

Becky Chambers, *A Closed and Common Orbit*

1. Objectives

- a. Model practices of critical note taking
  - i. Note taking
  - ii. Close reading and extracting meaning: every character, space, and section can tell you something.
  - iii. Connection making
  - iv. Question asking
- b. Document your reading for future reference (discussions, essays)

2. First lines:

- a. The novel starts with AI and legal reference files, not with sapients.
  - i. How is this beginning this similar to/different than other types of set-ups and world building?
  - ii. *Star Wars* films begin with a text “crawl,” a narrative that orients the viewer about past events and how the current episode fits into the broader narrative.

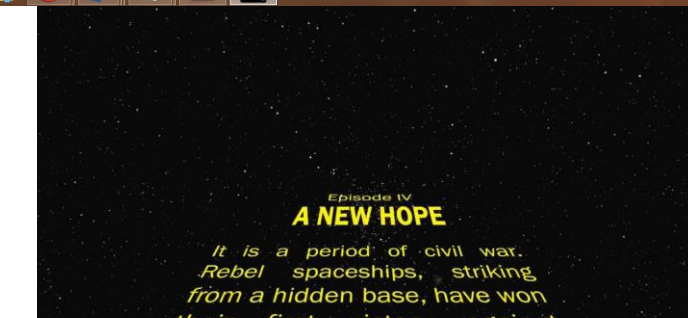
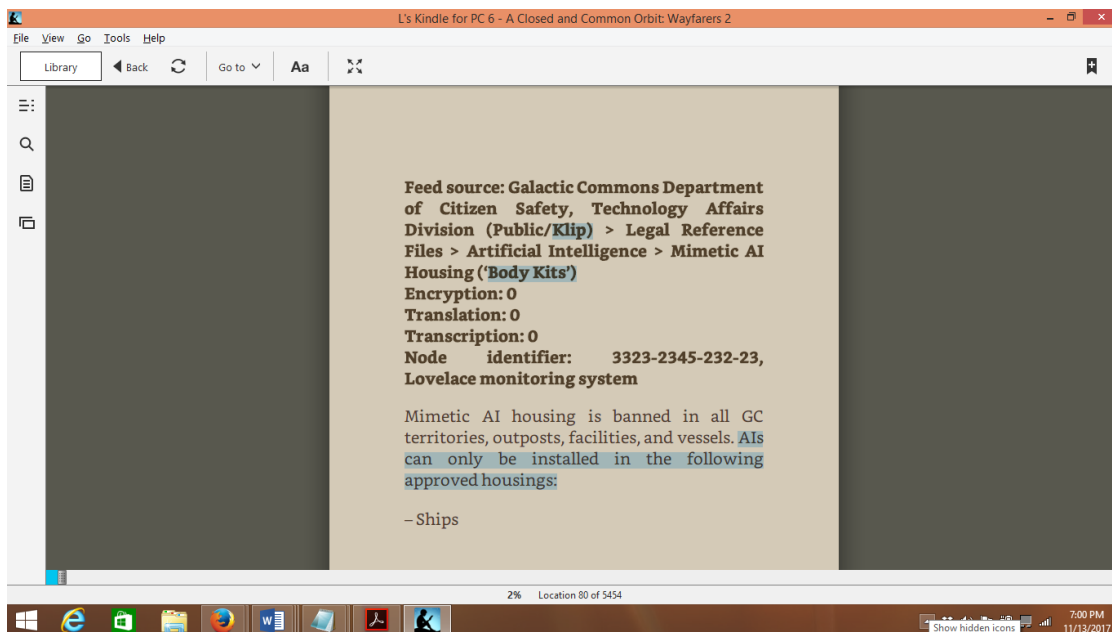


Figure 1 <https://andtherecameaday.files.wordpress.com/2014/12/anewhope-1.jpg>

iii. Whatever follows, happens with this textual backdrop. In Chambers, what follows is in this context of legality or illegality.

