqoma Solidarity Front. On the wall, there are maps of Beszel and UI Qoma. The borders are there, but are faded to a faint grey. Corwi points out that they could easily be deemed illegal. She gets out the photo of Fulana, and Drodin explains that he knew her as Byela Mar, although this was evidently a fake name. Drodin says that she came to the headquarters around three years ago. She spoke in a foreign accent, American or English, and wanted to use the library. When Corwi suggests they take a look, Drodin protests that they don’t have any Class One banned books, and the Class Twos are all ones that are also available online.

“Byela” would talk to Drodin about the history of the cities, the unification efforts, and the unificationists imprisoned for their political beliefs in both Beszel and UI Qoma. Drodin says that he eventually got into a fight with Byela after she began winding up his comrades. He concludes that she was “dangerous,” and would bring up “the kookiest underground bollocks,” myths and rumors that he thinks she was too smart to actually believe. Eventually, Drodin admits that she was “obsessed” with Orciny, the mythical third city between the other two. According to legend, Orciny is in the dissensi, the “disputed zones” that are neither Beszel nor UI Qoma. Drodin explains: “Orciny’s the secret city. It runs things.”

Although the divide between Beszel and UI Qoma is strictly enforced, not everyone believes it should exist. As in any divided city, there are dissidents who fight for the border between the two sides to be eradicated. Usually, those who take a political view like this tend to be left-leaning, preferring pacifism and inclusivity to authoritarianism and nationalism. Yet, as Borlú points out, there is a great diversity within the unificationist position, leading to internal conflict.



This is one of many points in the narrative where it is made deliberately unclear whether the world of the novel involves supernatural elements. For example, Borlú’s ability to “unhear” UI Qoman conversations seems almost impossible, yet in real life, people are actually capable of selectively muting noises they don’t want to hear (an ability termed the “cocktail party effect”).



Thus far, everyone Borlú and Corwi have used for information to help solve the crime has been a “criminal” in some way—from the drug users and sex workers in the neighborhood where Fulana was found to Khurusch to the anonymous tipper to the unificationists. This suggests that criminality is a widespread (if not nearly universal) position in Beszel, something that indicates a rather oppressive state and criminal justice system.



As well as being overrun with criminality, Beszel is also teeming with paranoia, conspiracy, and illicit knowledge. As is typical of political dissidents, the unificationists have a library where they keep banned books. Yet as this passage shows, this commitment to preserving subversive knowledge can put them in dangerous intimacy with conspiracy theories, such as the myth of Orciny.



Borlú explains that all historical evidence from the time before the founding of the two cities has been corrupted, buried, or destroyed. The myth of Orciny adds to the confusion; Borlú describes it as “a community of imaginary overlords, exiles perhaps,” and he jokes that the Illuminati lives there. Orciny used to be confined to children’s stories, and Borlú thus now asks Drodin if he means that Byela was researching “folklore.” Drodin simply replies that they have information about Orciny, which Borlú doesn’t find surprising, because “Like any dissidents they were neurotic archivists.”

Drodin repeats that Byela was dangerous, because, as unificationists, he and his comrades are subject to disproportionate scrutiny by **Breach**. While ordinary citizens are granted some leeway when it comes to looking at the other city, unificationists can be taken even for committing a brief, instinctive, “somatic breach,” such as jumping at the sound of a misfiring UI Qoman car. Drodin says that before she died, Byela said she was getting ready to leave Beszel and “officially” go to UI Qoma. When she disappeared, he heard that it was because she had successfully completed the trip. He repeats that Byela freaked him out, and that although he’s sorry she’s dead, he’s “not surprised.”

As they are driving away, both Borlú and Corwi feel “watched.” Provocatively, Borlú decides they should go to lunch in UI Qomatown. The buildings here resemble a “parody” of UI Qoman buildings more than the real thing; they are painted in Beszel Blue, a color that is actually illegal in UI Qoma. However, the area nonetheless serves as a home for the UI Qoman expat community in Beszel. The establishments there serve traditional UI Qoman food, and it is hard to overcome the instinct to “unsmell” the smells of this cooking. From time to time, someone lost in UI Qoma will approach someone in UI Qomatown and ask them for directions in Illitan, but **Breach** is usually forgiving of such incidents.

Once they are at a café, Corwi asks Borlú, “Why the fuck are we here?” Borlú replies that the UI Qoman atmosphere will help them with the case. After thinking for a while, Corwi reluctantly admits that it seems the case involves **breach**, and Borlú agrees. Borlú says they will have to take the case to the Oversight Committee, but will first need to gather some more evidence. When Borlú gets back to the office, Taskin tells him that he’ll have to wait a while before he brings the case to the committee. She explains that the committee is currently occupied with the issue of refugees, people who had been trying to get to UI Qoma and, against their will, ended up in Beszel. The next day, Corwi shows Borlú a file faxed over from UI Qoma: Fulana’s real identity.

This passage highlights a confusion over the extent to which Orciny should be taken seriously. Borlú is instantly dismissive of it as a ridiculous conspiracy theory (as shown by his reference to the Illuminati) or a children’s folktale. Yet there is also an indication that there might be something more serious and sinister about Orciny.



This passage clarifies that breach (with a small b) refers to the crime of Besz citizens acknowledging or interacting with UI Qoma in some way. While it has been made clear that quick glances are ok, the extra scrutiny to which unificationists are subjected means that they can be punished for acknowledging UI Qoma even by instinct or accident. The reader also learns here that Breach with a capital B refers to the authority that punishes people for committing breach.



The existence of UI Qomatown shows that it is not illegal to acknowledge the abstract existence of UI Qoma—rather, breach is defined as engaging with the actual city itself. Indeed, Besz citizens can go to UI Qomatown precisely because it isn’t UI Qoma, even if it resembles it, and if people in UI Qoma accidentally mistake UI Qomatown for their own city, this is technically breach (even if it is treated with lenience).



The name “Oversight Committee” is symbolically significant—and in several ways is a pun. The word oversight comes from the verb to oversee, the act of supervising something (usually from a position of authority). Considering how important seeing and unseeing are in the novel, “oversight” also suggests a kind of supreme, panoramic surveillance, underlining the connection between sight and power. At the same time, oversight also (somewhat counterintuitively) can mean error or omission—which will become significant.



CHAPTER 6

The dead woman was a 24-year-old American named Mahalia Geary. Borlú presents this information to the 42 members of the Oversight Committee sitting around the table. There are 21 Besz politicians there; the rest are from UI Qoma. The committee meets in one of the only places that is the same in both cities: **Copula Hall**, an ornate building that lies in both Beszel and UI Qoma’s Old Towns. The building is crosshatched inside, with one room in Beszel, the next in UI Qoma. The Oversight Committee meets consistently, even during times of conflict between Beszel and UI Qoma. The only exceptions have been the two times when the cities have been in direct war against each other.

Borlú has presented to the Oversight Committee twice before; once was regarding a drug case involving **breach**, the other a case where a man who had just killed his wife breached in a moment of sheer panic. Now, Borlú explains that Geary was a resident of UI Qoma and was a PhD student in archaeology. She was working at a major dig in western UI Qoma called Bol Ye’an. The site is run by archaeologists from Prince of Wales University in Canada, which was Geary’s home institution. A few years back there was a conference in Beszel about the discovery of a major “cache” of mysterious artefacts at Bol Ye’an.

Geary’s presentation at the conference, which was on Orciny, caused major controversy; however, once the scandal blew over, she was able to gain a visa to UI Qoma for her PhD research. One of the members of the Oversight Committee suggests that there is not yet any evidence that Mahalia’s death involved **breach**; there might be another explanation. He argues that Breach is “an alien power,” adding, “we hand over our sovereignty to it at our peril.” Several committee members object to this statement, and Borlú is taken aback. He is not used to Breach being treated as something up for discussion.

The first time Borlú saw **Breach**, he was 14 and witnessed a traffic accident that involved both Besz and UI Qoman cars on a crosshatched street. Just as he glanced at the accident, the vague “shapes” and “figures” of Breach arrived, moving so quickly and with such power that it was impossible to properly make them out. Now, back in the meeting, it is concluded that, although in general the Committee shouldn’t be too quick to hand cases over to Breach, this one couldn’t be more “clear-cut.”

Here the reader learns that the main function of the Oversight Committee is as a zone of interaction and shared governance between Beszel and UI Qoma. This means that the committee—like its meeting place, Copula Hall—is one of the only entities in either city that serves as a point of connection between Beszel and UI Qoma.



Thus far, readers know that Mahalia was both involved in the political underground and an archaeologist. She was devoted to the pursuit of knowledge, and seemingly subversive and illicit knowledge in particular. The fact that she ended up dead shows how charged such knowledge is in the world of the novel.



This passage shows that Breach (the authority) is not part of either the Besz or UI Qoman governments, but rather a separate power altogether. This is somewhat unusual, and highlights the fraught, complex, and internally contradictory nature of governance in the two cities.



Again, this passage is deliberately vague regarding the extent to which Breach involves supernatural powers. It certainly seems plausible that Breach is a fantastical authority using magic or science fictional technology to complete their job. Yet it is also possible that it is citizens’ fear that stops them from being able to see Breach properly.



Walking away from the meeting, Borlú reflects on **Breach's** power, which is “almost limitless” and “frightening.” He meets Corwi and explains that the case will be handed to Breach, but that this won't happen immediately. They discuss the mixed feelings nationalists harbor toward Breach. Borlú thinks about citizens who want to travel between Beszel and UI Qoma must go through the official border at **Copula Hall** even if the place they want to go is right next to their own house. Borlú recalls how, when he was a child, he would throw stones through thin strips of UI Qoma and watch them land back in Beszel, then walk around the strip in order to pick up the stone again.

The political landscape of Beszel and UI Qoma is not easily summarized using conventional categories such as right/left or conservative/liberal. This is in part because so much of the politics is defined by the strange separation of the two cities. This leads to complex, contradictory positions such as the attitude of the nationalists toward Breach. While Breach keeps the cities separate (something the nationalists want), it also undermines the authority of each nation.



CHAPTER 7

It is not possible to fly directly to Beszel from the US; passengers must change in Budapest, Skopje, or Athens. A blockade prevents Americans from flying direct to UI Qoma, too, but there are direct flights to UI Qoma from Canada. Borlú and Corwi have gone to Beszel Airport to meet Mahalia Geary's parents. While they wait, they talk about places they've traveled. They watch drivers waiting to collect board members of companies such as VerTech and Sear and Core, and Corwi wonders aloud why corporations are investing in Beszel. They discuss Mahalia's PhD supervisor, Professor Nancy.

This passage presents the first substantial reason why the divide between Beszel and UI Qoma is so strictly policed—because they have different relations with other countries around the world. This closely corresponds to the way that international relations work in reality, when global conflicts can spark proxy wars between two neighboring countries (or a split within the same country, such as the Vietnam War).



Corwi asks why Borlú went to Berlin, and he explains it was for a conference called “Policing Split Cities.” At the time, Berlin was still divided, and there were also sessions on Budapest, Jerusalem, and Beszel and UI Qoma. Corwi is shocked that Borlú was allowed to attend an event that placed Beszel and UI Qoma under the label “split city.” Mr. and Mrs. Geary arrive, and Borlú greets them, expressing his sincere condolences. He asks if they want to be taken to their hotel, but they say they'd prefer to go straight to view Mahalia's body. Mr. Geary asks if they will see Professor Nancy and Mahalia's friends, but Borlú reminds him that this isn't possible, as they are in UI Qoma.

Part of what makes borders so harmful is that they intrude on the most sensitive aspects of social life, including death. Mr and Mrs. Geary come to Beszel because this is where Mahalia's body was found and where it remains, yet this means they cannot meet her community or see where she actually lived. Although the Beszel/UI Qoma divide is unique in some ways, grieving families routinely have to deal with border issues like this in the real world, too.



