

A CONFUSION OF PRINCES GARTH NIX

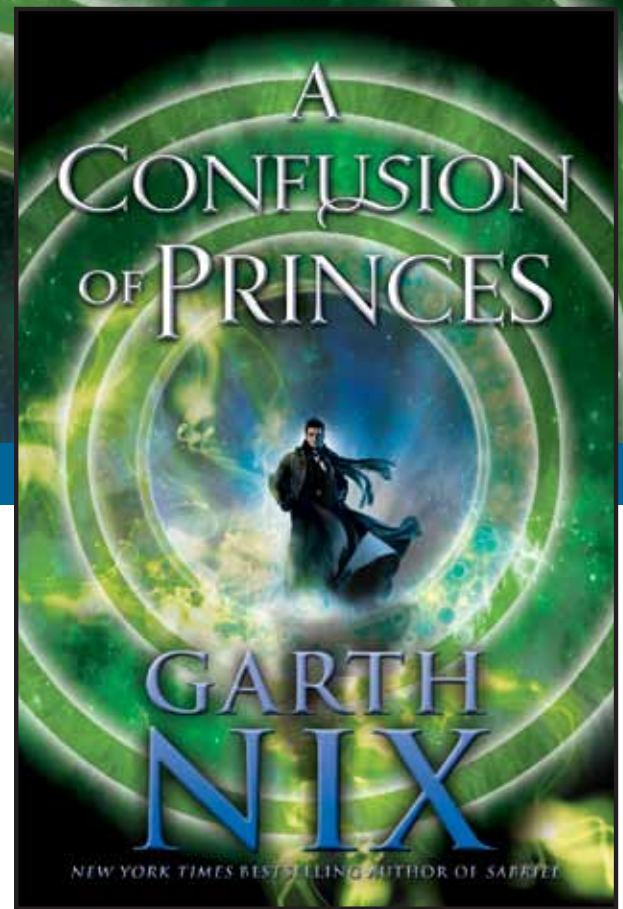
DISCUSSION GUIDE

ABOUT THE BOOK

As Khemri ascends to the rank of Prince—one of ten million cyborgs who run the intergalactic Empire—he quickly finds that it’s not the charmed life he was led to believe it would be. In fact, the more he learns about how the Empire really works, the more he questions his place within it. With danger and intrigue at every turn, this space opera-cum-bildungsroman poses provocative questions about what it means to be human.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Space opera is a subgenre of science fiction; a quick internet search will yield more information about it. Robert Heinlein and Andre Norton, both mentioned in the dedication, wrote in this genre. What characteristics mark this novel as a space opera?
2. This novel echoes some of the themes from Garth Nix’s other books, most notably the idea of death and resurrection (*Sabriel*, *Lirael*, *Abhorsen*) and the relationship between a body and the consciousness that animates it (*Shade’s Children*). Compare and contrast how these themes play out in the different novels.
3. The bildungsroman, or coming-of-age story, traces the psychological and moral growth of its youthful protagonist into adulthood. It’s a staple of young adult literature, where it’s often written in first person to more vividly capture the experience of growing up. What would you say about this book as both a bildungsroman and a young adult novel?
4. A constant wellspring of humor for this novel is Khemri’s exaggerated sense of self-importance and overwhelming narcissism. Discuss how effective these moments are, not only in providing comic relief from the action and suspense but also in foreshadowing Khemri’s meteoric rise up the Empire’s hierarchy.
5. Gender equity appears to be the norm in the Empire. For example, both men and women attain the rank of Prince (women are not Princesses), and superior officers are addressed as “sir” regardless of gender. Can you cite other examples? Discuss how these details not only flesh out the world building but also provide commentary and counterpoint to our present society.
6. “Evil begins when you begin to treat people as things,” writes Terry Pratchett. But for Khemri there is no “begin to”—he has always treated people as things. The most important part of his character development is his gradual appreciation of the worth of humanity. How does this realization unfold?
7. At the beginning of the novel Khemri has unshakable faith in the Empire, but he has completely lost that faith by the end. What are the important milestones along Khemri’s road to disenchantment and apostasy? What is the relationship between faith, trust, and loyalty?
8. The concept of family is alien to Khemri, but he yearns for it on a subconscious level as evidenced by his relationship with Haddad (kind of a surrogate father), his growing attraction to Raine (and the model that her family provides), and his reaching out to his own biological sister. Why are families so essential to human life?



Questions continued on the next page . . .

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9. Khemri has almost everything he could wish for: all the comforts and privileges of being a Prince, but then the added promise of being the Emperor with absolute power. But he gives it all up for something even more important: happiness. How does Khemri come to decide that money and power do not equate to happiness and contentment?
10. As Emperor, would Khemri be free to determine his own fate, or would his will ultimately be sacrificed and swallowed up by the collective consciousness? It's a dilemma that revisits a couple of old philosophical debates. Does free will or predestination prevail? Do the wants of the individual trump the greater good of society?
11. "The Empire made you into a Prince, Khem. But you have made yourself into a human" (p. 336). For all the conditioning of a Prince—the social isolation, the physical augmentation, the brainwashing—there is something inherently human in Khemri, but he also has to choose that route. What does this say about the nature-versus-nurture debate?
12. What draws you into a story most? Plot? Characters? Setting? Ideas? Language? It's the mark of a good storyteller when a story can grab different readers for different reasons. Discuss how each of these literary elements might appeal to a different audience, both in *A Confusion of Princes* and in general.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. **IMPERIAL GALAXY.** You may have noticed from the dedication page that this novel inspired Garth Nix and colleagues to create a massively multiplayer online game (www.imperialgalaxy.com). Check it out, and then think of how you can adapt this novel into a board game.
2. **COVER MAKEOVER.** Discuss how well the cover portrays the contents of the novel and why it is likely to make somebody pick up the book and read it. Then revisit question #12 and design an equally attractive cover that might appeal to a slightly different audience.
3. **TRINITY TECH.** The novel features three kinds of technology: mechanical (Mektek), biological (Bitek), and psychological (Psitek). Research the latest advancements in each field and contrast them with their fictional counterparts to see how far removed they are.
4. **TANTALIZING TITLES.** Create a table of contents for the book, giving each chapter an inviting title that teases and hints at—but doesn't betray—its contents. Feel free to also include other front and back matter, such as maps, a glossary, and a cast of characters.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

GARTH NIX is the *New York Times* best-selling author of the Abhorsen Trilogy, consisting of *Sabriel*, *Lirael*, and *Abhorsen*. He lives in Sydney, Australia. You can visit him online at www.garthnix.com, and you can also find him on Facebook.



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