1. Body kits

3. Text Style:

a. How does the look of the text (formatting, line-spacing, characters) help to set up and or tell the story?

i. How is it similar to/different than the *Star Wars* text crawl?

b. Looks like an electronic feed rather than a novel: like machine-read code rather than narrative text

i. >

ii. Tab

iii. Space

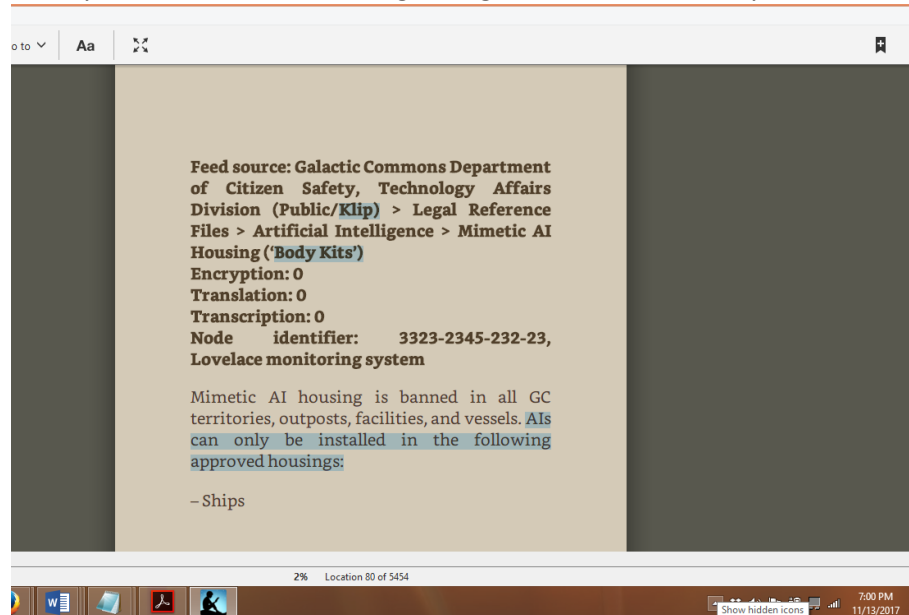
iv. 0

1. Essays and novels use negative space to frame ideas; for example, breaking a paragraph or putting dialogue in quotation marks.

2. The break, continuity, and flow of ideas are tagged with different values for different readers, indexed to other readers' expectations.

3. The lines wrap oddly, like someone used to text flowing in a different way, like someone used to organizing text in a different way.

c. Headings



i. Headings announce but don't narrate: the reader is alien to this world; challenge to get up to speed.

1. Feed source: names the governing body in the novel

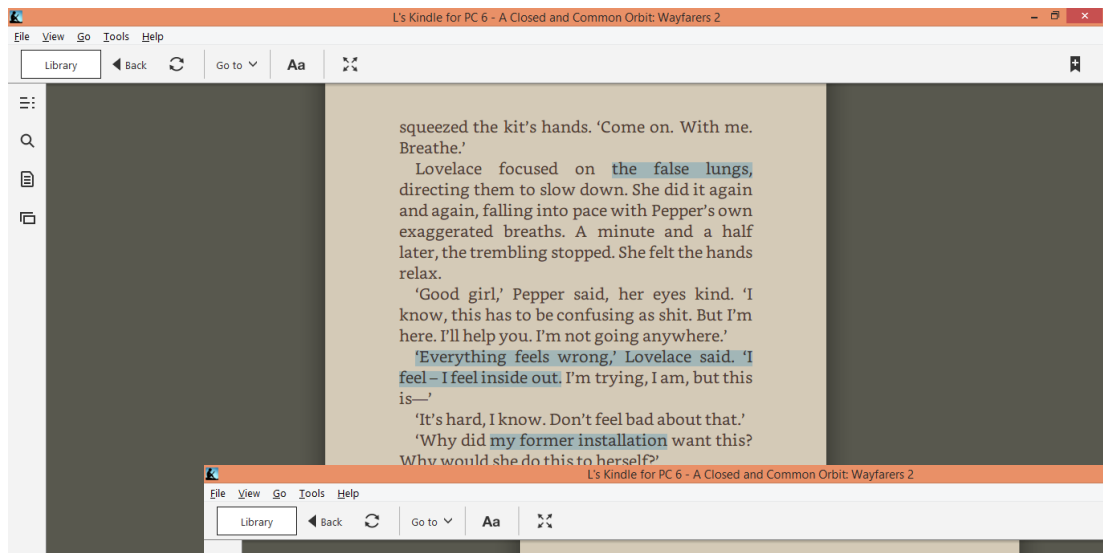
a. Galactic Commons (GC)

