

Books Beats & Visions: An Octavia's Brood Reading Group

The Long Memory by Morrigan Phillips

November 4, 2015 - Triangle Arts Association

Synopsis:

A select group of people, called Memorials, are responsible for maintaining society's "Long Memory". They train for years and are able to experience past memories of persons or places. The story centers around Cy, a young Memorial, and Holt, the head of an anti-Memorial movement. Cy's parents, also Memorials, were killed by Holt when she was a child in targeted ethnic violence against her people.

Driven by the influence of wealthy merchants, Holt's movement wages a violent conflict in the north to expand business and wealth. The movement seeks to sway public opinion against the Memorials, claiming that the weight of history holds society back and stifles progress. In addition to the war in the north, Holt rounds up hundreds of memorials and imprisons them in an ancient island fortress.

Cy leads a hunger strike in the island prison to protest Holt and his war. Cy also sends a list of prisoners and news of their hunger strike to her Memorial friend, Ban. Public opinion slowly builds against Holt, and the story ends with a frustrated Holt lashing out and killing an imprisoned Memorial, Je, who stands up to him.

The author references two important events in the history of Memorials: the binding and the unbinding. During the binding, memorials were given the ability and responsibility of keeping the long memory. The unbinding has not yet happened. It is a potential future event where all memories are freed and distributed to society. The unbinding is a legend few have heard, and it is something that Holt fears.

Selected Passages:

Cy stood and let the memory fade. The practice made her feel sad and drained. It was the exploration of the past, not merely the facts of history but the stories of the past, that made the Memorials so important. A Memorial did not simply know that this fortress had been used to cage refugees, a Memorial smelled the death in the air, heard the sound of screams, sensed hope draining from bodies like spilled blood. With Memorials remembering the pain and devastation, their role was to ensure that things like these prison forts would never be used again. But here was Cy sitting in this cell, drowning in the pain of the past mixed with her own.

Dancing at Gotham Jazz Club (Urbo Upstairs): 11 Times Square, New York, NY 1003

Next Meeting: November 18 - IMI Corona - In Spite of Darkness - Alixa Garcia

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☞ *Cy struggled hard against her shackles. She wanted to leap at Holt. To hurt and maim him. Cy could only see the crest, and it filled her with a panic and rage she had never known. Cy screamed, "I don't need the Long Memory to know what you and your wealth have done to my people! I lived it! Others will remember too!" Holt struck Cy across the cheek with the hilt of his sword, knocking her to the floor. "Your people are weak!" he spat. "They remember nothing of who they once were. Only that they are now lawless barbarians." He commanded his guards: "Remove her!" Then he stood with his back to Cy as she was hoisted up, dazed from the blow. "As a Memorial, Cy, you should know it is easier to control what people do with their memories than one might think."*

Discussion:

- ☞ How does this story relate to the community work that you do?
- ☞ How do this story reflect your experiences and the communities with which you are connected?
- ☞ What makes us remember or forget (as individuals and as a society)?
- ☞ Last week we discussed a lot the idea of allies. Who are allies in the story and how do we understand their actions? (The guards? Makati? Ban? Ban's father?)

Writing Prompt:

"It was the exploration of the past, not merely the facts of history but the stories of the past, that made the Memorials so important."

- ☞ Write about an instance where you and someone you respect both experienced the same "facts of history" but have different stories of the incident. Who is right? Can either of you be wrong?

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