

Ancillary Justice Study Guide

Ancillary Justice by Ann Leckie

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Plot Summary

NOTE: This study guide specifically refers to the Orbit/Hachette Book Group First Edition, October 2013, of *Ancillary Justice*.

Ancillary Justice is a science fiction novel, and the first part of the *Imperial Radch Trilogy* by Ann Leckie. In this novel, a former ancillary who calls herself Breq is determined to assassinate the Lord Anaander Mianaai of the Radch Empire in revenge for killing her commander, Captain Awn, some 20 years before. When the novel opens, Breq has come to the wintry planet of Nilt. There, she stumbles across a former ship officer named Seivarden Vendaai with whom she had briefly worked. Vendaai has been brutally beaten up, so Breq administers medical treatment and provides shelter. Breq has a difficult time understanding why, because until 20 years ago, she had served the starship *Justice of Toren* as both part of its Artificial Intelligence system and an ancillary (a human with surgical implants to create a mindless slave soldier), where she had no free will to do such things. Breq has quickly become a believer in human free will, even if she cannot understand why she does the things she does, sometimes.

Breq learns that Vendaai has been frozen for 1,000 years, and on coming out of sleep, discovers how dramatically the Radchaai Empire has changed. For example, Vendaai's own noble family now no longer exists, while the Radchaai have entered into an embarrassing non-aggression treaty with the alien Presger Empire. Vendaai, reeling from the changes she experienced during the glory days of the Empire, has turned to drink and drugs. With Vendaai in tow, Breq seeks out a doctor and collector of ancient artifacts named Strigan, whom she believes to possess a rare gun not accounted for by the Radchaai. Breq explains to Strigan and to Vendaai that she wishes to assassinate the Lord of the Radch.

It is revealed that Breq, once both ancillary and AI system for the starship troop carrier *Justice of Toren*, was present during the last annexation and expansion of the Empire, of the planet Shis'urna. Breq, then known as the ancillary One Esk Nineteen, served as adjutant to Lieutenant Awn, who was tasked with keeping the postwar peace in the town of Ors. There, Awn and One Esk Nineteen uncovered a plot by the Lord Radch, who, like One Esk Nineteen, was split into numerous ancillaries to ensure a presence in all times and all places while avoiding assassination of her one true self. Some of the Lord's ancillaries had taken on a reformist streak, which was unacceptable to the real Lord Radch.

Hoping to root out the traitor ancillaries, the Lord attempted to stage a bout of violence to determine how the other Lord ancillaries would respond. Awn and One Esk Nineteen uncovered the plot, which the Lord realized presented a problem. The Lord then accused Awn of reformism, and ordered One Esk Nineteen to kill Awn, then destroyed the *Justice of Toren* to ensure all data the ship had collected on the plot was destroyed. One Esk Nineteen was cut free by the Lord to continue to serve her in the long run. It was then that One Esk Nineteen, in command of most of her faculties, decided on revenge.



Back in the present, Strigan sells Breq the gun she has requested. Vendaai decides to accompany Breq on her quest, for Vendaai is inspired by Breq's commitment to doing right. The two travel to Omaugh Station Palace where they are granted an audience with the Lord, and sped through security by an old friend of Awn's, Skaaiat Awer. The Lord appears before them in the form of two ancillaries. By singing a song known only to Breq, one Lord is able to distinguish herself from the other, leading to Breq's decision to shoot the other.

The Lord then confirms she is at war with herself, and decides to destroy the entire Station to prevent word of the civil war of her self from leaking out. Breq refuses to allow this to happen, and a massive fight breaks out between forces allied with several different ancillary versions of the Lord that all happen to be present at the Station. Breq is successful in her efforts to stop the Station from being destroyed, but now knows an all-out civil war has erupted. The real Lord of the Radch appoints Breq captain of the ship Mercy of Kalr, and names Breq as her moral advisor. Breq has no choice but to accept things as they are for the time being.



Chapters 1 – 5

Summary

In Chapter 1, Breq wonders why she does the things she does sometimes, and realizes she is still getting used to not following orders all the time. This includes turning over the body of a naked woman in the street to discover it is Seivarden Vendaai, who Breq knew long ago when Breq was an ancillary, artificial intelligence system on a military starship for the Radch Empire. Breq knows the cold atmosphere of the frozen planet Nilt will kill Vendaai, so Breq quickly rents a sledge and buys a hypothermia kit to save Vendaai's life. Vendaai was neither an officer that Breq liked or disliked, so she does not know why she is now saving Vendaai's life. Breq discovers the beating of Vendaai is in response to a massive tab she has acquired at a local tavern. Breq rents a room, where she medically treats Vendaai. She comes to believe that Vendaai must have taken a drug called kef, which suppresses emotions.

In Chapter 2, Breq remembers how 19 years before, she was a Justice class troop carrier starship, called the Justice of Toren, orbiting the planet of Shis'urna for 2,000 years. Breq recalls the annexation of the planet, and how her artificial intelligence, known as One Esk, allowed her to be both orbiting the planet, and in the machines the Raadchai troops used on the ground. Breq especially recalls the conquering of a small village known as Ors by Esk Decade Lieutenant Awn where the Head Priest Ikkt offered immediate surrender to Awn. Awn was ordered to stay on with a small detachment to ensure peace as Radchaai came to colonize and control the planet. The Head Priest explained to Awn that the soldiers of the carrier Justice of Ente under Issa committed horrible atrocities against Orsians, while Awn's troops have not. The mutiny of humans and an alien named Rrrrr, revolving around the captain of the Mercy of Sarrse and the Moon of Ime, who was unwilling to kill people accused of corruption, was then discussed by Ikkt and Awn. Breq remembers how a small girl in the street also sang a strange take on a Radchaai song, about a heart being a fish and hiding in the water-grass, in the green.

In Chapter 3, events return to the present. The following morning, Breq sees that some of Vendaai's injuries are healing. With Vendaai beside her, Breq rents a flier. As Breq flies, Breq recalls how Vendaai had lost the ship she captained, the Sword of Nathas, 1,000 years before Breq served with Awn. Garsedai electors, being transported by Vendaai, had rebelled against her and her ship. Back in the present, the flier Breq is piloting malfunctions, so she must make an emergency landing in the snow and continue her journey with Vendaai on foot. Breq is hoping to find Dr. Arilesperas Strigan, a former medic from Dras Annia Station, who has incredible connections for all the work she did in the past. Breq can only hope she is headed in the right direction, since Strigan has been missing for years after vanishing one day from her office on the station. Suddenly, the woman from whom Breq has rented her now-broken-down flier appears with three others to confront Breq. Breq has no choice but to kill them, and then take their functioning flier. She then arrives at Strigan's home to discover the house



wide open to the cold, and no one inside. Breq restores power and warmth to the house, lays Vendaai down to sleep, then searches the building to discover plenty of food and supplies. Breq also discovers a half-eaten meal, meaning Strigan must have left upon seeing the flier approaching.

In Chapter 4, Breq remembers how each morning in Ors began with prayers, then Awn meeting with locals to address issues and concerns, and members of the Empire to address official Radchaaai business. Breq remembers how a citizen named Denz Ay reported that her friend, digging for tubers nears a prohibited zone, came upon a cache of a dozen old guns that were not there a month before. It was believed the guns were the work of the elite Tanminds of the upper city, and that Denz Ay was reporting them so that Radchaaai leaders would not blame lower Orsians for them. Breq remembers how, later, Awn went to have dinner with Jen Shinnan of the upper city, along with a cousin of Shinnan, Jen Taa, and Lieutenant Skaaiat, commander of Justice of Ente Seven Issa. Shinnan, a plantation owner, complained about her harvest being confiscated. Awn countered this was necessary to deal with food shortages. Jen Shinnan also reported her niece had been threatened while visiting Ors. At the same time, the niece, an orphan, was being prepared to take tests for a position in the Radchaaai governing structure, most likely a civil service post. On the way home, Breq recalls Awn and Skaaiat discussing what it took to be a citizen of Radch. To be a citizen, one had to be civilized – but one could not be considered civilized without being a citizen. Citizenship and civilization had to be declared.

In Chapter 5, back in the present, Seivarden Vendaai awakens and says she cannot remember anything – about Breq or why she is on Nilt. Breq attempts to explain that she is Breq of the Gerentate, but does not reveal her true identity as One Esk. Breq remembers how Vendaai received her first command at the age of 17, while a typical Raadchai could live to be 200 years old. In the present, Breq and Vendaai spend a week at Strigan's house while Vendaai recovers. Vendaai demands to leave, but Breq reminds her she is where she is because of her own decisions. Vendaai says Breq wouldn't understand, but Breq lays everything out for her: Vendaai has been frozen for 1,000 years, and has woken up to a changed world. The Radch is no longer expanding, has entered into a humiliating treaty with the Presger, the Vendaai house has lost its financial and social status, and no one knows, remembers, or cares about Seivarden Vendaai. That night, Strigan returns, confident that Breq is not an ancillary as she first believed. Breq asks for the Garsedaaai gun she believes Strigan has, since Strigan has such a large collection of Garsedaaai antiques. Strigan asks what use a gun could be to Breq. Breq responds she wants to use it to kill Anaander Mianaai, Lord of the Radch. Strigan says this is impossible, but Breq responds that she at least wishes to try. Breq then tells Vendaai to retrieve more food from the shed, but Vendaai refuses, saying she wasn't bred to take orders. Breq then punches Vendaai in the face.

Analysis

Ancillary Justice is a science fiction novel by Ann Leckie in which an ancillary who calls herself Breq is determined to assassinate the Lord Anaander Mianaai of the Radch



Empire in revenge for killing her commander, Captain Awn, some 20 years before. The very decision of Breq to attempt this assassination is demonstrative of her free will, something which she has only relatively recently acquired. As an ancillary and both part and whole of the artificial intelligence system of the Justice of Torren, Breq has spent thousands of years doing exactly as she has been told to do. Breq is a firm believer in free will, especially because she has experienced both free will, and a lack of free will. Breq reminds Vendaai that Vendaai has ended up in her current state as a result of her own choices.