Mr. and Mrs. Geary are among a very small group of visitors admitted to Beszel without tourist training through the compassionate-entry visa program. This means that they have not taken part in the exam, with both its “theoretical and practical-role-play elements,” that tourists have to take before arriving in Beszel. The training for the exam takes two weeks, and by the end tourists aren't able to see and unsee on a native level, but are at least prepared to be discreet about seeing the wrong thing, which allows them to avoid any egregious breaches. Borlú takes Mr. and Mrs. Geary to Shukman's lab, where they “moan” at the sight of their daughter's dead body.

Outsiders such as tourists and refugees play an important role in the narrative. Unlike native citizens, these outsiders have not internalized the division and alienation that defines life in Beszel and UI Qoma. In a sense, they provide a much-needed fresh, innocent perspective on life in the cities, highlighting the absurdity of the border and the rules around breaching.



Mr. Geary says he wants to go to UI Qoma. Borlú and Corwi are having lunch with the Gearys at their hotel, alongside a young man named James Thacker from the American embassy. Borlú promises that he is in the process of arranging the paperwork that will enable the Gearys to travel to UI Qoma. Mrs. Geary asks if they will be able to speak to “the **Breach**” about the case, but Borlú apologetically explains that this will not be possible. Thacker joins in, adding that Breach is “extremely secretive” but that he has no doubt that they will successfully solve the case and prosecute those responsible. He also explains that there will be no trial, only a private tribunal to which the Gearys will not have access.

Frustrated, Mr. Geary brings up Mahalia’s obsession with Orciny. Thacker seems not to know what Orciny is, and Borlú and Corwi clarify that it is a “folk tale.” Mrs. Geary mentions that Mahalia used to frequently argue with Professor Nancy. She and Mr. Geary then say that it seemed Mahalia was on the verge of some kind of a breakthrough when she died. People were angry about what she had discovered. As the conversation gets more heated, Borlú asks who was angry about Mahalia’s research. The Gearys mentioned that some were nationalists, but before the conversation continues, Corwi and Thacker intervene, suggesting everyone take a moment to calm down.

After the Gearys leave, Borlú and Corwi discuss two particularly nasty nationalist groups: Qoma First, and their Besz equivalent, the True Citizens. Borlú comments that Mr. Geary’s assertion that Mahalia angered the nationalists might not be true. Corwi notes that they know she upset the unificationists, and wonders if there are “any extremists she hasn’t made angry.” Borlú suggests they do some more digging while they wait for **Breach** to pick up the case. This surprises Corwi.

CHAPTER 8

When Borlú gets back to the office, he finds an email from Gadlem saying that as soon as Mr. and Mrs. Geary are taken care of, the case should be considered “done.” Borlú rolls his eyes at this message and continues to investigate. He calls Bol Ye’an, asking to speak to Professor Nancy. When she comes to the phone, she apologizes for not calling the ECS back, saying she’s been busy. She asks if the case is being handed over to **Breach**, and Borlú confirms that it is, but explains that he wants to do some final research because he is “curious” about Mahalia’s research.

This passage makes startlingly clear how much Breach actually prohibits the pursuit of true justice. Because it is so secretive and opaque, Breach is profoundly undemocratic. The way it approaches crime recalls the justice systems under totalitarian governments, which are defined by a total lack of transparency and accountability, and usually very little justice.



Mr. and Mrs. Geary are important sources of information about the case, but also unreliable ones. They don’t know anything about the way Beszel and UI Qoma actually work, and thus, although Mahalia seems to have told them a lot about her research, they are not well-equipped to understand it. Borlú must therefore attempt to decode their impressions in order to arrive at the truth.



Again, the fact that Mahalia seems to have angered the unificationists as much as the nationalists highlights that the political landscape in Beszel and UI Qoma is not straightforward. The unificationists and nationalists may be on opposing sides, but there seem to be certain issues which unite them against all odds.



This passage contains another important trope from crime fiction: the detective who cannot drop the case even when he is told to do so. This puts Borlú at odds with his own department as well as with Breach, who are supposed to be taking over the case—a potentially dangerous position to be in.



When Borlú mentions Mahalia's research on Orciny, Professor Nancy balks, exclaiming, "This is an archaeology department!" She says that if Mahalia was interested in Orciny, she would have been in a Folklore or Anthropology department. Professor Nancy then explains that Bol Ye'an is an ancient site, with artefacts that predate the origin of Beszel and Ul Qoma. Very little is known about the culture in which they were produced. Mahalia was studying these artefacts, although Professor Nancy wasn't sure what her ultimate argument about them would be.

Nancy explains that Mahalia was previously interested in Orciny and calls her "a little Bowdenite." However, once Nancy took her on as a PhD student, she made it clear that Orciny could not be the main subject of her scholarly research if she wanted to be taken seriously. Mahalia was very intelligent, but Nancy admits she was somewhat disappointed with the writing Mahalia ultimately produced, which was mediocre, particularly considering how much work she had been putting in. Borlú asks what "Bowdenite" means, and Nancy explains that it refers to people who are interested in the early work of David Bowden, particularly a book he wrote about Orciny called **Between the City and the City**.

Nancy explains that **Between the City and the City** is banned in both Beszel and Ul Qoma. Although she thinks the book has moments of impressive analysis, she dismisses it as largely "crackpot ramblings." She admits she previously didn't really think that Bowden himself believed in Orciny. When she met Mahalia, she similarly assumed her interest in Orciny might have been a joke. When they started working together, Nancy warned Mahalia that she would have to leave the Orciny stuff behind if she wanted to be taken seriously as a scholar, and Mahalia laughed and assured her that she had.

Professor Nancy then mentions the artefacts at Bol Ye'an, which are rumored to have magic powers. She says she wishes this were true, although the objects are unique and remarkably technologically advanced. She mentions that Bowden is still alive, although he's "repudiated" his previous work on Orciny. He also works in the archeology department at Prince of Wales University and lives in Ul Qoma. Like several other academics (including Nancy herself), he splits his time between Canada and Ul Qoma, although he now spends the majority of his time in the latter. Borlú looks Bowden up online and finds that most of his scholarly work was published in the mid-1970s.

This is another moment at which knowledge is shown to be especially charged in the world of the novel. Professor Nancy's strong reaction to the prospect that Mahalia would be studying Orciny within an archeology department suggests that doing so would undermine the legitimacy of her program.



Like Borlú himself, Mahalia was an intelligent, dedicated, and hard worker, yet someone who also had a rebellious streak. Her arguments with Professor Nancy and the ultimately disappointing nature of her writing suggest that Mahalia did not prioritize pleasing authority or succeeding according to conventional metrics. Rather, she was dedicated to pursuing knowledge for its own sake and charting her own path.



Considering what the reader already knows about Mahalia, it seems that she pretended that she was leaving behind her interest in Orciny to placate Professor Nancy, but in reality she remained committed to researching it. Indeed, as is common among conspiracy theorists, Mahalia perhaps thought she had to pretend to drop her interest in Orciny in the presence of others who didn't understand.



Bowden is both an important and unimportant figure in the world of the novel. He wrote a key text on the myth of Orciny, one that once triggered a lot of excitement, but he is now somewhat washed-up and irrelevant. Crucially, he now rejects his own research from the earlier part of his career. Whether this is because he actually believes it's wrong or because he needs to do so to be taken seriously is unclear.



Borlú then looks up the conspiracy websites, including fracturedcity.org where “dopplurbanology” obsessives congregate. There, he finds a few excerpts from **Between the City and the City**. Borlú then gets a call from one of the officers at the hotel where the Gearys are staying saying that Mr. Geary “went AWOL” and has **breached**. Breach have taken Mr. Geary and will now keep them until they can put them on a flight out of Beszel Airport. They will be banned from ever returning. Borlú finds the Gearys in a cell; Mr. Geary is unconscious, having been tranquilized by Breach. Mrs. Geary is furious, claiming that her husband has been “poisoned.”

Borlú tries to ask Mrs. Geary why Mr. Geary ignored their instructions and **breached**, but Mrs. Geary is insulted. She says that they knew Mahalia was afraid in the time leading up to her death, and Mr. Geary was going to find out why. Borlú apologizes to Mrs. Geary and promises that he is on her side. However, when Mrs. Geary asks that they be released and swears that they will find a way back in after being deported, Borlú says he can't help, reminding her that they are being watched by Breach. He asks that she trust him to find Mahalia's murderer. After helping her onto the plane, he looks at a piece of paper he took from the side pocket of her bag, where there is scribbled an address in UI Qoma.

CHAPTER 9

Borlú and Corwi are at the address that was on Mr. Geary's piece of paper, which is headquarters of the True Citizens. The members of the group are standing around outside, clearly trying to look intimidating. One is holding a baseball bat. Borlú speaks into his radio, requesting that backup be on standby. When Borlú approaches one of the men and tells them he wants to ask a few questions, the man replies that unless they have a search warrant, they will not be permitted entry. When Borlú mentions Geary, the men say they read about the case in the newspaper. They suggest that what happened to her was punishment for “certain behaviors.” They explain that she had a “reputation among patriots.”

Another man suggests that Mahalia was a unificationist or a spy. A black car arrives and a middle-aged man gets out. He introduces himself as Harkad Gosz, the True Citizens' lawyer. Gosz says he's guessing Borlú is there about Mahalia. He says that Mahalia was either “stupid” or seriously trying to undermine Beszel. Borlú replies that it's ridiculous to imply that Mahalia's interest in Orciny was somehow fake and that she was really working for UI Qoma. Gosz steps closer to Borlú, listing all the ways in which Mahalia's work was suspicious. Corwi comments that the nationalists truly are “batshit.” Gosz threatens to get Borlú fired. As a final act of intimidation, Borlú mentions **Breach**, then leaves.

For the first time, the reader witnesses what Breach actually does to those who violate the strict separation between the cities. At the same time, it is also clear that this isn't the usual punishment—Mr. and Mrs. Geary are being treated with lenience because they are foreigners (and because they are grieving, which is also what afforded them their compassionate entry visa).



Borlú now has an added incentive to keep pursuing his investigation even as the case is supposed to be handed over to Breach. He has made a personal promise to Mrs. Geary that he will find the murderer. This is especially important because when Breach take over the case, they will provide no information about their actions. Borlú, on the other hand, knows that an important part of delivering justice is transparency and accountability.



Unlike the unificationists, who were standoffish because they were afraid, the nationalists are more aggressive. They seem to believe that Mahalia deserved to be murdered, which obviously puts them in a highly suspicious light.



Although the narrative has thus far been brimming with dissidents and criminals, the True Citizens are the first characters who are genuinely sinister. They have no qualms about implying that Mahalia deserved to be murdered, and in this scene, they threaten Borlú's job. Of course, in a sense this puts them in a suspicious light regarding the case—yet at the same time, just because they are rude and violent doesn't mean they murdered Mahalia.



Walking away from the headquarters, Borlú and Corwi wonder if Gosz was sent over by Syedr, a Besz nationalist politician who is part of the Oversight Committee. Corwi mentions that she thought they were supposed to be done with the case by now, and Borlú replies that they should still gather as much information as they can before **Breach** takes over.

Although the True Citizens are crude and thuggish, they are also clearly connected to people with serious wealth and authority—as their relations with Gosz and Syedr show.



CHAPTER 10

Early the next morning, Borlú learns that Gadlem wants to speak with him urgently. He tries to hide, before reluctantly going to Gadlem's office. Gadlem asks about the Gearys, then says that he has a "tremendously intriguing case" for Borlú—the one that Borlú is already working on. The Oversight Committee has decided not to hand over the case to Breach, on the grounds that there is "insufficient evidence" that **breach** took place. Gadlem shows him a surveillance videotape of Khurusch's van. Borlú can make out the edge of **Copula Hall**, and sees the van drive in and out. This means that the van went from Beszel to UI Qoma and back legally after all.

This passage provides another stark reminder of the ridiculousness of borders. The video footage indicates that, in the midst of committing murder, the killer made sure to cross the border legally—a decision reflective of the disproportionate seriousness with which breach is treated in the world of the novel.



