



Garth Nix answers  
FAQs...

The following is a small selection of the questions I am asked by readers via mail or in letters. The answers are those current at the time this book went to press, so there is always the possibility some of the answers will change.

*Are you going to write another book about Sabriel?*

I'm unlikely to write another book in which Sabriel is the main character. I do however, have notes for two novels set in the Old Kingdom and Ancelstierre. One is about Chlorr of the Mask and her early life, it takes place several hundred years before the events in Sabriel. Another is set about three years after 'Nicholas Sayre and the Creature in the Case' and would see some of the main characters from Abhorsen return. Despite the fact that I have these notes, I may not write the books.

## Extra ...

*How do you pronounce Sabriel, Lirael and Ancelstierre?*

I always say you can pronounce the names however you like. I sometimes change how I pronounce them myself. However:

Sabriel        SAB-REE-ELLE or SAY-BREE-ELLE

Lirael         LI-RAY-ELLE (with the 'Li' as in 'lift')

Ancelstierre AN-SELL-STEE-AIR

*Will there be a movie of Sabriel and the other books in the trilogy?*

Maybe. I've always said I'd rather have no movie than a bad movie. I can only influence this by carefully choosing who I sell the film rights to, and, in my case, by attempting to sell those rights not directly to a studio but as part of a 'package' that includes a writer (or co-writer) and director whose work I admire and trust. Even if I manage to do this and at various times this has looked likely, a movie still might not get made. If it is going to happen, you'll hear about it!

*What's Touchstone's real name?*

Have a look at the last chapter of *Abhorsen* (not the epilogue), when the seven are attempting to bind Orannis. Touchstone uses his true name then.

*The map on the front page describes one area, is there more to this world?*

Yes. There is much more to both the world of Ancelstierre (some other countries are mentioned in *Lirael* and *Abhorsen*) and the world of the Old Kingdom. In effect there are two worlds which overlap or impinge on each other only in an area roughly described by the Wall and out to sea for some distance.

*Why did you choose bells as the tools of necromantic magic?*

It's always difficult to work out where particular ideas come from. However, in the case of the bells that necromancers and the Abhorsens use, I think there were two points of inspiration. The first was that I was trying to think up a kind of magic that was a bit different to that normally encountered in fantasy fiction, and as it was to be used by the Abhorsens I was looking into folklore about exorcising evil spirits and so on.

Possibly the most famous form of exorcism is by 'bell, book and candle.' That set me to thinking. Books were out, because I wanted something different from books of spells. Candles were out because they would not be very dramatic and also highly impractical (at least so I thought back then, I have since considered ways they could work). That left me with bells.

Around the same time, from reading Dorothy L. Sayers' murder mystery *The Nine Tailors*, I became aware that church bells often had names. That led me to look into the naming of bells. The two inspirations converged and I made up the seven bells, with their names and characteristics.

*Where do you get your ideas?*

Ideas do not, as a rule, spring fully-formed into or out of any writer's head, unless you put something in that head in the first place. You need to fill your mind and memory and both consciously and subconsciously work with all the material you have gathered to create ideas.

I personally gather 'raw idea material' from everything that goes on around me, from everything that I observe and experience, either directly or vicariously. I get ideas from my

## *Extra ...*

own life, from other people's lives, from reading (particularly history, biography, myths and legends), from television, from the Internet. I might get ideas from observing people in the street; from incidents in, or details of, history; from myth and legend; from landscape; from the living natural world; from the sciences; from all the fiction I've ever read.

By 'ideas' I don't mean fully-fledged plots, situations or characters, for these are expressions of ideas, things that are worked up from the raw material. The fleeting bits of information that lodge in my head could include 'ideas' like:

- ◆ The look of the sky in spring when a light rain is falling at sunset
- ◆ The Venetian agents who stole the body of St Mark from Alexandria in the 7th century
- ◆ Hand-forged roman nails
- ◆ A huge Persian carpet of blue and gold, easily forty feet long and forty feet wide
- ◆ Mynah birds turning on an injured fellow
- ◆ An absent-minded man's peculiar walk

These are all just bits of information that arrived in my mind in various ways. I have spent a lot of time looking at spring skies with the rain falling — in fact I look at the weather a lot and think about how it might be used in stories. I read about the Venetian agents who stole the body of St Mark in John Julius Norwich's history of Venice. I have seen Roman nails in various museums and have handled replica nails. The Persian carpet I saw in a mosque in Syria, but I might just have easily have seen

it in a book or on television. The mynah birds are a pest in my back garden, and the absent-minded man walks past my office at least once a week and his peculiar progress is always of interest.

I like to think of my mind as a kind of reservoir that is constantly being topped up with all kinds of information, which I am also unconsciously sifting all the time for things that might be useful in making a story. While the reservoir is constantly being topped up with new information, my subconscious and sometimes conscious mind is at work on both sifting these chunks of information and connecting them into larger rafts of ideas that may form the basis of a story. This is essentially daydreaming, taking thoughts and seeing where they might go and how they might connect with other thoughts.

In many ways daydreaming is one of the core prerequisites for writing. The trick is to get past the daydreaming phase and actually do something with all that idle musing. Ideas by themselves are merely a raw material, and it is not enough just to have ideas. You have to work to turn them into a story.

*Do you have a favorite among your books?*

My favorite is always the one I haven't written yet, because when I imagine a book, it's always better in my head than how they come out. I'm always wanting to try and get closer to the story as it is imagined. I never get there, but I always think it's possible . . .

## *Extra ...*

*Is Garth Nix your real name?*

Yes. I guess people ask me because it sounds like the perfect pseudonym for a writer of fantasy. However it is my real name!

*Will you ever write a sequel/prequel to Shade's Children?*

I have no plans to write a sequel and no notes about possible storylines. However, I never know when a story will rise up out of my subconscious. A sequel is at least theoretically possible, as I always envisaged that the Overlords in *Shade's Children* had taken over a single continent (basically Australia) and nowhere else, and the rest of the world was unable to intervene. So maybe the Overlords could try and establish themselves elsewhere ...