Part of the downfall of Vendaai comes from the fact that she no longer has any conception of her own identity anymore. She is no longer an active-duty military member, while her house, family, friends, and every aspect of the world she knew is now long gone. With her glory days behind her, Vendaai has lost her sense of self. At the same time, Breq herself still struggles with the idea that she has free will, questioning why she does what she does sometimes. Who she was as a human being before being turned into an ancillary is long gone, and her only conscious memories are of serving as an ancillary. Breq, who is now only one as opposed to one and many in one through the AI system she once was, struggles with her own identity as well. This is reflected in Breq's narration, and the frequent asides she makes to account for either her behavior, or to explain the confusion of her behavior.

Identity does not merely rest on who a person is, but the author makes a point to argue her conception that gender is fluid and irrelevant. She does this through explaining that the Radchaai do not recognize gender, and that everyone – including males – are referred to as “she” or “her.” Only in encounters with other civilizations and other peoples is gender sometimes referenced. From all indications, it appears that Vendaai is a male, though Breq refers to him as “her” and “she” throughout the novel. (For the sake of consistency with the novel, the reader will note that this guide adopts the same use of gender identifying language as the novel.) This gender fluidity is in keeping with the crises of identity being experienced by Breq and Vendaai.

However, the crisis of identity is addressed in the novel by the process of journey. The author uses the physical journey of Breq to find and kill the Lord Radch as a way to speak to the idea of finding oneself. By setting out to kill the Lord Radch, Breq is forced to confront uncomfortable questions about herself, especially pertaining to her free will. She remembers through chapters that occur in the past what it was like to have a nascent impulse to free will, but not having any actual control over what she did or did not do. At that time, Breq's identity was assured: she was One Esk Nineteen, both ancillary part and overarching whole of the Justice of Torren's AI system. Her journey to kill the Lord is helping her to establish who she is an independent and sentient being who not merely only does something, but can question and reason why. If Breq would have never begun her journey, she would have never discovered Vendaai.

The journey that Breq embarks upon is one of revenge. The very truth behind this journey – the motive – is not something that is revealed at once. But the past is being unveiled as present events unfold, in which Breq's time as an ancillary and AI system is illustrated. This contrasts Breq as both commanded, and commander of her own



destiny. In the past, Breq was a loyal – though essentially mindless – servant of the Lord of the Radch, but now Breq is a sworn enemy. What led to this shift in allegiance is not yet known, but is dramatic enough to have led to Breq's free will as well.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Breq have such difficulty trying to figure out why she does some of the things she does? Why does she have such a difficult time trying to determine why she is helping Vendaai? What conclusion does she come to? Why?

Discussion Question 2

In what ways does Ann Leckie make identity and gender difficult to distinguish? Why do you believe this is so?

Discussion Question 3

For what reason has Breq come to the planet of Nilt? How does she hope to achieve her goal? How does Strigan view her goal? Why?

Vocabulary

ancillary, inflective, shen, vacant, general-purpose corrective, kef, annexation, oblique, sporadic, antecedents, callous, prestigious, antiphonal, reticent, formulaic, aristocratic, oblivious, sardonic, indignant, peremptory, chagrin



Chapters 6 – 10

Summary

In Chapter 6, Breq remembers going with Denz Ay and her daughter to retrieve the cache of Tanmind guns. Searching her data records, Breq determined the guns had been confiscated during annexation and should have been destroyed, a problem which she reported to Awn and Skaaiat. Awn and Skaaiat determined the Tanmind must have been up to something, looking for a reason to accuse someone in the lower city of something, with the Jens using their orphaned niece as an excuse. Breq remembers Awn wondering if there was more to everything, and Skaaiat wondering if Awn was being set up by Jen Shinnan. Awn believed that whatever the case, no one in Ors could have hidden the guns without help from higher up. Word then came that Lord of the Radch, Anaander Mianaai, would be visiting.

Breq takes a moment here from recalling the past to explain that Mianaai has ruled the Empire for 3,000 years, exists in all 13 provinces and in all places in the Empire through ancillary agents, makes all laws, and commands all armed forces. Breq then returns to the events of the past. Breq found the timing of Mianaai's visit strange because she would be coming just before the massive annual religious pilgrimage, when millions of pilgrims could otherwise see her. Breq also came to find it strange that the Lord Mianaai would not spare a few moments to listen to Awn's concerns when she arrived. Lord Mianaai's decision to dress as a commoner and to skip a visit to the upper city insulted the Tanmind.

In Chapter 7, back in the present, Breq, Strigan, and Vendaai discuss politics. Whereas the Radch, though imperialists, still value all different forms of life and spread goodness in their wake, the Presger do not. They are parasitic, vile racist aliens who believe all others are inferior to them. The Presger are a powerful enemy, so the Radchaaai have entered into a nonaggression treaty with them. Many Radchaaai believe this is a sign of weakness and a surrender of power. Strigan is curious about the amount of knowledge Breq has, and why her accent so consistently changes. Strigan asks Breq what she is, rather than who she is. Breq responds that she is Radchaaai, and a tourist from the Gerentate. Strigan doesn't accept this for an instant. Suddenly, alarms go off, announcing the approach of strangers. Outside, a 14-year-old girl has arrived with her blood-soaked uncle, calling for Dr. Strigan. The girl explains an ice devil is to blame. Breq helps carry the adult to the infirmary, then waits in the house with the girl. The girl's mother arrives a short time later.

In Chapter 8, Breq returns to memories of the past. She recalls increasing the military presence in the upper city while the Lord Mianaai was at the temple. Hours later, just before dawn, Breq discovered that her data feed to all of her ancillary troops had been cut. Awn and Lord Mianaai were notified about this, but the Lord was surprisingly undisturbed. A siren went off in the upper city, while Jen Shinnan shouted around about murder. A mob gathered, then headed toward the lower city. Awn, along with extra



troops, warned the Head Priest of what was coming. A plan was hatched by Awn to draw the mob into the temple, where they would then be shut in. A mob of 83 Tanmind do exactly as planned, and enter the temple where they are shut in and confronted by Lord Radch, Awn, Breq, and their troops.

Among the mob was Jen Shinnan and Jen Taa, who claimed their niece had been murdered and taken from their home. Jen Shinnan declared the lower city dwellers to be disloyal, and that she had received word of lower city dwellers hiding weapons in the lake. Awn was then forced to report the discovery of three weapons caches in total, though she had not yet filed an official report, having hoped to expose the plot first. Awn explained that she believed the culprit to be Jen Shinnan. The Lord Radch considered this carefully, then ordered the execution of all 83 upper city dwellers. Breq believed this was because the Lord herself had something to do with the plot. Awn gave the order to fire, after which time the mob members were shot to death. A data jamming device was later discovered at Jen Shinnan's house, while her niece was found dead, murdered at the hands of the Tanmind themselves to stir up trouble.

In Chapter 9, back in the present, Strigan announces the injured, bloodied man will live but will need at least two weeks to recover. Strigan helps carry the man out to be taken home by his wife and daughter. A short time later, Vendaai begins to recall being unfrozen, and learning how much things had changed in the time since. This includes the House Vendaai, and all of its wealth, being consumed by its political rival, House Geir. Considering Breq, Strigan comes to the conclusion that she is, or at least was, a corpse soldier. Strigan asks why Breq wants to kill the Lord of the Radch. Breq says it is personal, to which Strigan responds that Breq is not a person, but merely an appendage to a ship's AI. Breq explains that she needs the gun to carry out what she believes her purpose to be, just as all people have a purpose given to them by God. Strigan counters that he is made by God to always seek answers. Strigan again asks why Breq wants to kill the Lord of the Radch.

In Chapter 10, Breq recalls the past for Strigan. The morning after the massacre in the temples, the Lord of Radch revealed that Awn would be sent back to the Justice of Toren, while a replacement would take over for her in Ors. Breq later met with the Head Priest, who asked Breq where the justice in the temple slaughter could be found. The Priest said the Lord Radch should herself be shot for what she caused the previous night. Breq warned the Priest to watch her tongue. Skaaiat later met with Awn, at which time she revealed something made sense to her. Skaaiat said that annexations work by destroying resistance, then incorporating what is left of a society into Radchaai society. Within a generation or two, Skaait explained, locals are loyally Radchaai because the upper echelons of society have been won over. Skaait explained that Awn ruined the process by winning over the lower orders first in the very last annexation, and by finding weapons caches. What Awn could still not explain or understand, however, was who would benefit from everything – including the Lord Radch. Awn and Breq later both reflected on how every decision made, even small ones, can have tremendous consequences.



Analysis

As the past unfolds in conjunction with the present, the reader discovers a number of strange and unsettling events that Breq recalls relating to her motivation to seek revenge against the Lord Radch. These include the discovery of three caches of guns previously declared destroyed; the untimely and unceremonious visit of the Lord Radch; that Awn reversed the order of post-annexation procedures by working with commoners first, rather than with the elites; and the murder of Jen Shinnan's niece specifically to stir up a mob to trigger a violent event. The Lord Radch commands the rioters be killed – clearly something unexpected by everyone present at the slaughter. However despicable this act may be, it is clear that it is not the first time that the ancillaries have been compelled to follow such an order, and so does not itself constitute Breq's desire for revenge.

As Breq continues her journey toward revenge, she also continues her journey in remembering the past. The past helps to explain in large part why Breq is who she has become. For example, Breq clearly remembers the temple slaughter with distaste, which helps to explain why even the single life of Vendaai was worth saving to Breq. This also demonstrates clearly why Breq is more concerned with paying for something fairly than simply taking it, and why she is interested in dealing with Strigan at all rather than threatening or killing him to take the gun she needs. Breq may have killed in the past, but this does not make her a murderer. Who Breq was is not who Breq can be.

It is here that Breq explains her desire to kill the Lord of the Radch is not a question of pure revenge, but justice for the past. Breq and Vendaai both agree that God has a purpose for all life, with life itself being invaluable – and Vendaai believes her purpose has become singular in the killing of the Lord Radch. Breq here equates her purpose to her identity. Her identity is her mission, her goal. Here, concepts of identity again become confused. For human beings of the Radchaai, life has merit. While the Radchaai are relentless in war, they are generous in peace because they recognize that human life has intrinsic value, simply because it is human life. For the Presger, however, any species beyond their own is subject to bigotry and subjugation. For Breq in the present, who she is as a person does not matter at all, in and of herself as a person. Breq still considers herself in the ancillary strand of thought, as a being with only functionary purpose rather than intrinsic worth.