The narrative switches to a statement made by the Oversight Committee regarding their decision not to invoke **Breach**. The statement describes the discovery that the van passed through an official checkpoint at **Copula Hall**, which means that breach did not occur. Smuggling does not inherently involve breach, although "most breach is committed in order to smuggle." Mahalia's murder, the smuggling of her body, and the theft of Khurusch's van are all crimes that will be properly investigated and punished, but Breach will not be involved.

On one hand, this decision could be perceived as a victory for real justice. After all, Breach is so opaque, mysterious, and all-powerful that their prosecution of the case may not have felt like justice to Mahalia's family. At the same time, Breach's power means that they would likely have been better equipped to actually find the murderer than Borlú and the rest of the policzai.



After reading the report, Borlú angrily exclaims that it's "bullshit," and asks how they are supposed to solve the crime without **Breach's** help. Gadlem agrees that it is unfair, but he encourages him to take a more positive approach. Borlú will be sent over to UI Qoma. Gadlem mentions that "this is an exciting new era of cross-border policing," a phrase taken directly from a brochure that came with the police station's new computer equipment. Borlú asks to take Corwi with him, but Gadlem refuses. He mentions his disapproval of Borlú's unauthorized trip to the True Citizens headquarters, which he heard about from Syedr. Gadlem indicates that it is likely this unauthorized visit was the reason why the Oversight Committee reversed course on invoking Breach.

This passage presents a significant piece of information. The Oversight Committee may have chosen not to forward the case to Breach not because they genuinely think breach did not occur, but rather for political reasons. Syedr's association with the True Citizens leads him to retaliate against Borlú for going to their headquarters—although, intriguingly, this retaliation takes the form of forcing Borlú to keep working on the case.



While Borlú prepares to go to UI Qoma, he receives the copy of **Between the City and the City** that he ordered online through a link from fracturedcity.org. Buying it was not a great risk, as the censorship of books is generally not taken too seriously. The book was “published by a long-gone anarcho-hippy press.” Borlú calls both his lovers and tells them he is going to UI Qoma for an investigation. He asks Sariska if she has read *Between the City and the City* and she replies that she did as an undergrad and loved it. Yet she now thinks the book is “ridiculous” and associates it with adolescence. After, Borlú calls Corwi and suggests that before he leaves, they investigate the footage of the van. She agrees.

Like many conspiracy theories, Orciny is associated with the immaturity of adolescence. This is a time in life at which many people are especially impressionable, because they are figuring out their own views of the world. Furthermore, adolescence is also a point at which people are naturally inclined to seek out countercultural beliefs due a desire to rebel against their parents and the status quo.



CHAPTER 11

Borlú and Corwi go to Khurusch’s house, and almost immediately ask him where he got the visa for his van. He gets flustered, and when they ask to see the pass, he stalls, saying it is not in his house. Borlú and Corwi continue to aggressively interrogate him, although they assure him that they do not think he murdered Mahalia or dumped her body. Distressed, Khurusch admits that he usually always takes his pass out of the van, but the one time he “forgot” was when the van was stolen.

Khurusch is certainly behaving suspiciously, although there are a number of reasons this could be the case that aren’t that he murdered Mahalia. As a gambling addict with a previous criminal record, Khurusch is in a somewhat vulnerable position regarding his relationship with the law. This in itself might be the reason for his nervousness.



Borlú says he knows that this is the reason why Khurusch never reported the van as stolen. He also says it’s a pretty strange “coincidence” that the van was stolen by someone who wanted to go to UI Qoma with the visa documents left inside. Khurusch denies that he purposefully gave the van to anyone, but Borlú says he’s looked up Khurusch’s border control record and seen that he’s left his documents in the glove compartment before. Khurusch admits he managed to keep his documents because it was a first-time offence, and because he gave the officer a small bribe. All of this is quite normal. Borlú takes Corwi to one side and asks her to look up all the vans stolen in Beszel on the night Mahalia’s body was dumped.

As this passage shows, being a successful detective primarily involves examining mundane, even boring details for secret coincidences and clues. In a sense, this highlights a similarity between detective work and conspiracy theories.



Corwi completes this task with remarkable speed while Borlú continues his interrogation of Khurusch inside a prison cell. Corwi tells him that a total of 13 vans were stolen that night, three of which were for joyrides. Of the remaining 10, only three were not reported by the end of the next day. All three have papers for travel to UI Qoma; Borlú comments that this seems like a strangely high number. All three also had previous warnings for failing to take visa documents out of the glove compartment. This leads Borlú to conclude that whoever stole the vans was “visa hunting,” and had access to border control records. They deliberately targeted vans likely to have the passes left in them.

Borlú and Corwi make such an excellent team because whereas Borlú has the imagination and insight to find clues in unlikely places, Corwi has the technical skill and thoroughness to follow up Borlú’s hunches. With this combination of skills, they become a formidable power.



Both Borlú and Corwi feel freaked out. Borlú says they need to keep investigating, but Corwi reminds him that they now don't know who they can trust. It is obvious that Mahalia "found something out." By this point, both Borlú and Corwi are whispering, aware that someone might be listening to them.

As the novel goes on, the characters become more and more paranoid. This is the result of living in a society with an extreme level of surveillance, as well as realizing that Mahalia seemingly unearthed secrets.



CHAPTER 12

Borlú is driven into **Copula Hall**. Because he is traveling to UI Qoma on state business, he is subject to extra scrutiny. Speaking to the border control officer, he explains that his Besz driver will remain in Copula Hall, and he points out the UI Qoman police who will be meeting him on the other side. An UI Qoman police car pulls up and an officer gets out, greeting Borlú in Illitan. He introduces himself as Senior Detective Qussim Dhatt, and welcomes Borlú to UI Qoma.

In Beszel, Borlú is in a position of authority, due to his job as a senior detective with the police. However, once he crosses the border into UI Qoma he loses most of this authority, and will be under the control of the UI Qoman police department.



Copula Hall is an old and ornate building. It is crosshatched, with some rooms in Beszel and some in UI Qoma (while some are in both, neither, or "Copula Hall only"). On the ground level, there is a small market and street vendors, and a "no-man's-land" where travelers pass through to get between Beszel and UI Qoma. Close to the UI Qoma exit lies the Temple of Inevitable Light, which Borlú has seen in pictures and, until now, unseen whenever he has passed it in real life.

The Temple of Inevitable Light is a religion in the (nominally secular) UI Qoma. Unlike the Besz Orthodox Church, it is an entirely fictional religion that seemingly has no connection to existing religious traditions. It is never fully explored or described in the novel. One of the only ways in which its presence manifests is when UI Qoman characters exclaim, "Holy Light!"



The last time Borlú went to UI Qoma was years ago. In preparation, he had participated in an "accelerated" two-day orientation, which involved lessons in Illitan and UI Qoman history and law. The teacher he had for this trip, meanwhile, told him that "Acclimatisation pedagogy's come a long way with computers." Yet Borlú found the computer-based tests he was forced to take "insulting" in their easiness. Now, driving through UI Qoma, he realizes that he had forgotten what it looked like. The landscape is noticeably wealthier and sleeker than Beszel. Dhatt asks if Borlú would like to settle in at his hotel before getting something to eat. Borlú responds by asking immediately about the case.

Although it is revealed very subtly, Borlú seems to be more seriously committed to the case than Dhatt is. It seems as if Dhatt is treating Borlú's visit more as a kind of vacation than an extension of his work on the case. Yet for various reasons, Borlú is now deeply devoted to finding Mahalia's murderer, and can clearly think of little else.



Dhatt clarifies that while Borlú is there, he will be treated as a "consultant" and a "guest"; the UI Qoman militsya will be leading the investigation. Borlú asks if he can travel, and Dhatt replies that he can, but may only participate in tourist activities, and it would probably be better if he didn't travel at all. Borlú asks about Bol Ye'an and Mahalia's fellow students, and Dhatt explains that no one from the dig or university has much information. They didn't see Mahalia for a couple of days and didn't think much of it.

This passage confirms that Dhatt not only wants to deputize Borlú, but seems to be taking a pretty lax approach to the case himself. Dhatt has been working on the case but hasn't really found any leads, and doesn't appear to feel an intense drive to solve it.



The militsya recently got a call regarding Mahalia's best friend, another PhD student called Yolanda Rodriguez. Yolanda seemed distraught, although her boyfriend, an UI Qoman man, was taking care of her. However, she now hasn't been seen for a couple of days, and nobody can contact her. When Borlú asks if she's "disappeared" Dhatt accuses him of being "melodramatic," but Borlú says that this is simply the accurate definition of the word.

In this passage, it almost seems as if Dhatt is actively uninterested in solving the case, considering how reluctant he is to see Yolanda's (clearly suspicious) disappearance as suspicious. Does this put Dhatt himself in a suspicious light—or could Borlú (and the reader) be suffering from paranoia?



CHAPTER 13

Borlú calls Corwi from his hotel room and describes the search of Mahalia's room and computer, which didn't turn up anything interesting. Yolanda's room was filled with intriguing items, but her computer wasn't there. Mahalia didn't use notebooks, instead taking notes in the margins of the books she was reading. At the UI Qoman police station, Borlú was made to hand over his gun. He and Corwi have devised a code system to communicate important updates about the case. Borlú had wanted to go to Bol Ye'an that day, but Dhatt says it's not possible. Alone in his hotel room, Borlú reads a bit of **Between the City and the City**, then flicks through UI Qoman television. He decides to go out into the night.

Borlú has not even been in UI Qoma one day, and he is already rebelling against his instructions. At the same time, considering Dhatt's overly relaxed attitude toward the investigation, Borlú can hardly be blamed of for disobeying his instructions to stay put. Yet while Borlú's actions are understandable, they are still dangerous; he might be on an official police mission, but he is still in foreign (and in some ways, enemy) territory.



As Borlú walks through the busy nighttime streets, most UI Qoman passersby double-take, assuming he is in Beszel from the way he looks before realizing he is walking in UI Qoma. He hears the siren of a Besz policzai car and quickly unhears it. He walks to a spot that overlooks Bol Ye'an. He sees people walking around the site and security personnel guarding it. As Borlú looks, two militsya officers come over and ask what he's doing. Borlú claims to just be "interested in archaeology," but they don't believe him and demand to see his papers. On seeing he is a police officer, their demeanor shifts to confusion. Borlú explains that he is assisting the *militsya* and that they can contact Dhatt if they have any concerns.

Either out of sheer determination or naivete, Borlú seems to have forgotten that, as a Besz citizen in UI Qoma, he will be subject to disproportionate scrutiny—regardless of the fact that he has official authorization to be in the city.



The militsya officers apologize and offer to escort Borlú back to his hotel. The next morning, Dhatt greets him in a friendly way, but as they drive off together he says, "I wish you hadn't done that last night." They return to Bol Ye'an and go straight to meet Professor Bernard Rochambeaux, who is from Quebec. He apologetically tells them that he doesn't have much information. He is disturbed to hear that Yolanda is missing, although she is not one of his students and he doesn't really know her. In private, Dhatt says that Rochambeaux is one of the few members of the university who has an alibi for the time Mahalia was killed.

The contrast between the apology that the militsya give Borlú, their coercive "offer" to take him back to his hotel, and Dhatt's words the next morning show what a delicate situation Borlú is in. The militsya may treat him with a surface level of respect, but in reality all his actions are highly charged.



While Borlú and Dhatt head to Professor Nancy's office, a man greets them, introducing himself as David Bowden. Borlú shakes Bowden's hand and says, "I'm enjoying your book," and Bowden replies, "That'll get you arrested." David explains that he doesn't have an office; he is an adjunct, only employed one day a week. He is only at the site today because his supervisee, Yolanda, did not show up for their meeting. Upon hearing that Yolanda is missing, Bowden is aghast. Other professors Borlú and Dhatt speak to are equally shocked. Professor Nancy, however, already knows that Yolanda is missing.

At first glance, Bowden seems to be an example of how dangerous knowledge can emerge from innocuous places. He may have written a book that could get people arrested just for reading it, but in person he seems to be little more than a nonthreatening, affable, and underemployed academic.