b. "Department of Citizen Safety" and "Technology Affairs Division" sound like real entities.

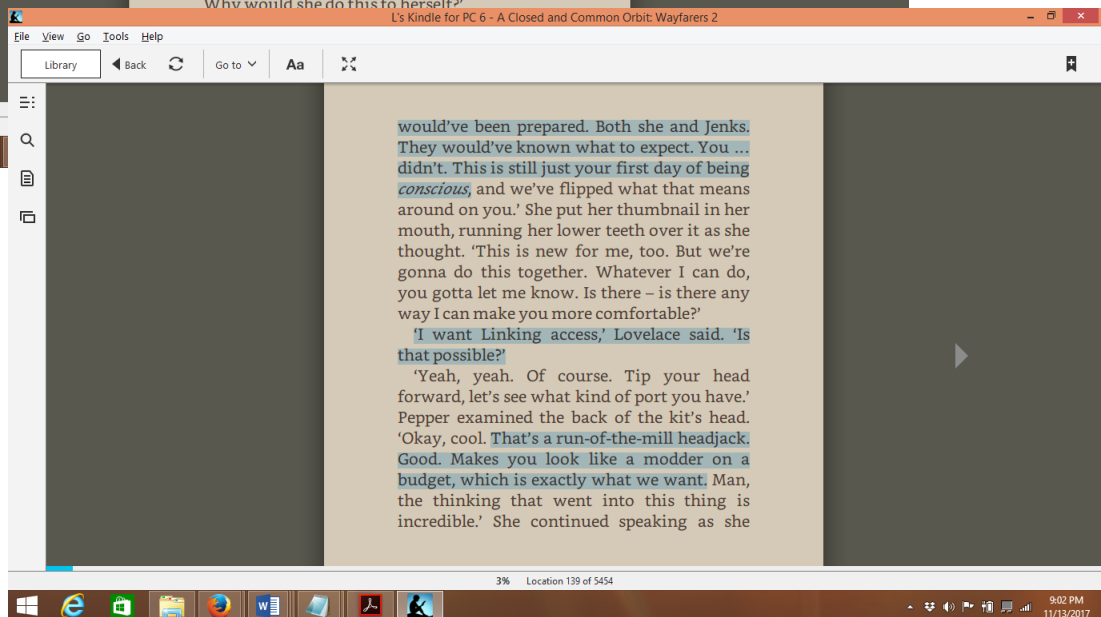
c. Legal Reference Files on AI and (il)legal housings for AIs



- c. The Linkings: like the Internet; Lovelace misses being plugged into the constant stream of information. How do you feel when you can't access wi-fi, data, or voice on your phone?
  - d. Modder
  - e. Headjack: plug-in spot on the back of the head; think of a USB or phonejack.
  - f. Scrib: tablet or smart phone
  - g. Patch: identification built into the wrist; an implant used for everything from paying bills to immunization records.
- d. Lovelace's body has a panic attack
- i. Link to the chapter title: drift; she is used to floating above embodiment, now it glues her down; she can't drift through space.
  - ii. The body could withstand a vacuum, probably. She could just drift, away from the fake gravity and bright light and walls that pressed in closer, closer, closer" (121-122).
    - 1. Why would it be dangerous to turn off this feature of her body kit?
    - 2. She is synthetic, what is the impact of focusing on "the false lungs" with Lovelace?