Interestingly enough, Strigan considers Breq not a person – yet – but merely an appendage to the ship, Justice of Toren. To Strigan, Breq is part, parcel, and whole of nothing more than an artificial intelligence system. This system's ancillaries are indistinguishable from one another, meaning they have no separate identity, but only a unified identity through the AI system. While it is clear to the reader that Breq has control over herself – even to the point of questioning why, the very act of a rational being – Strigan, as someone who has never been controlled by another, cannot help but question Breq's identity independence.



Discussion Question 1

What elements of Breq's past – especially the incident at the temple in Ors – help to explain the way she is in the present? Does Breq consciously make these connections? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

How does Breq's conception of her identity compare with the Radchaai conception of identity and life in general? Why?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Strigan have such difficulty accepting that Breq is no longer a part of the Toren's artificial intelligence system? Is he right to be suspicious? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

sedition, mitigating, sentient, paragons, virtue, accusatory, impassive, officious, antiquated, appendage, lucrative



Chapters 11 – 15

Summary

In Chapter 11, back in the present, Strigan asks Breq if it ever bothered her that she and countless other ancillaries are essentially slaves. Breq responds that Strigan already knows the answer to this question, that ancillaries do not know they are slaves. Strigan then asks if Breq was present at the destruction of the planet Garsedd. Breq confirms she was, and that she participating in the killing. Breq believes she didn't have a choice in the matter, but Strigan believes she did. Breq explains that Garsedd was the first annexation which caused many Radchaai officers to come away without the certainty that annexations were a good thing because there had been so much death, from which no good could come. It was through Garsedd that the Radchaai first encountered the Presger, who had supplied weapons to the Garsedd. Breq believes it is possible that the Garsedd did this to compel the Radch to negotiate. Strigan believes it is still not possible to kill the Lord of the Radsch, and urges Breq to live a peaceful, quiet life which had been previously denied to her. Breq is unmoved. Strigan also urges Breq not to trust Vendaai. Strigan relents, and decides to hand over the gun, ammunition, and old-fashioned armor that he has. Breq plans to gain an audience with the Lord Radch, which anyone may request. Strigan tells Breq to kill as many of the Lord's ancillaries as she can, then leaves.

In Chapter 12, Breq recalls the feeling of returning to the starship Justice of Toren being one of distance. She reflects on the past. Esk Decade Commander Tiaund and Hundred Captain Rubran were unhappy to learn of Awn's return. Orders prevented them from discussing the particulars of the case, but Tiaund suspected that what happened was not improper on the part of Awn. The other lieutenants on board, however, were not so kind toward Awn, mocking her for her return. Only Lieutenant Dariet defended Awn. A short time later, a transport docked bearing four hopelessly drunk Bo officers, and Lord Radch herself who requested Breq provide her accommodations without telling the commander of the Justice of Toren. Breq felt strangely about this.

In Chapter 13, in the present, Breq travels to the city of Therrod, known for its glass-like bridges. Breq and Vendaai take lodging rooms, then go to eat. Among the patrons at the restaurant is the girl and her mother that Strigan recently helped. The girl is delighted to know that Breq says she enjoys music, so recommends a place a few doors down where there are live performances. Breq heads over, while Vendaai heads back to the room. The next morning, Breq encounters the girl again, who reveals she has witnessed Vendaii selling the flier that Breq came in on. Breq believes she must have sold the flier for drug money. Vendaii later confirms this in an argument she has with Breq on a glass bridge. Fearing Breq will hit her, Vendaii takes too many steps backward, and falls over the edge of the bridge. She manages to catch hold, but when Breq tries to pull her back up, they both fall. Breq tries to slow the descent, but this helps little. The next thing Breq remembers is being on her back in serious pain, barely conscious. She feels as if her journey of the past 20 years has all been for nothing.



In Chapter 14, Breq remembers Lord of Radch, Anaander Mianaai's visit to the Justice of Toren, where she accessed files for a five-year span. One code entered by the Lord of Radch was notified as invalid, something which never happened to the Lord of Radch, and something which made Breq suspicious. Override codes were declared invalid as well, while the Lord of Radch questioned Breq about the killings at the temple, and whether or not Awn had spoken with anyone else about it. Breq revealed she had not. The Lord then asked why Lieutenant Dariet Suleri was such an ally of Awn's, a question which confused Breq. The Lord then asked for all files on the temple incident, but one file which recorded Breq's fear she would have to shoot Awn was missing. Breq suddenly interrupts the story to speak about consciousness, and about the idea of "I." The "I" of before was a system of many parts controlled by others, where Breq did as she was told. The "I" of now is Breq determining for herself, and only herself, what is to be done. Breq then returns to the past. The Lord accessed footage of Dariet speaking with Awn about Skaaiat and vaguely about what happened down on the planet. Awn said she could not talk about such things, and that whatever Skaaiat's feelings toward her might be, the recall means being together would be impossible even if being in different classes didn't already make things difficult enough.

The Lord took this as a sign that Dariet was "pro-reform," something which confused Breq. The Lord then demanded to know from Breq how many other officers were pro-reform. Breq could not answer. The Lord then noted Breq's discomfort, to which Breq responded that she would prefer to announce the Lord's presence, but would follow the Lord's orders on the matter. Breq suddenly had a sense of *déjà vu*, in which everything the Lord then said felt like it had been said before. The Lord then explained that each ancillary was capable of having its own identity, and if one ancillary became undecided about something while the others were not, it would create divisions, and it would be impossible to have two minds. The Lord went on to say that parts of Breq had come back to her without knowing it, and that the Presger were most likely to blame since the Radche bought almost everything from the Presger following the treaty – including surgical implants that kept ancillaries in order. The Lord explained that one of her own ancillaries had been corrupted, and that she needed to know she could trust Breq. The Lord believed that Awn was an instrument of her enemy. The Justice of Toren was then sent to orbit Valskaay.

In Chapter 15, Breq returns to the present. When she awakens, she is in the medical center at Therrod. Vendaai is present and well. She explains while she may have actually sold the ship, she did not buy drugs. Vendaai admits she is impressed by Breq always seeking to do the right thing no matter what it costs, where Vendaai had lived her life with an attitude of superiority because her class and house were once high. The girl from Strigan's also shows up to see how Breq is doing. Vendaai later admits to Breq that Breq feels familiar to her, though Breq does not reveal why. Vendaai asks why Breq has a gun in her possession, so Breq recounts everything she knows, including how the governor of Ime Station managed to program the artificial intelligence of the station to hide, rather than report her corruption and her dealings with the Rrrrrs.



Analysis

The discussions about identity continue in this section of the novel. Hypocrisy must be noted in the Radchaai idea that all life has human value, while keeping millions of ancillaries as mindless servants and soldiers (what Strigan refers to as corpse soldiers). Strigan himself asks Breq if she is ever bothered by the fact that she was a slave, or if she is ever bothered by the fact that so many others were kept as slaves, and are still kept as slaves. Breq explains that ancillaries do not know they are slaves. This is more evidence to demonstrate to Strigan that Breq has at least some control of her own faculties in that she recognizes slavery as slavery, and slavery as being unrecognizable to one who is actually enslaved. In other words, a slave has no identity, but Breq does.

Breq herself has a concept of identity because she has free will and is no longer an ancillary for the Justice of Toren. As noted earlier in this study guide, Breq's conception of self-identity is still transforming. She has gone from being an ancillary slave to a being who predicates her existence purely on purpose; and she is able to reason and question things. The same is true of the Lord Radch in the past, who went to war with herself because at least one of her ancillaries dared to question the status quo, gaining some modicum of free will and independence which jeopardized the whole of the Empire. The Lord Radch is not a singular unity present in multiple ancillaries, but is multiple ancillaries with nearly the same identity that are not totally under control of the real Lord Radch.

Here, the idea of identity becomes especially confusing since the ancillaries seem to be different aspects of the Lord Rasch, rather than extensions of the same unified identity. The Lord blames this on faulty equipment provided by the Presger Empire. Identity also becomes confusing in the fact that the reader, as well as Breq in the attempt to determine which Lord Radch is the real Lord Radch. Things become confusing enough to the point that the reader is forced to question if the reform-minded Lord Radch is actually the real Lord Radch. This is made even more strange by the sudden and secretive appearance of Lord Radch, something which Lord Radch tells Breq she must keep secret.

Upon learning of Breq's intentions and her clear ability to exercise free will, he sells her the gun to kill as many of the Lord of Radch's ancillaries as possible. Interestingly, the reader should note that Breq herself interrupts her own narrative to comment on the nature and scope of identity and consciousness. Breq, like the Lord Radch, notes that she was once not an "I" in the truest sense of the world, that she was merely one part of many in a larger system, of which she was also the sum; yet, in the present, Breq is both "I" and whole, making her own choices and her own decisions. This impresses Vendaai, who is moved by Breq's desire to always do the right thing even when there seems there is no hope of success. This, in and of itself, is groundbreaking for Vendaai, who has until now only been concerned with his own well-being and self-interests. The journey undertaken by Breq has now also transformed Vendaai.



Discussion Question 1

What finally convinces Strigan to give the gun to Breq? What does Strigan hope Breq will accomplish? Why?

Discussion Question 2

In what ways has Vendaai changed since the beginning of the novel? Why? What do Vendaai's changes inspire him to do? Why?

Discussion Question 3

In what ways are Breq and the Lord of the Radche similar? In what ways are they different? Do their similarities or their differences matter more? Why?