Borlú asks Nancy about Mahalia. Nancy recalls how Mahalia "embarrassed" the university by talking about Orciny years ago at the conference in Beszel. She asks about Yolanda, and Dhatt encourages her not to jump to conclusions. She takes Borlú and Dhatt around the site, explaining the significance of the ancient artefacts there. They speak to some of the students at work on the dig, who express their profound sadness at Mahalia's fate and fear for Yolanda. One student mentions that Yolanda was more into Orciny than Mahalia, who lost interest over the years. Most of the students have alibis for the night of Mahalia's murder, as unlike their professors, they were out socializing.

The fact that Yolanda was also increasingly interested in Orciny seems to confirm the impression that both women's disappearances is linked to their research on the city. Yet at the same time, it is still hard to see why anyone would be seriously threatened by this research. Most people have dismissed Orciny as little more than a conspiracy theory or children's story. Few seem to find it seriously threatening.



The students don't have many ideas about what could have happened to Mahalia. One rejects the idea of "conspiracies," but says that Mahalia's ability to provoke people could have led to her death. Another comments that many people were afraid of her; she was smart, but nobody really knew her. Another student admits that he called about Yolanda. He seems anguished and nervous as he describes both Mahalia and Yolanda's interests in Orciny. After speaking to the students, Borlú observes that it's strange that none of them mentioned **Breach**. Normally, when people in Beszel or UI Qoma disappear, Breach is the first explanation to which people turn.

Keep in mind that most of the students at Bol Ye'an are associated with Prince of Wales University in Canada. This means that the majority of them are therefore neither UI Qoman nor Besz. Their lack of ideas about what happened to Mahalia and Yolanda could be based in the fact that they are simply unfamiliar with the world around them.



Suddenly, one of the security guards from the site runs after them, asking if they are investigating Mahalia's murder. He introduces himself as Aikam Tsueh and asks if they've found anything out. Borlú explains that they can't tell him right now, but says they might ask him a few questions. Aikam looks nervous, but agrees. As they walk away, Borlú asks Dhatt if they checked if the security guards had alibis. Dhatt says they did and that Aikam probably had one, as he doesn't remember his name being flagged.

While Aikam might not be the murderer, his excessive interest in the case and nervousness about the prospect of being questioned do indicate that there is something suspicious about him.



CHAPTER 14

Borlú and Dhatt go to a teahouse, where Dhatt becomes a little less “aggressive.” Borlú looks out into the street, observing the different fashion favored by UI Qomans and the greater proportion of Asian, Arab, and African faces in the crowds. He and Dhatt politely discuss how they will divide their duties so as not to step on each other’s toes. Dhatt mentions that Aikam, who is only 19, was out with students the night of Mahalia’s murder. They discuss the van, and conclude that there are either two perpetrators involved, or one who committed **breach**. At the same time, the whole visa element of the van theft implies that the perpetrator was being careful to avoid breaching.

Borlú confesses that he received an anonymous tip about the case from a caller in UI Qoma who saw the poster in Beszel. Dhatt is shocked, but says he doesn’t think **Breach** will take Borlú for this infraction, particularly considering he is a police officer. Borlú says he has no idea who the person was, but thinks they might be a unificationist. Dhatt immediately gets up and announces they should “go fucking detecting!” Driving quickly and erratically, he takes them to a place where UI Qoman unificationists are known to congregate. While they drive, Dhatt comments that unification would be a “fucking catastrophe.” Borlú laughs at Dhatt’s chatter about all the ways in which it could go wrong.

Unificationists are not legally recognized in UI Qoma; neither are socialist, fascist, or religious political parties. For almost 100 years, it has been a single-party state, run by the People’s National Party. The current president has eased state repression, and persecution of illegal political parties has lessened. Arriving at the building, Dhatt bangs on the door, shouting. A young woman with shaved hair and tattoos opens it; Dhatt storms in and demands that everyone inside assemble in the kitchen. Dhatt lines them up and makes them repeat the phrase, “Inspector, I have something to tell you.” When they disobey or talk back, Dhatt smacks them. Once they are all done, Borlú concludes there are only two who it could have been.

After some initial hostility, Borlú and Dhatt seem to have mutually agreed to work together and make each other’s lives as easy as possible. This is significant not only in the context of the case of Mahalia’s murder, but also the broader context of relations between Beszel and UI Qoma. Perhaps if people from the two cities had more time to properly interact with one another, tensions and conflict would ease up.



Unlike Borlú, Dhatt evidently holds some pretty strong political opinions. Borlú’s neutrality arguably helps him to remain rational and clear-eyed in his detective work. At the same time, in politically charged situations like the division between UI Qoma and Beszel, it is always worth asking whether a neutral position is actually possible. By more-or-less holding up the status quo, Borlú is in fact taking a position—just one that is not as obvious as an “extremist” or dissident view.



More differences between Beszel and UI Qoma emerge in this passage. The reader already knows that UI Qoma is richer, more secular, and more ethnically diverse. Here it also becomes clear that the nation has a history of authoritarianism. This is reflected not only in the fact that all dissident parties are technically banned, but in the violent treatment to which Dhatt subjects the unificationists. As a police officer, he obviously feels that he can act with impunity.



Borlú asks them a few more questions, but they don't yield much, and he indicates to Dhatt that they should leave. In the car, Dhatt asks why Borlú shied away from their only promising lead. Borlú replies that he doesn't think the call came from one of the unificationists, and he's not sure if it even came from UI Qoma at all. Dhatt suggests they take a few hours to collect themselves and get through some paperwork before meeting up again. In his hotel room, Borlú speaks to Corwi on the phone. At first they use the code, but eventually drop it after it becomes too difficult. Borlú asks Corwi to find whatever information she can on Dhatt's background. He explains that he's not sure if he trusts Dhatt.

Borlú and Corwi's failed attempt to use their code reflect their own confusion about the possibility that they are being watched—and indeed, their broader confusion over who they can trust. They seem unable to decide whether using the code is prudent and necessary or whether it is in fact excessive and paranoid.



CHAPTER 15

Borlú suggests that he and Dhatt take the recently revamped, state-of-the-art metro to Bowden's apartment. Each stop has been designed by a different artist or designer who had been told to let their imaginations roam freely, with no concern for financial restraint. Greeting them, Bowden explains that one of his neighbors was a former Black Panther; UI Qoma was a popular destination for Panthers fleeing persecution in the US. Borlú asks why Bowden came to live in UI Qoma rather than Beszel, and Bowden replies it is because he is an archaeologist. Most of the significant artefacts are in UI Qoma, a fact that has been made worse by Beszel's eagerness to "sell what little heritage it could dig up to whoever wanted it."

Bowden's observation about Beszel highlights an intriguing idea—the preservation of a given culture's history is something of a luxury. While there may also be political and cultural reasons why Beszel was so easy to sell its "heritage," the fact that it must compete against its much wealthier twin city appears to be a significant factor behind this trend.



Borlú points to a pile of papers written in an ancient script and asks what it is. Bowden replies that he is still sent things like this by people claiming that the script is the language of Orciny. He asks about Yolanda, saying she was a sweet person against whom no one could possibly have held a grudge. He notes that the same could not be said of Mahalia, although he didn't know her well. He is Yolanda's supervisor, and he says that although Yolanda is "perfectly intelligent enough," she is not on Mahalia's level—few people are. However, he did not want to supervise Mahalia due to her "bullshit." Yolanda is his only student. An adjunct, his official title at Prince of Wales is "Corresponding Lecturer."

Bowden is clearly someone who does not command much power or respect within his field. This is reflected in his adjunct position with its strange, meaningless name, as well as the fact that he only has one supervisee. Perhaps his dislike of Mahalia is the product of his own embarrassment about his writings on Orciny, and his annoyance that someone is bringing back this embarrassing piece of his past.



Bowden dismisses his younger self as "a stoned young man." However, although he says that Orciny isn't real, he also emphasizes that 85% of the research in **Between the City and the City** "still holds up and is still used." When he first met Mahalia at the conference in Beszel, she said she wanted to work with him. He balked, threatening to turn her into the police. Mahalia said he was a coward, and that was the end of their relationship. Bowden says he was glad to hear that Mahalia had let go of her interest in Orciny.

Throughout most of this passage, Bowden continues to emphasize the idea that he is embarrassed of his previous work on Orciny. Yet his brief mention that 85% of the research still holds up is a curious reversal of this embarrassment. Perhaps Bowden is only pretending to be embarrassed out of political pressure.



Yolanda never originally showed any interest in Orciny, but has recently been bringing up “dissensi.” Borlú asks if Bowden feels threatened, as it seems that there may be someone targeting those who study Orciny. However, Bowden replies that he doesn’t study Orciny and hasn’t for a long time. Dhatt points out that Bowden was recently burgled, yet Bowden remains adamant that no one is after him. He reiterates that Orciny doesn’t exist, and Dhatt replies that, while this is true, there are still “nutters” out there who might be provoked by the thought of Orciny.

Again, Borlú and Dhatt have been placed in an interesting position. They must take seriously fundamentally un-serious ideas, not because they think that the conspiracy theory of Orciny is true, but rather because conspiracy theories prompt erratic behavior in other people. They can thus be dangerous without being real.



CHAPTER 16

Borlú looks through **Between the City and the City**. Bowden’s readings of unsolved historical mysteries are compelling and even “ingenious,” but his conclusions are bizarre. That night, while he is asleep, Borlú’s cell phone rings; it is one of the unificationists from the house where Borlú went with Dhatt, called Jaris. Jaris thanks Borlú for not exposing him as the person who made the anonymous call. He explains that he met “Marya” when she came to the unificationist house. He initially thought she was a unificationist herself, but then realized she was actually interested in Orciny.

This passage is a great example of why Dhatt’s aggressive, overzealous policing tactics often backfire. Jaris only feels safe confiding further in Borlú because Borlú did not expose him while Dhatt was interrogating the unificationists about who made the phone call. Now, because Jaris trusts him, Borlú will be able to make use of his information.



Mahalia was kicked out of the unificationist meetings for being “dangerous,” but she told Jaris privately that she’d found Orciny. She’d “made contact” with the people there, and explained to Jaris that there are places people in Beszel think are in UI Qoma, and vice versa, but really, they are Orciny. She wanted to “help” Orciny. The last time Jaris and Mahalia spoke, she got angry when he mentioned Orciny, telling him he didn’t get it. She claimed that “everyone who knew the truth about Orciny was in danger.” In the time leading up to her death, she’d taken to carrying a knife around for protection. Jaris declares that Orciny killed her, and that he’s sure he’s next. He hangs up, and when Borlú tries to call back, the number is blocked.

This passage makes it more explicitly clear that Mahalia’s interest in Orciny had some role to play in her death. In one sense, it would be possible to read her behavior leading up to her death as paranoid and delusional. Because she believed that the authorities were keeping the reality of Orciny secret, she didn’t seek help from the police or other institutions when she thought her life was in danger, but rather relied on a crude attempt at self-protection.



It is the middle of the night in UI Qoma but still normal hours in the US, and Borlú calls Mrs. Geary and asks how Mr. Geary is doing. He apologizes again for what happened during their visit. He then asks if Mahalia ever mentioned dating anyone, or told her about Yolanda. Mrs. Geary breaks down in tears, saying that Mahalia “confided in” Yolanda. She then says that Mahalia wasn’t dating anyone. There was a man she hung out with, but she wasn’t interested in him romantically, and claimed the situation was “complicated.”

It is actually strange that the question of Mahalia’s dating life has not come up until now, considering that the majority of women who die by homicide are killed by their intimate partners.



Mrs. Geary promises that she and her husband are going to track down all the unificationists and nationalists, because they are sure one of them murdered Mahalia. After hanging up, Borlú sleeps for a few hours, only to be awakened by Dhatt calling and saying, “Someone sent a bomb.”

The stakes of the case are certainly escalating, so fast that they threaten to outpace Borlú and Dhatt’s detective work.