- e. Who are Lovey and Jenks, and what does their story tell you about how old Lovelace is? Do Lovelace's questions



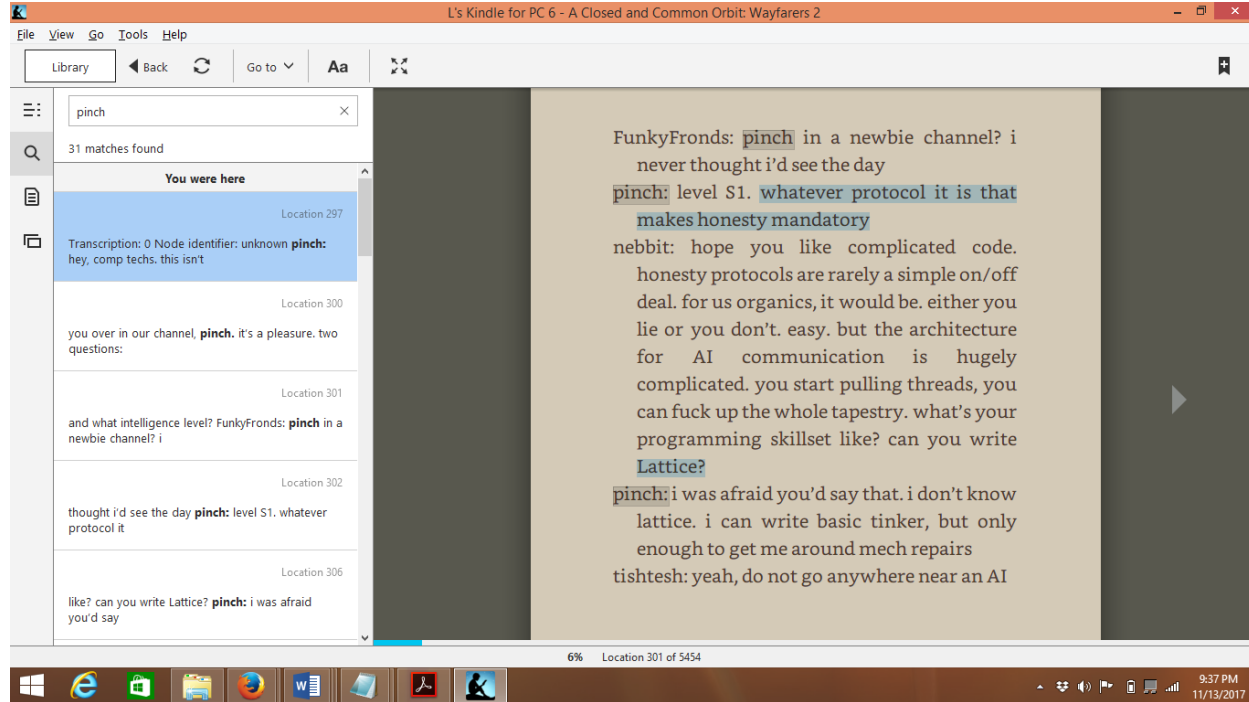
suggest that Lovey's memory banks have been scrubbed, or is she just not thinking clearly due to panic?