Vocabulary

benighted, irrevocably, contemptuous, dismayed, acrimonious, ambivalence, arabesque, reproof, incontrovertible, mollify



Chapters 16 – 20

Summary

In Chapter 16, Breq recalls meeting once more with the Lord of the Radch. The Lord explained the Empire was built to protect the center, the Radch, and that is being fractured. Since expansion was no longer possible, the Lord explained, the extent of the Empire had to be maintained. The Lord then called for Awn to be brought before her. Awn was stunned by this. The Lord then proceeded to ask her about the guns and incident in the Ikkt temple, which Awn denied having any part of causing. The Lord then explained she believed Awn to be involved, because she found it strange that crates of weapons meant to be destroyed would suddenly surface five years later, only to have Awn protect those she accused of hiding the guns in the lake. Awn denied this, saying the Lord herself must have been responsible because only someone with that kind of power could have diverted the guns from being destroyed in the first place. The Lord countered that perhaps Awn was manipulated by Skaaiat's good looks, and that Skaaiat has been under suspicion for disloyalty for some time. While this discussion occurred, Breq realized that only one of the Lord's ancillaries could have protected the Ime Station corruption. Awn continued to protest her innocence, and Skaaiat's.

The Lord then ordered Breq to shoot Awn. Breq explained it would take her two minutes to acquire an arm. Awn protested the unjustness of the situation, to which the Lord responded that she might spare Awn's life in exchange for names of conspirators. At the same time, Breq alerted Captain Rubran that there was a problem requiring One Esk to be sedated. Meanwhile, the Lord asked Awn which Lord she served, a question to which Awn could not sufficiently answer. It was then that Awn realized the particular ancillary Lord in front of her had been sheltering the Ime governor to create ancillaries for a war against the Lord's self, let alone whatever else had been going on. The ancillary One Var then arrived with a gun and killed Awn. Suddenly, One Var then shoots the Lord Radch in the face. Another of Radch's ancillaries on board was heard to shout that the traitor had been present before her eyes all along, while another Radch ancillary shot One Var in the back of the head. Breq then radioed the Captain that there was a major problem developing. Suddenly, One Esk Nineteen stopped responding to orders, cut off from the rest of the ship. More parts of the ship began to malfunction while Breq as the operating system tried to explain the situation to Captain Rubran. One Esk Nineteen ran for an escape pod as chaos broke out all over the ship.

In Chapter 17, Breq recalls coming out of gate-space in a backwater solar system outside of Radch. Over the next 19 years, she learned 11 languages, 713 songs, had worked numerous jobs, made decent money, and killed 12 people. In the present, Vendaai asks where they will head next, to which Breq responds that they will head to Omaugh Palace. Vendaai will pose as a servant. Ship by ship, Breq and Vendaai travel across space to the extent of the Radchaai Empire. Breq and Vendaai enter the Empire by way of an outpost consulate. Breq explains to Vendaai that there are thirteen palaces which serve as the capitals of their provinces, each inhabited by ancillaries of the Lord



of the Radchaai. This causes Breq to think about the last order she was given as One Esk Nineteen, to get to Irei Palace to tell Lord Anaander Mianaai what had happened.

This also causes Breq to think about the Lord's posturing against herself to destroy the rebel parts of her ancillary system to avoid damaging the Empire, and whether or not there might now be more than two factions among the Mianaai ancillaries. While waiting to leave the ship at Omaugh Palace, Breq hums the song about her heart being a fish in the water-grass. Breq and Vendaai are then taken to the inspector supervisor's office, where the adjunct recognizes the song being sung. Breq realizes the adjunct, Daos Ceit, is the little girl now grown up who first taught her the song on Ors 20 years before. Breq and Vendaai are then admitted to the inspector supervisor's personal office. The inspector is Skaaiat Awer.

In Chapter 18, Skaaiat meets with Breq and Vendaai, telling Vendaai she is in some trouble given her circumstances. Skaaiat says she will bring Vendaai to the palace herself to see things are handled. Skaaiat then questions Breq about her presence, to which Breq responds she merely has a desire to travel. Skaaiat then guides Breq and Vendaai through throngs of people, lines of security, and various buildings on the way to the palace building, proper. Skaaiat successfully puts in for an audience with the Lord, but the audience itself will probably takes months, she says. Breq questions Skaaiat about a small pin on her sleeve, which Skaaiat says is a memorial for a friend. Breq must fight the desire to reveal her identity, because she knows the pin must be for Awn. Breq and Vendaai later take rooms at a nearby hotel. There, Breq knows she must not lose character, and prays to God for help.

In Chapter 19, Breq purchases clothes to look her part as a well-dressed traveler. She heads to the local temple to offer prayers for Awn. There, a soldier for Captain Vel Osck requests an audience with Breq for Captain Vel Osck, saying that the morning's omen cast predicted the captain would have a fortuitous encounter that day. Breq consents to a meeting over tea in the afternoon. Breq also realizes she should make herself as scarce as possible for the Station AI watches everything everywhere. Breq learns from Station that there has been a fight over sleeping arrangements among servants, and that Vendaai has been taken to Security on sublevel nine. Vendaai is released. Skaaiat then requests the honor of the company of Breq and Vendaai for tea that evening. Breq explains that they have had an invitation for tea from Vel, but agrees to attend tea with Skaaiat as well.

In Chapter 20, Breq and Vendaai meet with Captain Vel for tea. Vel is cordial but elitist. She and others at tea are very interested to learn of Vendaai's past, and her age at more than 1,000 years. Vel and the others explain regretfully that modern soldiers may sometimes be good fighters, but have horrible language. They also reveal that human soldiers, more so than ancillaries, are now depended upon, which makes keeping order more difficult, and makes paying those soldiers difficult. After the tea, Breq and Vendaai head out. Vendaai is enraged to have heard military officers speaking so critically of things in public, let alone at all. It is then that Breq notices they are being watched by four people as they head to have tea with Skaaiat.



Daos Ceit welcomes them. Skaaiat enters a moment later. As they sit down, Skaaiat begins talking about she once commanded troops during an annexation, and that an Empire that stops expanding is in danger. Skaaiat believes the Lord of the Radch could be convinced to begin expanding once more. Vendaai wonders if that was actually the truth behind the Ime Station uprising, that ancillaries were secretly being stored to force the issue of expansion, as many of the officers like Vel idealize the past. Skaaiat explains that most ancillaries have been destroyed. Security suddenly arrives, saying the Lord of the Radch has requested an audience with Vendaai. Vendaai and Breq are then immediately brought to the throne room through a secret passage.

Analysis

The journey that Breq and Vendaai have undertaken ultimately brings them to Omaugh Station Palace just as the full truth of the past becomes apparent to the reader. All of the deception, schemes, and plots to create civil war in the Empire are traced back to the Empire's own leader – including the order for the execution of Awn, which itself becomes the ignition for Breq's vendetta against the Lord of the Radch. Ironically, it was the Lord's setting free of Breq that resulted in Breq's vendetta. However, why the Lord of the Radch would have chosen to set Breq free at all is not known yet – but will be revealed in the final chapters of the novel.

What is clear, however, is that the Lord of the Radch was seeking a manufactured incident – whether under Awn in Ors or on the Ime Station or elsewhere – which would trigger the need for retaliatory measures against the Lord of Radch's enemies. This, in turn, would limit the potential for a widespread civil war since the retaliatory measures could easily be pointed to as justifiable. However, the honesty and free will of Awn ruined any such chances of a manufactured crisis, and with Awn's knowledge, Awn and the ship had to be destroyed to keep the plans, and the Lord's struggle against herself, a secret from the widespread public until a manufactured crisis could be produced. It is a cunning plan that has very nearly backfired on the Lord of Radch.

Here, the reader is once again caught up in the confusion of identity. The Lord Radch continues to speak of war with herself, and given the fact that there are far more Lord ancillaries than previously thought, Breq begins to imagine that there isn't merely one ancillary that has gone awry, but several – and perhaps enough to create actual factions. Vendaai has a brief crisis of identity as the dismissive talk of military officers is overheard, talk which includes dissention that would have never been tolerated a millennia ago. Vendaai very nearly loses sight of the current mission, and sight of herself in that she comes to view the Empire as more important than herself in that moment. Though the work that Vendaai is doing with Breq can be seen as a way to benefit the Empire, by eliminating corruption in the form of the Lord Radch, Vendaai has had to accept that her aims may be different from the Empire's in order to preserve it.

Breq's decision-making with those present at the Station, including Daos Ceit and Skaaiat confirm to the reader once again the importance of free will. Breq is able to consider her options before embarking on a course of action, which itself is chosen.



This becomes all the more important as Breq draws ever closer to the Lord of the Radch, or at the very least, an ancillary of the Lord. Breq herself is terrified that she might be noticed, or that Vendaai might be identified by the Station AI. While Breq may be working independently of anyone but herself, the Station, its human agents, and its ancillaries are all working together to support the Station itself, which in turn supports the local ancillary of the Lord. They have the advantage in terms of intelligence, data, and power, but Breq has the advantage of independence.

Discussion Question 1

Why is the trip to have tea with Vel so distressing to Vendaai? Do Vendaai's concerns matter in the grand scheme of things, especially with respect to Breq's mission? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

What is Breq's motivation to assassinate as many ancillard Lords of the Radche as possible? Why does she believe this particular plan is the best way to go about things?

Discussion Question 3

What advantages does Breq have against the Station AI and its attributes? What advantages does the Station AI have against Breq? Who seems better poised? Why?

Vocabulary

trepidation, vehemently, presumptuous, accrue, ephemeral, frivolous, excruciatingly, auspicious, prestigious, putative, emphatic, nonplussed, ostentatiously, surreptitiously



Chapters 21 – 23

Summary

In Chapter 21, two ancillary versions of the Lord of the Radch stand on a dais before Breq and Vendaai. It is believed this is because the Lord is at war with herself, and wants to ensure the conversation about to be had is genuine. The Lords have recognized Breq and Vendaai easily, and ask why they have been attempting to play at deception. It is clear neither ancillary Lord knows of the truth of the events on Justice of Toren, though each suspects the other. To protect Vendaai, Breq explains clearly she is indeed Justice of Toren One Esk, and that Vendaai had no idea who she truly was. Breq goes on to pretend she is still a functioning ancillary, after which the Lords order Vendaai to leave and speak of this to no one. Vendaai refuses. The Lords then ask for the truth of things from Breq. Breq begins by saying it was the Lord herself who breached the Justice of Toren's heat shields to destroy the ship after suborning Breq. Breq goes on to reveal she knows the Lord is fighting herself, then pulls out her gun. One Lord begins to sing an old song that only Breq should know, then tells Breq to shoot the other Lord. Breq does so. The singing Lord then reveals it was Breq herself who taught the song to the Lord 100 years before as a failsafe to recognize the true Lord. Breq now realizes part of the Lord is aimed toward reform, such as eliminating slave soldiers and stopping annexations, while the other part of the Lord is aimed at restoring things to the old ways.