CHAPTER 17

Borlú and Dhatt go to Bol Ye’an, where the bomb was discovered by Aikam. The package in which it was placed was addressed to David Bowden. A man shows Borlú that someone wrote the phrase, “The heart of a wolf” in Illitan on it. Dhatt explains, “It’s an old motherland song.” Dhatt observes that the bomb was designed to target a single individual, not cause widespread damage or chaos. It was sent from Beszel, from a post office “grosstopically” close, although it would have travelled a long distance via **Copula Hall** to arrive at Bol Ye’an.

The details of the crime point to conflicting perpetrators. The line from an UI Qoman “motherland song” suggests that it was sent by UI Qoman nationalists. However, the post office that it was sent from is in Beszel. Of course, the nationalists may have chosen this post office to throw investigators off the case—or perhaps someone in Beszel is trying to frame the UI Qoman nationalists.



Speaking to Dhatt, Borlú points out that Mahalia angered the nationalists back in Beszel, and that although the equivalent groups are technically banned in UI Qoma, it’s possible they might have been vengeful against her, too. The officers then speak to Aikam, congratulating him on his discovery and asking how he knew what a bomb felt like. Aikam replies that he didn’t, he just noticed it was suspiciously heavy. Next they speak to Professor Nancy and the head security guard, Kai Buidze. They ask if Bowden often receives mail at the site and Nancy replies that he doesn’t—he technically doesn’t even have an address there.

The fact that a bomb has been sent to an adjunct professor at an archeological dig shows how politically charged and fraught knowledge can be. This is particularly true in a place like Beszel/UI Qoma, where history is highly contested and has a significant bearing on the way the political landscape of the present operates.



Nancy explains that, although Bol Ye’an has never been subject to attack before, Bowden himself has. Borlú begins to speculate that the package may have been from an UI Qoman nationalist based in Beszel, who sent it from a Besz address in an attempt to obscure its actual origin. Dhatt emphasizes that in UI Qoma, nationalists are not allowed to congregate like they are in Beszel, and are not treated with the same lenience as unificationists, who are not taken seriously as a threat. Dhatt asks about Aikam, whom Buidze describes as “dumb” and friends with some of the students, including Yolanda but not Mahalia.

In both Beszel and UI Qoma, dissident groups like unificationists and nationalists are subject to state repression and surveillance. Yet this differs significantly in degree. As Dhatt points out here, being subject to extra repression is not necessarily evidence that a particular group is more out of line with the government’s position—rather, it can simply be because the group is perceived as a more forceful threat.



Borlú then asks why, considering the site is full of foreign students (who usually have an interest in this sort of thing), no one has mentioned **Breach**. Buidze puts up his hands and admits that the reason is that students there, like all foreigners, breach all the time. As long as they remain discreet about it, Breach will not punish them. Bol Ye'an is a highly crosshatched area, and the students working there avoid discussing Breach because they know "they're all guilty as hell." After Buidze leaves, Dhatt gets a phone call informing him that Bowden is missing from his apartment.

At this point in the narrative, most of the information about the crime seems to be vaguely present, but none of it is coming together in any coherent way. Meanwhile, the escalation of disappearances and threats means that time is running out for the case to be solved.



CHAPTER 18

Borlú tells Dhatt about the call from Jaris, and Dhatt is angry that he didn't mention anything earlier. Borlú shoots back that there are plenty of things Dhatt hasn't mentioned to him too. He asks that Dhatt put an arrest warrant out for Jaris, although he suspects that he's already fled the country. Dhatt suggests that Jaris could be guilty of Mahalia's murder, but Borlú points out that if this were true, it wouldn't have made sense for him to call with the tip. Borlú adds that judging from the way Jaris spoke about Mahalia, it seems that "he was into her."

Although Dhatt and Borlú are now successfully working together, it is obvious that Borlú is much more intelligent and skilled than his UI Qoman counterpart. This becomes especially clear when Dhatt suggests that Jaris could have murdered Mahalia—an absurd idea considering he called Borlú with tips twice.



Dhatt pauses the conversation and insists that the two of them put their differences aside and work together, saying, "You're police. I'm police. Let's fix this." He takes Borlú to a cop bar near the office. They discuss the case, and what to make of the Orciny issue. While they agree that Orciny doesn't exist, they must nonetheless consider the "cults and lunatics" who believe it does. In the midst of their discussion, some of Dhatt's colleagues from the militsya come over, seemingly wanting to provoke a fight with Borlú. Dhatt assures them that Borlú is indeed a "Besz wanker," but ushers Borlú away before they can say anything else.

This passage highlights a shift in Dhatt's attitude and loyalty. Whereas before he remained suspicious of Borlú simply because he was from Beszel, here he finds allegiance with his partner over the fact that they are both police officers. The increasing stakes of them solving the case as fast as possible surely also has a role to play in accelerating their bonding.



As they get to the car, they discuss the shifting fortunes of Beszel and UI Qoma. Dhatt comments that while UI Qoma is more prosperous than Beszel now, this will inevitably not last. He takes Borlú to meet his wife, Yallya, at their apartment. Borlú is shocked to realize that grosstopically, he and Dhatt live less than a mile away from each other. Yallya asks Borlú about the case as she and Dhatt bring him food. Yallya asks him lots of questions, which he does his best to answer, and he stays later than he originally planned. As Borlú goes to leave, Dhatt asks if he's alright. Borlú thanks Dhatt for the evening and says that he's fine, but wants to go for a walk, which surprises Dhatt because it is raining.

As this moment of bonding escalates, both Borlú and Dhatt let their guards down and discuss their respective cities, as well as the tensions between them. The fact that Dhatt—who is clearly patriotic—admits that he doesn't think UI Qoma's period of financial supremacy will last is particularly significant. This bonding moment is crystallized when Borlú realizes he and Dhatt live very close to each other, a fact that emphasizes their connection and unity in the face of extraordinary division.



Borlú walks to his own street, wondering if he will run into a neighbor who will go to greet him before unseeing him after noticing his visitor's badge. Such interactions are notoriously awkward. However, everyone is inside. Borlú notices that he is being watched by an old woman. He can't tell what city she is in. Freaked out, he hurries away. Back at the hotel, he asks for a 5am wakeup call, and also prints off a piece of paper with the message "Urgent. Come ASAP. Don't call." The next morning, he goes back to Bol Ye'an, wearing UI Qoman-style dress with his visitor's pass only just visible.

Borlú hands a young homeless child some money, asking her to approach the nearby security guards and ask them to phone someone, then read out the message. He makes her promise not to reveal who he is. After she completes the task, Borlú sees Aikam walk out. He follows Aikam from the site, sneaking onto the bus behind him, careful not to be seen. Eventually, Aikam reaches a poor housing project, where he runs up a concrete staircase and knocks on a door. Borlú listens to a frantic conversation between Aikam and a woman. Announcing his presence, Borlú reveals that the message Aikam received was not from her. The woman starts crying, and Aikam addresses her as Yolanda.

CHAPTER 19

Having noticed Borlú's presence, Aikam tries to attack him. Borlú restrains him, telling him to calm down and promising he will not harm Yolanda. He promises that he is not with the militants and that he wants to help them. In the living room, Yolanda sits on a piece of broken furniture, stands, then sits again. Borlú asks if Yolanda ever leaves this apartment. Yolanda says that she is hiding, waiting to get out. She can't tell anyone where she is because she knows "they" will find her and kill her like they did Mahalia. When Borlú asks who, she says "The third place. Between the city and the city. Orciny."

While Borlú and Yolanda speak, he doesn't interrupt and tell her that her ideas are foolish conspiracy theories, and she takes this as confirmation that her paranoia is right. Borlú learns that Aikam found the apartment for her and set her up there. She insists that now Mahalia and Bowden have been targeted, she will certainly be next. Yolanda explains that Mahalia's PhD work was just a cover for her real investigation into Orciny; she would only ever do just enough to make sure Professor Nancy was satisfied. Yolanda says, "Do you realise they [Orciny] contacted *her*," adding, "They're everywhere."

As is typical in crime fiction, many of Borlú's actions precede the explanation for them. In other words, the reader learns what Borlú is thinking after they learn what he has done. This keeps the reader in the dark and encourages them to draw their own conclusions about what Borlú has discovered. In this way, the reader plays detective alongside the hero.



At this point, the reader is able to piece together that the person he made the security guards phone was Aikam, but that he wanted Aikam to believe the message was from Yolanda. This allowed Borlú to follow Aikam and discover Yolanda's hiding place.



Considering her best friend has been killed, Yolanda is right to be worried, although it is unclear at this point whether she has succumbed to paranoia and conspiracy theories. Recall that several people have described her as being less intelligent than Mahalia (and recall that Buidze also described Aikam as "dumb"). It is not unlikely that her interpretation of what's happening is mistaken.



Confusingly, Yolanda manages to simultaneously sound excessively paranoid and potentially correct. For example, her explanation that Mahalia's PhD work was just a cover makes sense considering Professor Nancy found it strangely disappointing. Yet at the same time, Yolanda's claim that Orciny is "everywhere" sounds like the words of someone suffering from paranoid delusions.



Yolanda explains that after the controversy she caused at the conference, Mahalia received a letter written in the ancient script that preceded the founding of Beszel and Ul Qoma. The message said something along the lines of, “We are watching you. You understand. Would you like to know more?” Orciny started making Mahalia complete tasks for them; in return, they would provide pieces of information about the city, its people, and its history. Yolanda emphasizes that the people of Orciny have special powers, and that the artefacts in the Bol Ye’an dig belong to them. Indeed, the artefacts were never lost, but are rather being deliberately stored at the site by Orciny.

Shortly before her death, Mahalia appeared increasingly distressed. She told Yolanda that they “could be thieves without even knowing.” Yolanda believes she must have somehow angered Orciny, and that Bowden has angered them too. When Borlú mentions that Bowden rejects Orciny now, Yolanda replies that this is just because he needs work, but really he knows Orciny exists.

Borlú begins to say something, but then realizes he has no idea what he thinks the truth is. However, he then points out that Yolanda has an option she hasn’t yet tried. If she purposefully **breached**, then at least she would be safe from the powers of Orciny, as Breach would deport her. Yolanda says Mahalia used to say that Orciny and Breach were enemies at war, but she’s not so sure herself. She thinks they might work together, or even be the same thing.

CHAPTER 20

Yolanda tries to stop Borlú from leaving, claiming this will draw attention to her hiding place. He tells her to remain calm and says that he is going to get her out to Beszel, where he is better able to navigate the system. He tells Aikam to quit his job at Bol Ye’an and stay looking after Yolanda. The apartment is in a bad state, but there is enough tinned food for a few more days. He promises to come back and get Yolanda out. Walking away, Borlú sees an abundance of angry messages from Dhatt. Calling him, Borlú says that something’s happened that he can’t explain. He asks Dhatt to meet him at the city’s main station in two hours, and to come alone.

This passage is crucial to the eventual resolution of the case, although it will not be totally clear why until the end of the novel. For now, what is most significant is that Mahalia was made an agent of Orciny, doing things on their request. According to Yolanda’s story, they realized that her desire for knowledge was enough to allow them to manipulate her.



Mahalia’s statement that she and Yolanda could be “thieves” is intriguing. They are archeology PhD students—what are they taking? Of course, the answer to this is the artefacts at Bol Ye’an. Yet those artefacts are likely just being stored at the site.



Yolanda’s resistance to provoking Breach could be yet another sign of her excessively paranoid thinking—her statement that Breach and Orciny are the same thing seems to indicate this. On the other hand, she could be right—it is hard to know when Borlú himself has lost all sense of what the truth actually is.



Borlú is now stuck in the difficult position of having to retain a sense of authority with Yolanda, when in reality he has no idea what is going on. This is all made worse by the fact that he is working alone, although at this point it seems like he finally trusts Dhatt enough to confide in him.



When Dhatt finds Borlú, Borlú explains that he's found Yolanda. Borlú reiterates that they don't know what's going on, and he says he wants to get Yolanda out of the country. He admits he plans to do this by getting her into Beszel first. Dhatt shakes his head and notes that Jaris is still missing. He then says that when they searched Bowden's flat, there was no sign of forced entry, and nothing was missing. They found a letter with a single word written in ancient script, which Professor Nancy told them was a "warning"—like drawing a "skull-and-crossbones." Borlú mentions that Yolanda believes that **Breach** is Orciny. While he might not think this is true, he cannot say it isn't with total confidence.