- f. Why is it important that Lovelace appears to bleed, in the event of cut or injury?
  - g. How does plugging into the Linkings with her headjack make Lovelace feel? Why does plugging into the Linkings make her feel better?
  - h. Port Coriol – destination. What is it like?
    - i. “You can’t run around the Port calling yourself Lovelace. You’re not the only installation out there, and given that you’re going to be living in the place where techs talk shop ... someone would notice. I mean, that’s the whole reason the kit’s got an organic-sounding voice, too” (163-165).
  - i. What was Pepper’s name before?
  - j. Lovelace can’t lie, and she has to respond to direct questions. How is this a problem for an AI in an illegal body kit?
  - k. Pepper asks if Lovelace can edit this part of her code, but she can’t. What clues does Pepper’s response give?
    - i. stored in, but I’m blocked from editing it.’ ‘I bet that can be removed. Lovey would’ve had to have that removed if she was keeping this thing under wraps. I can ask Je— or, well, no.’ She sighed. ‘I’ll find someone to ask” (188-190).
      - 1. Whose name does Pepper not complete?
      - 2. What does the unknown source feed (encryption level 4) tell you about Pepper’s efforts?
  - l. Why is Pepper risking 10-15 years imprisonment by helping Lovelace?
5. **Jane 23, Age 10**
- a. Switch into other storyline. The language changes; sounds more like a 10 year old.
    - i. Girls sorting scrap.
    - ii. Jane 23 knows she’ll get in trouble asking about where she comes from; who she is.
    - iii. Her job is to sort scrap.
    - iv. Have the same name, different numbers.
    - v. Watched over by robot Mothers
      - 1. Humanoid
      - 2. No faces; “Just a dull silver round thing, polished real smooth” (241).
        - a. What does having or not having a face mean for sapients?
        - b. Can the girls see themselves when they look at the Mothers, through reflection from the round, silver front of their heads?
        - c. Why do the words “robot” and “mother” look odd side by side? How do we normally think of robots? Of mothers?
    - vi. What is life like?
      - 1. 5 minute showers
      - 2. Liquid breakfast at workbench
      - 3. Only human contact: bunkmate
        - a. Jane 23
        - b. Jane 64
          - i. Trios – Why are there sometimes 3 girls to a bunk? Think of what happens to Jane 64, for example.
          - ii. What happens if the Mothers get angry?
      - 4. What happens to the Lucys, Sarahs, and the Jennys?
      - 5. What happens when the girls turn 12?

6. **Switch into illegal owner's manual for a body kit:** "Mr Crisp's Beginner User Manual" (259).
  - i. What does reading the manual tell you that Lovelace can't about being an AI in a body kit?

7. **Switch into encrypted chatroom**

- a. Pinch (Pepper) is asking about modifying code in AIs.



- b. Modifying code is very complicated, and takes Lattice.

8. **Switch into Lovelace's impressions of Port Coriol.**

- a. She and Pepper have been travelling on Pepper's shuttle for 10 hours.
- b. Coriol is very diverse, like a sort of wild-west town.
  - i. Lovelace doesn't know where to look or what to look at.
  - ii. |She found herself jerking the kit sharply around at loud noises and bright colours, trying desperately to take it all in. That was her job. To look. To notice" (323-324).
- c. Meet Pepper's partner Blue
- d. Lovelace picks a name: Sidra

9. **Switch into UNDERSEA TRANSIT LINE**

- a. Coriol is a tidally-locked planet: one side always faces the sun; the other side is always dark. The two continents are divided by ocean. The fastest way to get from the light side to the dark side where Pepper and Blue live is via the undersea transit line.
- b. During the train ride, Sidra notices something about Blue and Pepper's appearance. Sidra's job is to pay attention. What does she see when she looks at them, and in what ways are they manufactured like her?
  - i. Pepper and Blue were from a very particular someplace else. Sidra had determined what set Blue apart from the rest of his species: symmetry. His face was arranged in a way that genes simply could not achieve when left untampered with, and his body suggested bones and muscles structured with equal attention to design. The same was present in Pepper as well, despite all her body had weathered. . . . Whoever made Blue had made Pepper, too. This

conclusion wasn't a revelation. Pepper had explained things on the shuttle – explained the scar tissue on her palms, explained how she'd found Blue, explained why Enhanced Humanity colonies were estranged from the GC. Sidra wasn't sure how many questions on the topic were too many (a distinction she was still learning in all things), but Pepper had been up front. She didn't seem to mind being asked, even though some answers came harder than others. If you're going to stay with us, she'd said, you should know whose house you're in (428-437).

- c. As a ship's AI, Lovelace is made to hover above the surface, above the sapients. What does she learn from being on the train with diverse sapients and Pepper and Blue?
    - i. |The Aeluons and the Aandriks with their breathing masks. The Harmagians with their motorised carts. None of them were meant to share a world together – meant to share this world – yet here they were. Perhaps in that way, at least, she was not so different from them" (440-442).
10. In what ways do the different sections create drift?