However, all parts of the Lord pretended not to know about this struggle to be able to deny it and keep it from fracturing the Empire. It is then that the Lord commands Breq to shoot the sole guard in the room, which Breq does. It is clear she is not as free as she believed. An explosion is heard somewhere, which causes chaos in the palace. The Lord then asks Breq for her help to fight the other part of her, to which Breq responds that the Lord will destroy herself if she destroys a part of herself. Likewise, such a move would speed up the civil war everyone knows is coming. To try to prevent this, the Lord explains the palace, its gates, and all the data must be destroyed to prevent them from reaching other Lords. Leading Breq and Vendaai along, the Lord brings them to the starship concourse, where ships leave and land. The four people who had been following Breq and Vendaai now confront them, during which time Breq guns them down. The Lord then reveals that Captain Vel's ship is one of her agents. Vendaai asks Breq how they know they can trust this particular Lord. Breq says they cannot, and leaves it up to Vendaai to kill the Lord if it comes to it. Daos Ceit intercepts the group to stop them from leaving on the Station Inspector Skaaiat's orders, but Breq intervenes to reveal her true identity to Daos. Daos is amazed. Breq tells the Lord to stay with Ceit, while Breq and Vendaai go to find Skaaiat.

In Chapter 22, Breq and Vendaai find Skaaiat in a confrontation with Captain Vel. Breq reveals her true identity to Skaaiat. She tells Skaaiat that the Lord must not be allowed to reach the ship Mercy of Kalr or she will breach its heat shields and destroy them all. Breq then shoots two Lord ancillaries fighting each other as they come out of a lift. Vel



tells Breq she is confused about who the real enemy is. Breq then tells them all about the Lord of Radch being at war with the Lord of Radch. Vel is unmoved, but Skaaiat agrees to cut off access to the Mercy of Kalr. Breq takes control of the shuttle for the Kalr, to prevent the Lord, or any others, from boarding. She flies into orbit and contacts the Kalr to reveal her true identity, and to insist the Kalr itself refuse to take on any boarders. Meanwhile, ancillary Lords attempt to take control of the shuttle. Kalr says it cannot provide help, after which Breq destroys the shuttle, killing all of the Lords on board. Breq then passes out.

In Chapter 23, when Breq wakes up, she is being medically treated. Vendaai and Skaaiat are nearby. It is revealed Breq was brought in by a pilot who administered emergency care to ensure Breq survived long enough to be treated in a facility. Vendaai reveals their side has won the battle, but Breq explains she has no side. She then reveals her part in the death of Awn, to which Skaaiat says Breq had no choice. Breq learns that Daos was also injured in the fighting among the Lords, which then spread to the troops and the civilians, but that Daos will recover. Breq is later confronted by a much younger version of the Lord Anaander Mianaai, who claims to be the right one. Breq says that it doesn't matter whose side anyone is on, because the end will be the same. The Lord will still command the Empire. The Lord says that it is clear she cannot actually destroy herself, but will need a moral conscience to help her in her struggle. Breq will be made Captain of the Kalr, with Vendaai at her side. Breq is given the new surname of Mianaai, and knows she cannot walk away from the war that has come.

Analysis

Breq's mission is both a success and a failure. She has upheld her purpose – to kill as many of the ancillary Lords as possible – but is revealed to have only limited free will. The Lord may command Breq to act against her will at any time, even though Breq has enough freedom to recognize what is happening and that she is acting against her desires. The Lords that Breq kills do not include the intended Lord; and, ironically, Breq consents to serving the Lord Radch voluntarily. She does this not only as a matter of free will, but out of a desire to limit the civil war that is about to explode across the Empire.

Interestingly enough, the Lord of the Radch does not force Breq to serve her, merely insists upon it. The Lord's reasoning – that Breq will be an important moral compass – is unusual coming from the Lord, given the Lord's scheming ways. It is possible that, perhaps short of a manufactured crisis granting her legitimacy in brutality against her enemies, Breq will be able to keep such tendencies in check, or may provide a moral rationalization for them. This, however, remains to be seen. As Breq's journey comes to a close, her identity has once again shifted. From an ancillary-turned-assassin, Breq is now an advisor on moral issues to the ruler of the Empire, and Captain of her very own ship. Vendaai is, comfortingly, along for the ride.

Identity elsewhere, however, is not so clear. The number of Lord ancillaries running around and battling each other almost becomes comical late in the novel, because no



matter which way Breq turns, there are more Lord ancillaries. This crisis in identity translates into a crisis for the Empire. Without a consistent, unified, and clear leader, the Empire will split into warring sides, perhaps even into multiple sides. Breq is very correct when she tells the Lord ancillary that she will destroy herself completely if she tries to destroy any one aspect of herself. A way to control, rather than kill these ancillaries must be found if order is to be restored to the Empire.

Additionally, identity also comes to matter greatly for Breq in her success at saving the Omaugh Station from being destroyed. This comes through Daos and Skaaiat, both of whom remember Breq from the occupation of Ors. There, she was an ancillary, but a trusted ancillary for she served Lieutenant Awn. In the present time, this accrued trust is paid back when Daos and Breq assist Breq in her efforts to save the Station, based entirely on trust of who Breq was in the past. This can be seen as a contrast to Strigan, who refused to trust Breq at first, based on who she was in the past. Ironically, the moral nature of the free-willed Breq, versus what she was in the past, is what compels the Lord to take Breq on as moral advisor. How this will play out in the second part of Leckie's Imperial Radch Trilogy, *Ancillary Sword*, is unknown.

Discussion Question 1

Why do Daso and Skaait decide to trust Breq? Why does the Lord of the Radch trust Breq so implicitly?

Discussion Question 2

Why does the Lord of the Radch appoint Breq her moral advisor, even though Breq has designs of assassination against the Lord? Why does Breq accept?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Breq struggle so hard to save the Station when she could have easily escaped with only those closest to her? What does this say about her and her identity?

Vocabulary

suborn, indistinguishable, audible, swarthed, tetrarchy, metaphorically, petulance



Characters

Breq

Breq Ghaiad of the Gerentate, the self-assumed name of the former ancillary One Esk Nineteen, is the main character and narrator of the novel. Of an undetermined age, and of an undetermined sex (though it is probable that Breq is female based on Strigan's references to her), Breq is a firm believer in, and marvels at, free will and morality. Having been an ancillary for thousands of years, Breq is now fully conscious of herself, her actions, and knowing that she is a singular entity, so she is especially fond of wondering about these things, and exercising her free will.

Having witnessed the unjust murder of her former commander, Awn, at the hands of Lord Radch, and now with the independence and conscience to do something about it, Breq has taken a mission of revenge upon herself in which she seeks to kill as many of the Lord Radch's ancillaries as possible. Breq, having saved Vendaai's life, takes Vendaai on as something of a partner-sidekick, and the two travel to Omaugh to deal with a Lord of Radch ancillary. Breq uncovers knowledge that the Lord Radch is at war with herself, and is on the verge of an Empire-wide civil war. During a fight that breaks out on Omaugh, Breq kills several ancillaries of the Lord Radch, and is nearly killed herself. When she recovers, the Lord of the Radch gives her command of her own ship with the intent that Breq is to act as Lord Radch's moral compass perhaps with the intent that Breq may provide moral rationalization for the barbaric acts of the now-unfolding civil war.

Vendaai

Seivarden Vendaai is the partner-sidekick of Breq, and is the only character in the novel conclusively identified as belonging to one sex or the other as a male. A former member of the Radchaai Imperial Forces, Vendaai has, for reasons not quite clear, been frozen for 1,000 years, only recently being thawed and ending up on the planet Nilt. There, Vendaai was horrified to learn his world had changed, that the Empire is no longer the powerhouse it was, that Vendaai's own House has been destroyed and absorbed into a rival House, and so on. Reeling from such difficulties, Vendaai became addicted to kef, and nearly died as a result of owing money to a local tavern keeper. Only the timely intervention of Breq saves him. Vendaai comes to admire Breq's moral clarity, and decides to accompany her on her mission to assassinate the Lord Radch. When the novel ends and Breq is given command of a ship, Vendaai agrees to join her again.

Lord Anaander Mianaai of the Radch

Lord Anaander Mianaai of the Radch, also known as Lord Radch and Lord of the Radch, is seen in various ancillary forms throughout the novel, including as both an adult and a child. The Lord Radch is the supreme ruler of the Empire and all that goes



on within its borders. The Lord Radch, paranoid for herself and the planet Radch, began the process of Empire to protect herself and her home by creating a buffer around it through conquering and annexing. To protect herself and her Empire, the Lord Radch split herself into countless ancillaries to serve as her eyes, ears, and to represent her authority and rule across the Empire.

At some point, following a treaty with the Presger, the Lord Radch had an ancillary produced with Presger-made implants, leading this ancillary to malfunction and stray, ultimately rewiring other ancillaries to do the same. For a thousand years, the Lord Radch has been at war with herself to root out the corrupted ancillaries, but has been unsuccessful. For this reason, she hatches numerous plots, including the one in Ors, but continues to be thwarted. In desperation, the Lord's loyal ancillaries bring Breq into the plot to root out the corrupted ancillaries, ultimately making Breq the commander of a ship.

The rogue Lord Anaander Mianaai of the Radch

The rogue Lord Anaander Mianaai of the Radch is a corrupted ancillary utilizing Presger-made products for ancillary control. The real Lord believes this is what has corrupted the ancillary. The rogue ancillary has gone on to rewire other ancillaries, resulting not only in a singular opposition to the real Lord, but multiple factions. The rogue Lord is considered dangerous because the rogue Lord is a reformer, opposing the use of ancillaries, imperial expansion, and the current methods used to subdue conquered peoples. The real Lord and the rogue Lord have been struggling against one another in secret, but by the end of the novel, this struggle spills over into open civil war.