Borlú asks if Dhatt can get Yolanda an exit visa by pretending she is a police officer. Exasperated, Dhatt takes them to an underground bar, where he starts making arrangements to get Yolanda exit documents. Meanwhile, Borlú calls Corwi and tells her that he and Dhatt are coming back to Beszel, along with another officer who's "undercover." He asks Corwi to discreetly meet them at **Copula Hall**. Corwi reluctantly agrees, and adds that someone has been calling and asking questions about the case. She says he sounds frightened, and is speaking with an American-sounding accent. Borlú concludes it must be Bowden, and tells Corwi to tell him that he will help him escape, but he only has one chance. He then gives Corwi Yallya's phone number to call.

CHAPTER 21

Borlú and Dhatt go back into the office and try to act normally, but they feel paranoid. Dhatt agrees to arrange getting a militsya uniform for Yolanda, and one for Borlú as well, just to make the process of crossing the border smoother. Eventually, Bowden calls Yallya's phone. Borlú offers to get him out, and although Bowden refuses to reveal his location, he wants to come and will keep calling Yallya's phone. Meanwhile, Dhatt protests this plan because he doesn't have documents for Bowden, but Borlú begs him to do what he can and to bring another uniform in case Bowden shows up. At 7pm, Corwi announces she has everything ready on the Beszel side.

Meanwhile, Borlú and Dhatt make final arrangements with those they are leaving behind in UI Qoma, including telling the Gearys that they have must speak to a new contact in the militsya—something Borlú feels bad about. At half past midnight, Bowden calls again. Borlú tells him he has "one shot," and if he wants to leave, he should meet them by the traffic gate outside **Copula Hall** at 7pm the next day. On that day, Borlú doesn't check out of his hotel. He leaves his belongings there, all except his copy of **Between the City and the City**.

Yolanda's conspiracy theory that Breach and Orciny are the same thing might seem outlandish, but it also reveals why Orciny is plausible in the first place. While Breach isn't a city, it does appear to exist between or outside of Beszel and UI Qoma, while still watching the two cities and exerting influence. Indeed, if Orciny doesn't exist, it could be argued that, as a myth, it is a manifestation of people's fears about Breach.



This is a crucial twist in the plot—in order to save other innocent lives, Borlú and Dhatt must now commit crimes themselves and rebel against their superiors in their respective police departments. The suspense over whether they will be able to pull this off helps push the plot to a climactic conclusion.



It is significant that the climax of the novel involves the illegal crossing of the border between Beszel and UI Qoma. Bear in mind that any unlawful violation of the border (all of which falls under the category of breach) is the most serious crime a person can commit in the two cities. The fact that Borlú and Dhatt are attempting it anyway is thus a gesture of rebellion against the norms of their societies.



It is unclear whether Borlú brings "Between the City and the City" with him because he does not want to expose himself as having bought a censored book, or because he believes the book will help him solve the case. Indeed, perhaps the book has become a kind of talisman for Borlú, not useful for its information but as a symbol of dissident knowledge.



Borlú takes a taxi to Yolanda's hideout. His driver is a Kurdish refugee who has been living in UI Qoma for four years and speaks highly of it. Borlú asks him to point out his favorite places in the city. When Borlú finally gets to Yolanda, he tells her to prepare to leave. He instructs her to warn Aikam that he's not coming, because he doesn't want "a scene at **Copula Hall**." When Yolanda tells him this Aikam protests, but she promises to call him from Canada. In the car, Dhatt gives Borlú and Yolanda militsya uniforms to change into. When they arrive at Copula Hall, the guards do not ask any questions, but usher them straight through. As Borlú walks through, he sees the familiar sights of Beszel in the distance.

Borlú thinks he sees Corwi, but in that moment, Dhatt alerts him to a man walking behind them. He is wrapped up in winter clothing, which is perfectly ordinary, but is walking in a strange, aggressive manner. Dhatt and Borlú attempt to push Yolanda ahead. The bundled man reaches into his jacket and Borlú instinctively does the same, before remembering that his gun has been taken. There is a sound. The man shouts his name and Borlú realizes it is Bowden. Dhatt is shouting; both he and Yolanda have been shot. Chaos ensues, and Borlú sees people fleeing from a figure pointing a rifle.

CHAPTER 22

There is another shot, which Borlú hears as he tackles Bowden to the ground, forcing him to drop his gun. Borlú tells everyone to get on the ground. Dhatt shouts that he is shot but okay, whereas Yolanda was shot in the head. Borlú looks up and sees that Yolanda is dead, while the shooter is running away, unimpeded. The shooter is a "nondescript" looking man wearing black trousers and a grey sweater. He disappears into the crowd. Borlú gets into a police car and starts to drive, hoping to catch the shooter; because he is still in his militsya uniform, no one stops him. He wonders where **Breach** is, but then realizes that, again, there has been no breach. The killer carefully ensured this was the case.

Borlú brakes hard, stopped by cars in front. He gets out and stands on the car's roof and allows himself to glance at the events in Beszel. Finally, he catches sight of the shooter and begins to follow him. Eventually, the shooter notices him and moves faster, and Borlú picks up his own pace, too. The shooter starts running, turning into an alley. Borlú finds it hard to keep up. The shooter runs into a Besz street, turns, and looks at Borlú. It is not obvious enough to be **breach**. Borlú recognizes him, although he can't remember from where, and shoots him. The man falls, and Borlú hears the word "Breach" being repeated. The faceless figures descend, announcing both the "crime and [their] identity." Something touches Borlú, and everything goes black.

In this passage, Borlú and the rest of his group get tantalizingly close to successfully crossing the border. The fact that the security staff do not even ask questions shows how much law enforcement officials are able to get away with simply by virtue of being superficially identifiable as figures of authority.



This dramatic moment is so shocking in part because it contains a reversal of assumptions. Whereas before, Bowden was framed as a victim of the violence surrounding Mahalia's murder, he is now revealed to be a perpetrator. The fact that he raises a weapon at Borlú immediately makes him a candidate as the possible murderer of Mahalia.



The presence of the second shooter indicates that although Bowden drew a weapon, it was not necessarily him who shot Dhatt and Yolanda. Indeed, there is no obvious connection between Bowden and the shooter other than the fact that they were in the same place at the same time and both had weapons.



This moment is the main climax of the entire novel. In killing the shooter, Borlú decides that stopping him is more important than the negative consequences of breaching. This is an expression of Borlú's own idea of justice, which contrasts to the rules of Beszel and UI Qoma. Indeed, this act can be interpreted as showing that in order to achieve true justice, it is sometimes necessary to disobey the rule of law.



CHAPTER 23

Borlú is in total darkness, but can hear sounds. Then he wakes up, and initially feels as if no time has passed between being tackled by **Breach** after shooting the man and waking up inside a grey, very plain room. Borlú is sitting on a bed. There is also a window, a desk, and two chairs. He is wearing clean, plain clothes. He is told to “sit.” He turns to face three figures, two men and one woman, all his age or older. Borlú introduces himself with his full name, and in response the people identify themselves only as “Breach.” One of the men speaks to Borlú in Besz with an undetectable, “flat” accent. He says that Borlú committed an extreme, violent breach, killing a man by shooting from Ul Qoma into Beszel.

The man continues that now Borlú is in “the **Breach**.” He says that man Borlú shot was named Yorjavic, and asks if he remembers him. The man says that they will decide how long Borlú remains in the Breach, and if he will ever return to the outside world at all. Borlú suddenly manages to remember that he saw Yorjavic at the house of the True Citizens; he thinks it was Yorjavic who called Gosz. The man explains that Yorjavic is a former soldier. Suddenly, Borlú frantically asks after Dhatt and Yolanda; the man replies that Dhatt has lost the functionality of his right arm but is otherwise fine, and Yolanda is dead. Borlú tries to point out that he was just trying to stop Yolanda’s killer, but the man replies it doesn’t matter; Yorjavic didn’t breach, and Borlú did.

Borlú is brought food. After eating, he tries to pry open the door to his room, but cannot. At a certain point, **Breach** come back and add that Yorjavic did breach after having been shot—“Victims of breach always breach.” This is how they have information about him. They remind Borlú that his fate is up to them, and that he can think of this as his “trial.” They encourage him to explain what exactly he did and why, which will then allow them to make a decision. They ask that he tell them about Yolanda, Mahalia, and Orciny, which they refer to as a “fool’s conspiracy” that has returned after a long time.

Borlú tells them everything, but they continue to interrogate him. He tries to run at them, but they knock him out. When he comes to, one of the men explains, “You’re beyond law now; this is where decision lives, and we are it.” Borlú says that Yolanda thought that **Breach** were Orciny, but Breach reply that Orciny doesn’t exist. Breach observe that Borlú is afraid of whatever it is he’s been trying to find. Two of the figures bring in a projector, where they play footage of Bowden being interrogated by the militsya. Bowden insists that Orciny doesn’t exist.

Finally, this passage reveals what happens when people commit breach (the crime) and are seized by Breach (the authority). In some ways, the truth is a little anticlimactic: Borlú appears to be in some kind of prison crossed with an office. Everything about the surroundings is perfectly, eerily flat and neutral. Breach can be the ultimate arbiter of violations between Beszel and Ul Qoma because it is so profoundly neutral.



Although it is not an overtly brutal or sadistic place of punishment, there is still something distinctly nightmarish about the Breach. This nightmarishness emerges through Borlú’s inability to reason with the people who call themselves Breach. Indeed, the fact that these people are totally without individual identities is similarly horrifying and surreal. The effect is that Borlú seems stuck in some kind of void or maze.



Again, Breach might not be brutal, but the opaque blankness of their operation is extremely sinister. The fact that one of them tells Borlú to consider this his “trial” seems almost like a cruel joke—a reassertion that Breach have total, unimpeachable power, and are answerable to no one.



The strange way in which Breach speaks here helps elucidate their unique, sinister approach to justice. Using the terms “law” and “decision” without definite articles makes them seem almost like places. Indeed, as these words indicate, the Breach is a manifestation of “decision.” It is not a country, institution, or organization—just pure power and control over people’s fates.



The footage then switches to Aikam, who sits silently crying, then to Dhatt, who angrily protests that he doesn't know what any of this is about. He claims that "Orciny's a pile of shit."

Breach turn off the footage and ask Borlú about Orciny. Borlú reflects that the Breach is essentially "nothing," just a "void full of angry police." When Breach ask about Orciny, Borlú attempts to bargain with them, indicating that he'll help them if they give him something in return. They ask again if Borlú thinks Orciny killed Mahalia and Yolanda, and Borlú points out that Yolanda believed that Mahalia had discovered some kind of truth. He suggests that they take a look at Mahalia's notebooks.

CHAPTER 24

When Borlú leaves the **Breach**, accompanied by its avatars, he realizes that he doesn't know whether he is in UI Qoma or Beszel. The previous night, he spent hours watching interrogation tapes, footage of Corwi, his lovers, and the nationalists. Breach told him that Yorjavic's apartment was searched and there was no evidence associating him with Orciny. When Borlú is finally taken out of his room in the Breach, the people he walks past are dressed in clothes that belong neither to Beszel nor UI Qoma. He hears a mix of Besz and Illitan being spoken, as well as a hybrid language combining the two. They step through doors into the light of the outside world.

Borlú eventually realizes that they are in UI Qoma, and that it is morning. The man he is with asks him to call him Ashil, and says he will address Borlú as Tye. Both these names could be either Besz or UI Qoman, with no strong ties to one or the other. As they walk, Borlú realizes that they are moving back and forth between the cities. Everyone they pass unsees them. Ashil asks Borlú where he is, and after a pause, Borlú replies that he is in neither Beszel nor UI Qoma, but in **Breach**. Ashil replies that "No one knows if they're seeing you or unseeing you." He adds that they aren't in neither city—they are in both.