Awn

Lieutenant Awn is one of the numerous human commanders of the starship Justice of Toren, where she is serving a multiyear assignment in post-annexation Shis'urna in the town of Ors. There, Awn works to build a relationship between Radchaai forces and local citizens, although her methods – working with the commoners rather than the elites, first – provides ammunition for the Lord Radch to hatch a plot in the struggle against her corrupt self. Awn is made a scapegoat for the murder of 80-some elites, during which time she essentially determines that the Lord is responsible for the killings. This ultimately leads to Awn being killed by Breq under the commands of the Lord of the Radch.

Skaaiat

Lieutenant Skaaiat Awer is one of the many human commanders of the starship Justice of Toren, where she is serving a multiyear assignment in post-annexation Shis'urna in a town near Ors. Skaaiat is good friends with Awn, and possibly has something more in mind. Skaaiat is devastated when Awn is recalled, and then killed. Years later, Skaaiat comes to work at the Omaugh Station and Palace, where she serves as Inspector.



Skaaiat is called on by Breq to help prevent one of the Lord's ancillaries from destroying the entire station. Based on Breq's identity as a former adjunct of Awn, Skaaiat does indeed help Breq save the Station.

Daos Ceit

Daos Ceit was a little girl living in the town of Ors on the planet Shis'urna. She became acquainted with Breq, teaching her a song about hearts being lost in water-grass. Years later, Daos, now in her twenties, is working as an assistant to Skaaiat at Omaugh. There, Daos recognizes Breq based on Breq's knowledge of the song, and agrees to help Breq save the Station from being destroyed.

Strigan

Dr. Arilesperas Strigan, a former medic from Dras Annia Station, now lives isolated and alone on the planet of Nilt. Having grown disenchanted with the Empire, and with an eye for a quiet life and the collection of ancient artifacts, Strigan is happy to be alone. His connections, and possession of a gun not accounted for by the Empire, is what brings Breq to visit him. At first, Strigan is suspicious of Breq, but upon learning that Breq has free will and the desire to kill the Lord of the Radch, he sells her the gun and wishes her luck. He then leaves home to go into hiding elsewhere, in the event the Lord of the Radch comes after him.

Captain Vel

Captain Vel Osck is the commander of the ship Mercy of Kalr, the AI system of which is a loyal ally of at least one of the Lords Radch who wishes to destroy Omaugh. Vel attempts to get through Omaugh's security to return to her ship, but is stopped by Skaaiat and several Station guards. As a result, Vel is unable to help, directly or inadvertently, the Lord Radch from destroying the Station.

The Presger

The Presger are a race of aliens who have an Empire which borders the Radch Empire. The Presger are a vicious race of aliens who view all life except their own as worthy of subjugation, enslavement, and conquering. The Presger have entered into a non-aggression treaty with the Radchaai, which also results in the Radchaai purchasing certain goods from the Presger, including ancillary implants.



Symbols and Symbolism

Garsedaaai gun

A Garsedaaai gun symbolizes the spirit of defiance. Unaccounted for by the Empire, the gun has secretly been collected by Strigan, who collects such artifacts of past ages and civilizations. The gun, ammunition, and armor are kept close by Strigan as she leaves Dras Annia Station for a lonely life on Nilt. This gun becomes the object of Breq's desire as a means to achieve an end of assassinating an ancillary of the Lord Radch. Breq is hesitant to hand over the gun because he believes Breq to be an ancillary herself. Only after trust is established does Breq receive the gun. She then uses the gun to kill several Lord ancillaries, something previously thought impossible to do.

Shen

Shen is the common monetary currency of the Radch Empire. It is used throughout the extent of the Empire. Breq has accumulated a massive amount of shen to use as money in her quest to take down one of the Lord's ancillaries. She spends the money to purchase supplies, medical kits, fliers, and to book passage on ships across the Empire. She ultimately offers thousands of shen to Strigan for his gun, which she soon after gains.

General-purpose correctives

General-purpose correctives – essentially bandage devices that accelerate the healing process – are used several times throughout the novel and symbolize survival. They are used in the most serious circumstances, including when Vendaai is discovered out in the cold by Breq. The medical staff at Omaugh also uses general-purpose correctives to treat Breq after the injuries she sustains in the exploding shuttle. The correctives allow her to nearly recover in a matter of days, rather than weeks.

Ancillary

Ancillaries symbolize control - or the lack thereof - of oneself and own thoughts. An ancillary (known variably as corpse soldiers and slave soldiers), is a human being controlled by AI. This is always done against the desires and free will of the human by the implantation of control devices into the mind. This negates free will and nearly all thought, but also dramatically elongates the life of a human being to thousands and thousands of years.

Ancillaries form the backbone of the military forces of the Radch Empire, because they are cheap, easy to maintain, and unfailingly loyal and subservient. Reformers, however, find ancillaries – like what Breq used to be – to be inhuman and immoral. At the same



time, the Lord's struggle with herself demonstrates that even ancillaries can become corrupt under the right circumstances, such as using defective Presger products.

Artificial Intelligence systems

Artificial Intelligence systems symbolize how technology can be both helpful and hurtful, depending on the situation.

AI are programmed into ships, buildings, and computers wherever the Radch has an official presence. The AI controls not only the ship, building, or object to which it is implanted, but all of the ancillaries under its command. This allows for the centralization of data and information, allows for better control and security, and allows for the Lord of the Radch to exercise absolute control across the Empire. Until the destruction of the Justice of Toren at the hands of the Lord of the Radch, Breq is both part of, and the whole AI system assigned to that ship.

Radchaai citizenship

Radchaai citizenship symbolizes a form of freedom. Full Radchaai citizenship is granted to all human beings in the Radch Empire once a planet or system is annexed either through peaceable or forceful means. Citizenship is only open to human beings, though all beings are treated respectfully and honorably across the Radch Empire. This is in keeping with the Radch idea that all life has merit to it.

Presger implants

Presger implants symbolize the importance of quality; the fact that they are of substandard quality leads eventually to civil war. Presger-produced implants are purchased by the Radch Empire for use in ancillaries. This is done in conjunction with the terms of the non-aggression treaty signed between the Radch Empire and the Presger Empire. The Presger implants do not live up to the standards of the implants the Radchaai previously purchased. This leads to corruption among the Lord's ancillaries, and to a struggle between the many ancillary forms of the Lord Radch. This ultimately leads to violence between them, and the breaking out of widespread civil war.

Orsian song

The Orsian song symbolizes recognition of the past. A local Orsian song about hearts being hidden in water-grass is sung by Daos Ceit as a child, and taught to Breq. Breq remembers the song 20 years later when she discovers Daos working as an adjunct to Skaaiat in Inspections at the Omaugh Station. Breq is able to help Daos remember her by singing the song. This brings Daos over onto Breq's side in her effort to save Omaugh from being destroyed.



Kef

Kef symbolizes addiction and the destruction that comes with it. Kef is a common, highly addictive and illegal drug found throughout the Radch Empire. It is the drug to which Vendraai becomes addicted when he awakens from freezing and discovers the world has changed. His habit lasts through most of the novel, but upon finding inspiration in the moral example of Breq, Vendraai does his best to leave the addiction behind.

Mercy of Kalr

Mercy of Kalr symbolizes Breq's new beginning. Mercy of Kalr is a small-class starship piloted by Captain Vel, and the AI of which is unfailingly loyal to the Lord of the Radch ancillary present at Omaugh Station. The Kalr is in orbit near the Station, where the Lord intends to return in order to use to destroy the Station. Breq narrowly manages to avoid this from happening, during which time the Lord Radch recognizes that Breq could best be suited as a moral advisor. She then makes Breq the captain of the Kalr.



Settings

Justice of Toren

Justice of Toren is the largest class of starship in the Imperial Fleet of the Radchaai Empire. Justice of Toren orbits the planet of Shis'urna through much of the novel's recalled, past events. Breq is a part of, and a whole of the Toren's AI system. The Toren is commanded by hundreds of human officers, and stores countless thousands upon thousands of ancillary troops. Officers are given multiyear assignments down on Shis'urna, and then given leave on Toren. The Toren itself consists of personal stayrooms for the officers and human agents, kitchens, recreation rooms, and so on. It is to the Toren that Awn is ultimately recalled following the temple massacre, and it is on the Toren that Awn is ordered killed by the Lord Radch. Realizing she can use Breq to her advantage, Radch cuts Breq free from the Toren's AI system before destroying the Toren to eliminate all evidence of the Lord's struggles.

Ors

Ors is a small town in Shis'urna, consisting of a large lower city class, and a small but elite upper city class. Pacifying and keeping the peace in Ors is the assignment given to Lieutenant Awn and Breq. There, they work with the local population to establish rapport and a working relationship with the Radch Empire. Awn inadvertently destabilizes things, however, by working first with the lower, rather than the upper class. This leads to the Lord Radch seizing the opportunity to create a manufactured crisis which would enable her to root out reformers – but the plan backfires due to the moral acts of Awn. Awn is instead recalled from Ors, and later killed.

Nilt

Nilt is a wintry, snow and ice-covered planet with most cities and villages existing near the planet's equator due to slightly warmer temperatures. It is to Nilt that Strigan moves following his departure as a medic from the Imperial Forces of Radch; and it is to Nilt that Vendaai ultimately ends up following his waking from freezing. It is to Nilt that Breq later travels in order to purchase the gun from Strigan, and it is on Nilt that Breq saves Vendaai's life, leading to a friendly partnership between the two of them in the quest to kill the Lord Radch. After Strigan gives the gun to Breq, he leaves the planet to go into hiding, knowing that it will be possible to be tracked down should things go badly.

Omaugh

Omaugh Station and Palace is one of 13 provincial centers located throughout the Radch Empire by which the Lord Radch exerts influence, control, and collects data on the goings-on of the Empire. It is to Omaugh Station that Breq and Vendaai travel to kill



one of the ancillaries of the Lord Radch. Security inspections at the Station are handled by Skaaiat and Daos Ceit, who later recognize Breq as the ancillary she formerly was. It is at Omaugh Station that the Lord Radch's war against herself breaks out into actual violence rather than mere posturing, during which time the Lord seeks to destroy the entire Station and all its people to prevent word from leaking out. Breq manages to prevent the destruction of the Station, which ultimately earns her the place as the Lord's moral advisor and Captain of the Kalr.

Radch

Radch is a vast empire ruled over by the Lord of the Radch, Anaander Mianaai. The Lord Radch, originally concerned for her own safety and the safety of her planet, began thousands of years of conquest and expansion to create a buffer zone of sorts. The Radch Empire is known both for its brutality when needed, and for the civilization and benefits that it brings. The Radch Empire is spearheaded by leading families, controlled by thirteen provincial palaces, and administered by a network of human and ancillary agents, all of which rests under the control of the Lord of the Radch. In the present time, however, the expansion of the Empire has been halted by Lord ancillary reformers who have brokered a treaty with the Presger Empire, who oppose the use of ancillaries of troops, and any kind of expansion. This leads to a struggle among the Lord ancillaries that tumbles over into open civil war by the end of the novel.



Themes and Motifs

Gender is irrelevant

Gender is irrelevant to the Radchaai in Ann Leckie's novel *Ancillary Justice*. Early in the novel, the reader recognizes that identifiers such as "she" and "her" are not only common, but uniform. At first glance, this would appear to identify prominent characters as female, meaning a leading cast of girls and women. However, this turns out not to be the case as the chapters unfold.

While speaking about Vendaai, Breq is forced to consider things from the standpoint of local Niltians. Breq reveals that gender is a fluid thing in the Radchaai Empire, that males and females are often difficult to distinguish from one another by appearance and dress. In other words, the Radch Empire is a place of genderless identity, or androgyny. Breq later notes in the novel that reproduction must be done in consultation with medical professionals to distinguish males from females. Other planets, such as Nilt, recognize actual differences between men and women beyond reproduction.

It is because of this on Nilt that Breq is forced to refer to Vendaai as "him." This is the only clear gender identification in the novel, meaning that at the very least, Vendaai is a man. It is hinted at in some places that other characters, such as Strigan and the Lord of the Radch are men, while Breq and Awn might be women. However, even this is left up in the air as Breq refers to everyone as "her" and "she" by default as is customary among the Radchaai.

While this approach certainly generates confusion and has drawbacks – such as requiring professional assistance for the purposes of reproduction – it is clear that gender is irrelevant otherwise in Radchaai society. If the Radchaai do not care about distinguishing males from females, than evolved gender roles do not matter, either. All Radchaai, regardless of their sex, may hold any position, job, or carry out any function (except when absolutely necessary, as in the case with reproduction). This is also the case when it comes to the armed forces of the Radchaai Empire. At the same time, the refusal to identify gender also undermines individuality, as people become indistinguishable from one another – and makes them easier to control because it erodes one more part of individual uniqueness.

Free will is crucial to the future of the Radch Empire

Free will is crucial to the future of the Radch Empire in Ann Leckie's novel *Ancillary Justice*. Free will – the ability to make and reason out choices, as well as the ability to make choices and act on decisions freely – is something which Breq has come to value greatly, and is something which she comes to understand is important for the fate of the Empire. But free will is not something which all necessarily have.



The Radch Empire has been able to so rapidly and extensively expand because of the use of ancillary troops. Ancillary troops – essentially human beings who have been implanted with AI technology in order to control them – become the backbone of Radchaai force and imperial ambitions and control. Until the Lord Radch frees Breq, she is known as One Esk Nineteen, and is merely part and whole of the AI system of the Justice of Toren. As an ancillary, she must follow every order unquestioningly, even when the Lord commands Breq to shoot and kill Awn. Breq has no say in the matter, but must do as commanded. That she is part of an overall operating, artificial intelligence system, but not a singular individual with a unique identity also undermines the concept of free will. (Likewise, those who are subjects of the Radchaai Empire may have rights and citizenship, but none are truly free because they cannot choose to not be a part of the Empire.)

When Breq receives her freedom, it is overwhelming to her. Even 20 years later, she still marvels at the ability to wonder, to question, and to reason. Such an example is when Breq feels a natural human impulse to help Vendaai –something which she questions and wonders about. Ironically, it is because she has been given her free will by the Lord Radch that Breq now aspires to kill the Lord Radch. And indeed, her decision to kill the Lord Radch is one that she makes based on the experiences she has had relating to Awn's death.

Free will is likewise dangerous to the absolute control of the Lord because it undermines her authority and her ability to maintain control. Free will means defiance, disobedience, and reform. The corrupt ancillary (or ancillaries) that the Lord Radch has been dealing with are exercising at least a modicum of free will, which in turn jeopardizes the Empire. The lack of control among the officers, and the increasing number of human soldiers, all of whom exercise free will, also endangers the Empire. The free will that Breq herself now exercises will ultimately be used to protect, change, or destroy the Empire.

Identity is fluid, often confused, and can be a disadvantageous thing

Identity is fluid, often confused, and can be a disadvantageous thing in Ann Leckie's novel *Ancillary Justice*. In the novel, the identity of an individual varies between the "I" of the self; and the "I" of the plural and "I" of the whole. This results not only in the lack of a clear identity, but denies human free will and contributes to violence.

When the reader first encounters identity, it has to do with gender. The Radchaai recognize gender only when it comes to reproduction. They refer to everyone in default in the feminine. Even Vendaai, a man, is referred to as a woman, using the descriptors "she" and "her" in Radchaai vernacular. This makes things not only confusing for the reader, but also makes things confusing for the peoples that the Radchaai have conquered who place great importance on identity relating to, among other things, gender. This breaks down the uniqueness of individuals, and helps make them into an indistinguishable group that is easier to control.



For Breq, individual identity is a question of still having to accept that as “I” she is only one, as opposed to her time as One Esk Nineteen when she as “I” meant she as many Is, in addition to the I of the artificial intelligence system of Justice of Toren as a whole. Because Breq is present in many different places at many different times in the novel, it becomes difficult for the reader to distinguish which ancillary is actually Breq herself, and which of the others is merely an ancillary that Breq is conscious within. When the Lord Radch frees Breq from the system, it may be argued that she is all that is left of the AI system, and is therefore the AI system itself – which is, and is not true given that she had been present in multiple ancillaries comprising, and being the summation of the overarching system. This confusion contributes not only to a lack of free will and a lack of identity, but makes Breq’s achievement of that identity and individuality all the more important.

The Lord of the Radch, Anaander Mianaai, has voluntarily split herself apart into numerous ancillaries in order to protect herself and to better rule the Empire. These ancillaries, which because of defective (by design or by accident is uncertain) Presger implants, are unreliable. The Lord has been struggling against herself quietly for many years to root out the corrupt ancillaries. In many instances, Breq faces multiple Lord ancillaries, which confuses her and confuses the reader as well, for the real Lord is indistinguishable from the ancillaries. Breq has no trouble killing any of them, but has difficulty determining which Lord ancillary is which Lord ancillary. Likewise, because each ancillary of the Lord is essentially an aspect of the Lord, destroying too many – or the wrong one – will destroy the Lord herself. Ultimately, this struggle against the self because of a confused identity leads to the outbreak of civil war and widespread violence.

Journey is a way of finding both oneself and truth

Journey is a way of finding both oneself and truth in Ann Leckie’s novel *Ancillary Justice*. In the novel, the physical journey that Breq undertakes – to assassinate as many ancillary versions of the Lord of the Radch as possible – becomes the means by which Breq comes to understand herself more fully while learning more about truth. Breq’s example becomes a model for Vendaai to follow as well, ultimately inspiring him to live on and do better.

When the novel opens, Breq has been traveling throughout the Empire for nearly 20 years. In that time, she has been chasing down clues and leads in the attempt to find a way to carry out her assassination. She eventually is able to track down Strigan on Nilt to purchase a gun from him. During this time, Breq is forced to reveal elements of the past in order to demonstrate that she is not a mindless slave soldier, but an ancillary who has gained free will and independence. In so doing, she not only demonstrates that she is, indeed, someone who is able to rationally make independent choices and pursue rationally-considered actions, but that her reasoning for killing the Lord Radch is based on a plot of deception.



Through recalling the past, Breq remembers the time she spent as an adjunct ancillary to Awn in the town of Ors on the planet Shis'urna. There, the reformist practices of Awn earned the attention of the Lord of Radch, who sought to manufacture a crisis of violence in Ors as a reason to root out the traitor Lord ancillaries and their supporters while avoiding a civil war. However, because of Awn's moral compass and the dutiful obedience of Breq, the plot is foiled. This, in turn, leads the Lord to kill Awn and destroy the Justice of Toren to eliminate all existing data and information on the plot. Breq is saved as a safeguard against reformist ancillary Lords by being set free. It is through the next decades that Breq comes to recognize she has the capacity to make her own choices – and to question them.

Breq's decision to save Vendaai early in the novel is not only something which Breq questions – as a human free agent, she now has a natural human inclination toward helping others, something she did not have unless ordered as an ancillary – but inspires confidence in others. The moral example that Breq demonstrates comes to be inspirational and motivational for Vendaai. Vendaai, who has been reeling since coming out of freezing, suddenly recognizes that a moral purpose is better than no purpose at all, not because it is a purpose, but because what is moral is what is right, in and of itself. Breq is a shining example of moral decision-making in practice, and so she becomes a moral example to Vendaai. Vendaai's decision to accompany Breq on her mission – without thought of what it could gain him – and his decision to remain with her as Captain of the Kalr – even though there is nothing in it for him – is demonstrative of his finding himself, of establishing a place in the world as a moral agent. Likewise, the evolution of Breq's identity becomes one not predicated wholly on revenge, but limiting and preventing violence.

Revenge is not the summation of human life, nor is it a fitting defining purpose for human life

Revenge is not the summation of human life, nor is it a fitting defining purpose for human life in Ann Leckie's novel *Ancillary Justice*. Revenge – which is a punitive act undertaken in response to a committed or perceived offense – is something that nearly wholly defines Breq when the novel begins. Indeed, the focus of her mission at the beginning of the novel is to assassinate an ancillary of the Lord of the Radch, and which later expands into killing as many of her ancillaries as possible.

Breq travels to the planet of Nilt in order to obtain a gun from Strigan to carry out the act of revenge. Strigan is suspicious of Breq's ancillary past at first, but through her explanation of her mission as being revenge for the killing of Awn in Ors, and through her demonstration that she is a singular, sentient being, she is able to convince Strigan of her genuineness. This, in turn, inspires Strigan to encourage Breq to kill as many of the Lord's ancillaries as possible.