They travel first by metro in UI Qoma and then change to a tram in Beszel. They go to the UI Qoma University library, and when Ashil shows his Breach accreditation, the security guard leaps to his feet, terrified. They walk in and search the stacks for a book without a reference number. Eventually they find it: a heavily-used copy of **Between the City and the City**. Inside, Mahalia has scribbled all over the margins, things like "REALLY? CF HARRIS ET AL" and "LUNACY!! MAD!!!" Borlú comments that she knew the truth about Orciny, and this is where she kept it hidden.

The description of Borlú's interrogation by Breach leaves it ambiguous whether Breach want to know more about Orciny because they actually need the information, or because they are deciding how to sentence Borlú. They have claimed very confidently that Orciny doesn't exist, yet their style of questioning suggests a desire to know more about the conspiracy.



For Borlú's whole life, the distinction between Beszel and UI Qoma has been foundational to how he perceives the world. Everything belongs to one city or the other, and determining which is which is essential to navigating everyday life. However, his time spent in Breach—which is deliberately neutral—disrupts his native ability to distinguish between the cities, leaving him profoundly disorientated.



This passage shows how Breach actually works in terms of its presence in the two cities. Ashil explains that to be in Breach is to be in both cities at once. He and Borlú remain largely out of sight because everyone who sees them quickly looks away, unable to determine which city they are in. This means that the whole time, Breach have been moving among the people of both cities without being invisible, yet without being seen, either.



As has been indicated throughout the novel, Breach has the power to solve crimes far more efficiently than either the policzai or the militsya. As Ashil's interaction with the security guard shows, this is because they have ultimate power. At the same time, Breach arguably also needs Borlú's insight—without it, they would be somewhat lost.



CHAPTER 25

Back in the **Breach** headquarters, Ashil brings Borlú photocopies of every page of Mahalia's copy of **Between the City and the City**. That evening, they walk together in the outside world. By now, Borlú realizes that the dissensi are where Breach reside. Inside the bedroom in which he has been placed, he argues with representatives of Breach about the possibility that Orciny could be real. That night, once he is alone again, Borlú once again looks over Mahalia's notes in *Between the City and the City*. They start neat and calm, but over time become more frantic. Borlú senses that she was furious.

The next morning, Ashil comes to get Borlú again, this time bringing him to a meeting with 12 or so **Breach** all stuffed into a fairly small room. Borlú realizes it is a "crisis meeting." A vigorous debate ensues. Eventually, Borlú says that they need to go to Bol Ye'an, and Ashil agrees. Ashil advises Borlú that if he sees anyone he knows to just ignore them. Borlú wants to talk to Professor Nancy, but Ashil says they won't be talking to any of the students or professors.

When they arrive, they approach Buidze, who panics and immediately insists that he hasn't **breached**. Borlú asks if Buidze has been successful in his mission to stop the artefacts getting smuggled out. Nervously, Buidze says that no one would buy the artefacts anyway. He adds that it is impossible to stop the students breaching as they walk across the site, but this "doesn't mean they're thieves." Borlú demands to know what artefacts are missing, but Buidze remains adamant that none are. In answer to Borlú's questions, Buidze explains that different people take turns to lock up the site at night, and that Mahalia locked up the day she was killed.

Professor Nancy walks in, recognizes Borlú, and looks shocked. He greets her and she nods in response. Borlú examines some artefacts, then asks Buidze to walk him through exactly what Mahalia would have done when she locked up. Borlú hypothesizes that before locking up, Mahalia took one or more older artefacts and left them in a specific place for someone in Beszel to pick up and smuggle out. Ashil asks Borlú if he feels watched, and Borlú replies that he doesn't know. They search the grounds for a while looking for missing items, but find nothing. Borlú determines that the smuggling of the items must have involved **breach**, because the items are from UI Qoma and were picked up in Beszel.

The fact that Breach actually resides in the dissensi—the place where Orciny is supposed to be—further underlines the idea that the myth of Orciny is really just a manifestation of people's fears about Breach. This in turn shows that there is often an intimate proximity between superstition and reality.



Breach may be all-powerful, but the way they operate is strange and rather inefficient. They seem to be a decentralized, leaderless organization, which is unusual for a branch of law enforcement.



Buidze's misplaced fear about Breach is illustrative of a wider problem. Throughout the novel, Breach has been such a significant point of focus that other kinds of crime have received insufficient attention as a result. In this case, Buidze's panic over Breach distracts from the fact that Borlú and the rest of Breach are actually there to investigate a whole other form of crime—theft.



Ashil's question to Borlú about feeling watched is intriguing. Because of Ashil's rather blank, laconic way of talking, it can be difficult to know exactly what his words mean. Here, it is possible that he is asking if Borlú suspects that there is some kind of force involved in the theft that is now watching them. On the other hand, the question may relate to Borlú's ongoing "trial" which is determining the severity of his breach. Or perhaps he simply wants to know how it feels for Borlú to be in Breach.



When Borlú and Ashil get back to headquarters, **Breach** are “bickering and voting.” It is announced that the frequency of minor breaches is increasing, and Breach isn’t getting to all of them. Borlú tells Ashil he “can’t handle” the meeting and Ashil escorts him back to his room, locking the door. Borlú looks over Mahalia’s notes again, paying special attention to the surnames she’s listed in the margins, some of which are familiar.

Suddenly, Borlú begins shouting, calling for Ashil, saying he needs to get online. Ashil takes him to the computer room where he enters the names Mahalia wrote in the margins into a search engine. The connection is painfully slow, but eventually reveals that each of these people are scholars who refuted Bowden’s argument. It is suddenly clear that Mahalia changed her opinion about Orciny. Borlú declares that rather than being killed by Orciny, “Mahalia was killed because she *stopped* believing in Orciny at all.”

CHAPTER 26

Borlú begs to be allowed to contact Corwi and Dhatt, but Ashil will not let him. Borlú then says that they need to focus on Yorjavic and figure out if he has an alibi for all the evenings when Mahalia locked up at Bol Ye’an. Borlú again asks to speak to Corwi and Dhatt, but Ashil sternly reminds him that he is in **Breach**, and thus doesn’t “get to demand things.” The next morning, Ashil returns to Borlú’s room and hands him coffee and a pill. After discussing Borlú’s hypothesis about Yorjavic, Ashil leaves and returns with the information that Yorjavic was under policzai surveillance most of the nights when Mahalia locked up the site.

Borlú asks about Syedr, and Ashil says he was also accounted for, attending events with the Chamber of Commerce. Stunned, Borlú suddenly realizes that their focus has been all wrong. He points out that it’s a strange coincidence that these trade events would be happening on the exact nights Mahalia locked up the site. Borlú becomes increasingly frustrated with having to tell Ashil how to investigate the case and demands to be let out so he can do his job. However, Ashil reminds him, “You’re a **breacher** [...] It’s you we’re investigating.” Borlú asks who else was at the trade events, looking through a list of companies. One company in particular stands out: Sear and Core. The CEO was in attendance at the trade events every night Mahalia had the keys to Bol Ye’an.

Breach have a very simple directive—after all, they are only charged with prosecuting one crime—and yet even this presents a struggle for them. This is especially surprising considering the amount of power they have.



This crucial plot twist resolves several of the questions that Borlú’s previous understanding of the case left unanswered. These include: what would be killing people who believe in Orciny if Orciny doesn’t exist? And why would Mahalia believe in a conspiracy most people dismiss as foolish if she is exceptionally intelligent?



Ashil’s insistence that Borlú doesn’t “get to demand things” because he is in Breach actually contradicts much of how Borlú has been treated thus far. For example, just moments ago, when Borlú wanted to get online, he was immediately escorted to the computer room. This seeming inconsistency is explained by the fact that Borlú is allowed to do anything as long as it advances his “trial”—something he can manipulate to solve the case.



This is the point at which everything begins to come together, revealing some secrets and surprises along the way. Most significantly, the villain is not revealed to be political dissidents or a magical, evil force (Orciny), but rather a company, Sear and Core. Indeed, the very name “Sear and Core” evokes a malicious, violent, and extractive mode of being.



Borlú notes that there are rumors that the artefacts at Bol Ye'an have "special properties." Sear and Core wanted them, and persuaded Mahalia to hand them over by pretending to be Orciny. Confused, Ashil asks why anyone would "put money into superstitious nonsense." But Borlú points out that it won't have cost too much, and would be a sound investment just in case the artefacts did turn out to have special powers. They discuss the plausibility of Borlú's new hypothesis, and Ashil agrees to investigate. However, he admits his powers are limited: as foreigners, Sear and Core do not have the same natural terror of **Breach** as citizens of UI Qoma and Beszel.

It is clear that in order to successfully intimidate Sear and Core, **Breach** will have to show up in huge numbers. However, assembling people is not easy; Breach are spread all around the city, and many are resistant to the idea of congregating for this single mission. Then, Ashil gets a phone call that clearly rocks him in some way. He tells Borlú that two buses have collided and breached. Both buses were taking refugees to camps, and now the refugees are wandering around the city, injured, confused, and "breaching everywhere." Citizens will be reluctant to help them in case doing so means breaching. Ashil says that the cities have been placed on "complete lockdown," and all of Breach will be attending to the incident until it is resolved.

Borlú is surprised by the severity of this reaction, but Ashil then explains that the bus crash was intentional, Besz and UI Qoman unifications planned it together. This is the unificationist "insurrection," a dramatic attempt to fuse the cities. Borlú stresses that it can't be a coincidence that this has happened now. He reminds Ashil that the unificationists are a little pathetic; organizing something like this is clearly beyond their capacity. He asks if planes are grounded, including private jets. Ashil says that they are, but it's possible private planes could get away. Borlú says they have to go to the Sear and Core building immediately—the bus crash is clearly a decoy.

Depending on the reader's perspective, the conclusion of the novel may be something of an anticlimax. While the gradually building suspense might have led readers to expect a twisted, subversive, and surprising motivation behind the central crime, the truth is rather mundane and depressing. Sear and Core wanted the artefacts simply due to corporate greed.



Just as all the information to solve the crime is finally available, an event occurs that prevents Breach from actually taking action on it. While Breach usually attends to minor, individual breaches, the bus collision is exactly the kind of event that Breach wants to stop from ever happening. An individual case of breach, even if not punished, will have no real effect on the cities. However, an incident like this bus crash threatens to unravel everything.



One recurring motif in the book is decoys and other ways in which people use others toward their own ends. This happened when the murderer stole Khurusch's car, for example, or right now, when Borlú is manipulating his Breach "trial" in order to solve his own case. In a politically fraught world in which everyone has their own particular agendas, people are constantly using one another for their own ends.



CHAPTER 27

In the streets, there is panic everywhere. People are running around in flight and glee; windows have been broken and fires started. Borlú spots a unificationist gang spray painting the words “TOGETHER! UNITY!” in both Besz and Illitan. Very quickly, the group is swarmed by **Breach** avatars moving so quickly they could hardly be seen. Ashil manages to open a parked car that does not belong to him. Judging from the conversations he is having in his earpiece, it’s obvious that there are simply not enough Breach in the cities. Borlú knows that huge numbers of unificationists will be put in camps following this incident. Ashil says he doubts this is all a decoy, and then says, after hearing something in his earpiece, “We’ve lost avatars.”

As they near Sear and Core, they see a helicopter flying away, and Borlú announces that they’re too late. However, they go into the building anyway. A Besz security guard tries to stop them from entering, but Ashil tells him to back down, reminding him that the whole city is currently in **Breach**. He demands access to the helipad and says no one must be allowed to follow them. Up on the top floor, they spot four people: two who look like ultra-nationalists, a man in a suit, and someone else not properly in view. As they get nearer, Borlú is stunned to see that the final person is Mikhel Buric, a Social Democrat who sits on the Chamber of Commerce. It is him, not Syedr, who has organized the theft of the artefacts.

Borlú shouts at Buric, accusing him of murder and asking why a “liberal sellout” like himself would be hanging around nationalists. Buric replies, “We’re all patriots.” Ashil attempts to arrest Buric, but the suited man intervenes, introducing himself as “Ian Croft, regional head of CorIntech,” a company owned by Sear and Core. The nationalists both have their guns pointed at Borlú and Ashil. Buric says he doesn’t care about **Breach**; he boasts that he has spent years getting business from Beszel and stealing from UI Qoma. He accuses Breach of protecting UI Qoma. He continues that the unificationists are right to assert that there is only one city, but adds, “that city is called Beszel.”

The utopian slogans of the unificationists present them in a sympathetic light, particularly compared to Breach, which doesn’t even seem to understand its own function. Why is it so important that the cities be kept separate—particularly at a moment in which citizens are demanding change and unity? This question never gets answered, and this in itself makes a point about the way in which laws can be self-justifying, with no rational explanation behind them.



The end of the novel is more obviously political than everything that preceded it. Although the whole narrative describes a fraught political situation, thus far the position of the novel has been fairly neutral, although one recurring idea has been the arbitrary harm caused by borders. However, in this moment it is revealed that it is the social democrat political—not the nationalist—who is in bed with sinister corporate interests. This can certainly be read as a comment on real-life politics.



Again, the portrayal of Buric here is a rather stark comment on the nature of politicians. Buric is clearly unprincipled, self-interested, and obsessed with power. Indeed, he even has the crudeness to boast about being above the law. In this sense, Buric is something of an archetype of a corrupt politician.



Borlú realizes aloud that Buric leaked the footage of the van in order to stop **Breach** from taking over the case of Mahalia's murder. The nationalists still have their guns raised, but Borlú doesn't think they'll shoot. He announces that he is not there representing Breach, but rather the Beszel policzai, and reminds Buric that he has broken Besz law. He adds that he doesn't care about smuggling or UI Qoma, but he does care about people being murdered. He arrests Buric on the charge of conspiracy to murder Yolanda. The nationalists look confused, but Buric raises his gun at Borlú. There is the sudden sound of a gunshot; Ashil has shot Buric, who now falls, bleeding from the chest.

The nationalists, meanwhile, fire at Ashil, and Borlú shouts that they are under arrest. He attends to Ashil, telling the nationalists to stay put, but they run. Ashil says he's alright, and yells at Croft to stay where he is. However, Croft has already climbed into the helicopter. Ashil tries to declare the vehicle "grounded," but Croft responds by calling Beszel, UI Qoma, and **Breach** pathetic, and saying that they do not stand a chance against the powers of his own country. He closes the door, and the helicopter flies away. Speaking into his earpiece, Ashil calls for help, saying that he is wounded. Borlú and Ashil put the final pieces of the puzzle together, with Ashil speaking weakly due to his wound. As help arrives for Ashil, he hands his keys, phone, and gun to Borlú, who promises, "I'll do it."

CHAPTER 28

Running off, Borlú phones Dhatt, telling him he needs his help immediately. Dhatt is stunned to hear from Borlú, as he knew he was with **Breach**. Borlú begs Dhatt to send men to Bowden's apartment to detain Bowden until Borlú can get there. Dhatt agrees, but when he calls back, he says that Bowden is gone. Borlú asks Dhatt to put an ABP on Bowden, explaining that he's probably trying to leave the country. When Dhatt calls back a second time, he says that Bowden is at **Copula Hall**; apparently he has been there for hours. However, the staff don't know what to do, because they can't tell if he's in Beszel or UI Qoma.

Here Borlú rebels against his status as a prisoner of Breach and realigns himself with the policzai. Significantly, this is not because he has allegiance to Beszel, but rather because his loyalty is to his job, which is to prosecute murder. In contrast to the confusion of Breach, the violent fanaticism of the nationalists, the greed of Sear and Core, and the megalomania of Buric, Borlú is the only one acting on legitimate moral principles.



The end of this scene is somewhat cartoonish in its use of tropes. The villain, representative of an evil corporation, declares that he is too powerful to be beaten and then flies off in a helicopter. Indeed, the straightforwardness of this villain might catch the reader by surprise. This is, after all, a novel that bends the rules of different genres and fuses them to make strange new results. It is therefore arguably surprising that the narrative seems to have such a cliched moment in its conclusion.



In the strange world of the novel, managing to confuse people over which city one is in is a way of making oneself untouchable. In this state, Bowden could do anything, as no one will risk impeding him. Of course, there is an assumption that someone cannot remain in this kind of ambiguity for long—surely at some point Bowden will do something to make clear where he is.



The staff told Dhatt that they saw Bowden start to walk away, but didn't keep watching him because it would be **breach**. By this point Borlú is in a car, driving as fast as possible. Dhatt is only ten minutes away from **Copula Hall**, but he doesn't want to approach Bowden for fear of breach, either. Borlú cannot promise that there is no risk involved, but begs Dhatt to follow Bowden while acting as if he is just going on an ordinary walk. Dhatt agrees, but reminds Borlú that he will only be able to arrest Bowden if he is indeed in UI Qoma. Borlú thanks Dhatt and then calls Corwi, asking her to head to Copula Hall as soon as possible. In the ensuing minutes, Borlú frantically switches between phone calls with both of them, trying to coordinate their respective locations.

Borlú can tell by a shift in Corwi's tone that she has found Bowden, although she cannot risk saying this aloud. He gets out of the car and finds Dhatt, tapping him on the shoulder. Stunned, Dhatt looks at Borlú with an unfamiliar expression. Bowden is easy to spot; he is walking in a distinct manner that belongs neither in Beszel nor UI Qoma. Meanwhile, Corwi stands nearby. She draws her gun without looking properly at Bowden. Borlú holds out his hand and Corwi holds it as they walk. Borlú says Bowden's name, and tells him what he is doing is impressive. It would take a while, but having perfected the performance of neutrality, Bowden could theoretically walk right out of the two cities unimpeded.

Bowden points a weapon at Borlú. Borlú says he knows Bowden tried to cut Mahalia's face off, then covered it with makeup when that didn't work. The strange metal object in Bowden's hand makes a clicking sound, and Borlú realizes this is what he used to kill Mahalia. He asks if it is one of the artefacts from Bol Ye'an. Bowden indicates that it is. He then says he never wanted to kill Mahalia, and that he always told her the truth—that Orciny wasn't real. However, Borlú replies that it was obviously not Buric or Sear and Core's idea to use Mahalia for the smuggling operation—it was Bowden's. He wanted to "have it both ways," to still be "right" about Orciny even after knowing he was wrong.

Borlú concludes that Bowden didn't collaborate with Sear and Core for the financial incentive, but rather as a way of rescuing his own ego. He asks if Mahalia ever found out what Bowden's role was, and he says he thinks she didn't. Rather, she believed she was protecting him. Mahalia's realization that the whole Orciny thing was a hoax was a final humiliation for Bowden, and he killed her in revenge. Bowden explains that when Borlú came to UI Qoma, Buric began to panic, and sent the bomb in order to try to trick Borlú into thinking that nationalists were responsible for Mahalia's murder. Borlú comments that Bowden staged attacks on himself in order to make himself appear innocent.

This passage reiterates the idea that Breach's power comes from the fact that it is fundamentally unknowable. Even Dhatt is reluctant to find Bowden because he is so afraid of breaching. If there was more information about Breach and what punishment they use, Dhatt would likely not have this fear—particularly as a police officer himself. Yet the opacity of Breach paralyzes him with fear.



This passage confirms that because he is in Breach, Borlú cannot be seen by people in the cities, which is why he needs to use touch to show Bowden and Corwi where he is. Meanwhile, the idea that one could theoretically stay in between the cities (or at least keep it ambiguous which of them one is in) through performance is a fascinating new development. It speaks to the way in which everything about a person—from accent to style to body language—is produced by, and reflects, their environment.



This passage illustrates that, alongside Sear and Core, Bowden is the main villain of the novel. Not only does he cooperate with the evil corporation in the theft of artefacts from Bol Ye'an, but—purely out of egoism—Bowden conscripts Mahalia in the scheme and then murders her. He is selfish, cruel, and seemingly unrepentant.



Up until now, the reader might have assumed that Sear and Core instructed Bowden to murder Mahalia once she found out the truth about Orciny to make sure no one found out about their crimes. However, as Croft pointed out as he flew away on the helicopter, Sear and Core are extremely powerful and have nothing to fear from an individual PhD student. The reality is that Bowden killed her due to his own egoism, anger, and shame.



As for Yolanda, Borlú points out that she and Aikam were the only ones who actually believed in Orciny. He accuses Bowden of telling Buric that Yolanda would be at **Copula Hall**—information that got her killed. Bowden asks where Buric is; Borlú replies that he is dead, and Bowden says this is “good.” Bowden hands over his weapon, agreeing to come with Borlú. When Borlú asks what city Bowden is in, Bowden replies, “Either.” This is enough for Borlú to seize Bowden and bring him into the **Breach**. Borlú nods in gratitude to both Corwi and Dhatt.

CODA: CHAPTER 29

Borlú never sees the weapon Bowden was carrying again, nor learns if it indeed has any special powers. Following Riot Night, a new wave of state repression sweeps over UI Qoma. In Beszel, the night is rarely discussed. During it, 22 people died in UI Qoma and 13 in Beszel, in addition to the refugees who died in the crash. Borlú asks Ashil if anyone from **Breach** has ever “broken ranks,” and Ashil says they have, but doing that automatically means breaching, and thus falling back under Breach’s control. Borlú’s cell in the Breach quarters is no longer locked, and he spends the days walking around the cities with Ashil.

Borlú asks about Bowden’s fate, but Ashil only gives a vague answer. Borlú points out that despite all the violations Bowden *did* commit, he didn’t actually **breach**. Ashil shrugs this off, saying, “If we say he breached, he breached.” Sear and Core remain in Beszel, and have made gestures of accountability. Borlú asks Ashil when he will be allowed to go home, and Ashil smiles, telling Borlú he has done “an excellent job.” Ashil reflects on how the ordinary citizens of Beszel and UI Qoma enforce Breach themselves by dutifully seeing and unseeing only what they are supposed to. He then explains that no one is born in Breach; every avatar of Breach became one by once breaching themselves.

Borlú realizes it is difficult to imagine himself returning to Beszel and only being able to see that city after having experienced walking between both cities in **Breach**. He wants to be able to say goodbye to people from the outside world, but Ashil says it’s not possible. Ashil explains that Breach were happy when Borlú breached, because they wanted to make use of his skills as a detective. As a compromise, Ashil allows Borlú to write letters to his lovers. He goes to see both Corwi and Dhatt, but both can tell that he is not entirely in their city and thus greet him wordlessly. Borlú mouths “thanks” and “good-bye” to Corwi even though he knows she can’t see. He says he is no longer Inspector Tyador Borlú but Tye, his Breach avatar name. Now, he lives in-between, “in both the city and the city.”

Many of those responsible for the crime at the center of the novel either died (Yorjavic, Buric) or escaped (Croft and the rest of Sear and Core). Bowden is the only person brought into the criminal justice system. Yet considering he breached, he will not receive an ordinary trial, but will instead meet a mysterious, opaque fate. Furthermore, he will be punished for breaching, not for murder.



Ashil’s comment about those who rebel against Breach automatically being brought back into Breach emphasizes the idea of Breach’s circular, self-justifying nature. It is a loop from which there is no escape. This is a very hellish, almost absurdist depiction of crime and punishment, although one that arguably corresponds with reality.



Although the crime is solved, the ending does not provide satisfaction or catharsis in the form of justice. Again, most of the villains escape punishment, and the fate of the one person who is punished—Bowden—remains unknown. Meanwhile, Ashil’s words about Breach may intensify any cynicism the reader has been led to feel at this moment, particularly about power and the (im)possibility of subverting it.



The ending of the novel is rather moving, even tragic. Borlú is confined to a mode of existence that, ironically, is freer than his previous life in the sense that he can move between Beszel and UI Qoma. However, this freedom means little considering he cannot properly interact with the people he loves. At the same time, the fact that Dhatt and Corwi acknowledge him—something that is clearly difficult or impossible—suggests that if the people of the cities collectively take action, they might indeed one day be able to overthrow Breach’s power and unify.





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