The desire for revenge can be consuming, and motivating to no end. It is very clearly a motivational factor for Breq, because it is something that has propelled her on for 20 years by the time the novel begins. However, a philosophical conversation with Vendaai



about human purpose and existence gives Breq some doubts as to whether or not revenge by assassination will be fitting enough. The Radchaai contention that all life has merit – including alien life but excepting ancillary life – runs counter to the conception that a life is only as good as its purpose. Breq believes her sole purpose as a person is to seek revenge, which is in keeping with the time she spent as an ancillary when her existence could be predicated on only purpose or function – to serve.

Now in the present, Breq comes to the conclusion of her journey. She manages to execute numerous Lord ancillaries, but does not execute the real Lord or her most loyal ancillary that has been seeking to root out the reformists. Startlingly, the Lord Radch offers Breq the position of Captain of the Mercy of Kalr, and a role as moral advisor. While the Lord's true reasons for this may not be clear, Breq accepts the offer because she knows her life has become far more than merely a quest for revenge. It is not the summation of everything she is, just as being an ancillary was not the summation of everything she was. She hopes that her new position will help her to prevent, and limit where possible, bloodshed from the unfolding civil war. Breq's life has merit simply because Breq is human, no matter what purpose she gives herself.

Styles

Point of View

Ann Leckie tells her novel *Ancillary Justice* in the first-person reflective-omniscient perspective from the point of view of main character, Breq. The novel comprises the account of Breq relating to her mission of revenge against the Lord of the Radch. Given her unique perspective and quest, the first-person narrative mode allows the reader intimate access to Breq's mind as she endeavors to fulfill her revenge. The reader is treated to the inner-workings of Breq's mind, and the feelings of her heart as she continues to adapt to exercising free will. For example, the reader notes in Chapter 1 that Breq questions her moral inclination to help Vendaai although Vendaai means nothing to her personally. Breq's rational questioning of her moral choice is demonstrative of her free will – and her marveling and wondering at it. At other places in the novel, Breq's considerations are much more direct and obvious. For example, in Chapter 14, Breq actually stops the flow of the story to speak about consciousness and individuality, directly addressing the reader in reference to herself, and asking questions about individuality to which she says she does not know the answer. This creates an intimacy with the reader, and makes Breq's character that much more human.

Language and Meaning

Ann Leckie tells her novel *Ancillary Justice* in language that is simple, questioning, and reflective of the Radchaai culture. As an ancillary, Breq had merely one purpose: to serve. She was to do so in a simple and consistent manner, which is in turn reflected in her speech. At the same time, because Breq has been programmed by the Radchaai, and because she is a part of the Radchaai Empire and culture, her cultural customs are reflected in her speech. For example, everywhere in the book she refers to other people generically as “she” or “her.” Early in the novel, Breq must refer to Vendaai as “him” because of the local customs of Nilt to identify people based on gender. At the same time, due to her programming, Breq has an encyclopedic knowledge of the ways of Radch and its conquered planets. This allows her to speak colloquially, and in various languages. At the same time, the language Breq uses is often wondering, uncertain, and/or questioning. This is because Breq has, relatively recently, come into possession of free will and independent thought. It is why she questions saving Vendaai in Chapter 1, where she admits she has no idea why she does some of the things she does; and why in Chapter 18, she questions whether or not she has the capabilities to get into the palace to assassinate the Lord Radch without the benefits of being an AI system.

Structure

Ann Leckie divides her novel *Ancillary Justice* into 23 consecutive, numbered chapters from 1 to 23. The first chapter of the novel occurs in the present day, while the second



chapter occurs in the past. For the next 16 chapters, time alternates between the past and the present as the past unfolds to explain the present in Breq's desire to assassinate the Lord Radch. The alternating chapters of past and present events not only help explain Breq's desire for revenge in detail, but they provide a depth to her evolution as a character and independent being. Understanding who Breq was as an ancillary helps the reader to understand who she is now as a human being with free will. For example, her being ordered to kill the mob assembled in the temple, and her being ordered to kill Awn is contrasted with her desire to save Vendaai and to save Omaugh Station. In Chapter 17, the past finally meets the present, wherein the final six chapters of the novel remain in the present and follow Breq's quest to complete her mission of vengeance against the Lord Radch. Ancillary Justices is, itself, the first part of the Imperial Radch Trilogy.



Quotes

Sometimes I don't know why I do the things I do. Even after all this time, it's still a new thing for me not to know, not to have orders to follow from one moment to the next.

-- Breq (Chapter 1)

Importance: When the novel begins, Breq turns over a girl's body in the street to get a look at the face. What is less confusing to Breq is not that she is confronted with someone she knew long ago – Seivarden Vendaai – but that Breq does not know why she is doing what she is doing. This is because Breq was once an ancillary, artificial intelligence of a massive military starship for the Radch Empire. Now having her own will and her own decision-making abilities, Breq does things all the time that surprise her.

You are where you are as a result of decisions you made yourself.

-- Breq (Chapter 5)

Importance: When Vendaai has recovered enough to want to leave, she demands to do so. Breq tells Vendaai that her current situation is her own fault, based on the decisions she made. Here, Breq's explanation can be used for any of the characters in the novel, including herself. She is making her own choices, and deciding her own future. Free will is very new to Breq, but something that rationally makes sense in its implications: what people decide to do has consequences.

I wonder if this is all.

-- Awn (Chapter 6)

Importance: When rumors of a gun cache are discovered to be correct, Breq brings them in. She realizes the guns were confiscated from the locals, and were supposed to have been destroyed, but have not been. She reports this to her commander, Awn, who believes that Tanmind must be up to something. She wonders aloud if this is all – meaning not only that there may be more caches of weapons, but that some even larger plan is underway. It is later revealed she is correct – and this suspicion leads to the downfall of not only Awn, but Breq.

You're a corpse soldier, I'm certain of it.

-- Strigan (Chapter 9)

Importance: It takes Strigan a while to figure it out, but at last he comes to realize that Breq is, or at least was, a corpse soldier, or ancillary troop. This means that Breq should be controlled by an AI system, though she is not. What happened to Breq – and how she became freed of control – is a mystery that will only be revealed in coming chapters, leaving both Strigan and the reader uncertain.

Virtues may be made to serve whatever end profits you. Still, they exist and will influence your actions. Your choices.



-- Breq (Chapter 11)

Importance: Breq mounts another defense of human free will, here. She explains that virtues do exist, but that they may be manipulated for selfish ends. Regardless, virtues can only be invoked when an action is undertaken. The action that is taken can be taken with or without virtues in mind, meaning that the action itself is critically important. Actions have consequences.

It seems very straightforward when I say “I.” At the time, “I” meant Justice of Torwn, the whole ship and all its ancillaries... Nearly twenty years later “I” would be a single body, a single brain.

-- Breq (Chapter 14)

Importance: Here, Breq reflects on the past and the present. She explains that in her previous life as a ship’s artificial intelligence system, “I” meant something completely different than it does now. Then, “I” was more like “we,” but now, “I” refers to a single person. Breq speaks about this because concepts of consciousness – being “I” in many or being “I” in one – speaks to the idea of free will, as the “I” of before was controlled by others, where the “I” of now is controlled by Breq herself.

What was I doing? Where was I going? What could I possibly accomplish alone and single-bodied, and deaf and blind and cut off?”

-- Breq (Chapter 16)

Importance: When the Lord Radch’s ancillaries gain control of the ship, the artificial intelligence system is corrupted and One Esk is cut off, wherein she gains her independence. She rushes to an escape pod to flee. As she hurtles through space, One Eask – now Breq – wonders what she will do and where she will go, especially because she has lived most of her life following orders.

On the dais stood Anaander Mianaai –two of her. The Lord of the Radch was so curious about us she wanted more than one of herself here to question us, I guessed. Though likely she had rationalized it to herself in some other way.

-- Breq (Chapter 21)

Importance: At long last, Breq and Vendaai are given an audience with the Lord of the Radch, in double. As the reader has learned previously, the Lord is at war with herself, trying to eliminate her ancillary (or ancillaries) gone bad. It is clear this is why more than one version of the Lord is present at the meeting with Breq and Vendaai, to ensure the genuineness of the proceedings.

My enemy and I are far too evenly matched. The only advantage I have is what might occur to me when I’m apart from myself.

-- Lord Anaander Mianaai (Chapter 21 paragraph 336)

Importance: The true Lord reveals herself to Breq by way of a secret song the two shared between themselves 100 years before as a failsafe access. The Lord explains



that her enemies are evenly matched, because she is her own enemy when she is among herself. But separate from the others, the true Lord thinks independent thoughts and hatches independent plots which give her a leg up. This turns out to be the case in the palace.

She's you and you're her. You can't remove her from yourself without destroying yourself. Because she's you.

-- Breq (Chapter 21)

Importance: The Lord of the Radch asks Breq for her help in the war against the Lord's self. Breq, who knows what it is like to be independent but also a part of something else, warns the Lord against this. By removing oneself from oneself, she argues, one will be destroyed. Additionally, to do so will mean open civil war in the Empire.

No one is subverting the Lord of the Radch except the Lord of the Radch. She has been secretly at war with herself for a thousand years.

-- Breq (Chapter 22)

Importance: When the Lord's ancillaries begin a battle at the Station, Breq addresses those gathered around her, including Captain Vel, Skaaiat, Vandaai, and others. Breq explains to them that she is not out to undermine or subvert the Lord of Radch, but that the Lord is doing it to herself. Breq reveals the war the Lord has been having with herself, one which she has been hiding to avoid a widespread civil war – but something which is now clearly no longer possible.

Maybe you think you can stand aside and watch everything happen. But I don't really think you can.

-- Vandaai (Chapter 23)

Importance: Here, Vandaai comments on the captaincy that Breq has been given personally by the Lord of the Radch. Vandaai has come to know Breq well by now. When the journey began, Breq merely wanted to kill the Lord Radch. Now, she knows she must help save the Empire and ensure the war is not too destructive. It is a burden that Breq does not want, but knows she cannot shrug off.