

Discussion Questions

1. Why do the Oankali believe that human men are an unsolved problem, and how do you think Akin was meant to solve this problem? How do his human and Oankali sides manifest?
2. How do you think having a perfect childhood memory, as Akin has, would change you as an adult?
3. How does the Oankali trait of sharing any pain that they cause in others influence them as a species?
4. What similarities exist between the Oankali and humans?
5. Why do you think the Oankali give the resisters an extended life span?
6. Discuss the role consent plays in the novel, both in human- Oankali and the human resister settlements.
7. How does the Oankali perception of sex and gender compare to our own?
8. How do the first inventions, or re-inventions, in the human resister colonies reflect on the humans' priorities and goals?
9. When Akin calls Gabe's phoenix coin a lie, Gabe gets angry and says Akin is calling the human resisters' dream a lie. What role do mythology and stories play in human culture?
10. What significance does the book's title have?
11. The Oankali frequently discuss the Human Contradiction. What is this, and do you agree with the Oankali? What are the best and worst traits of humanity?
12. When Tino reflects on the war that destroyed Earth, he wonders, "How could sane people like the ones he had left behind in Phoenix do such a thing—or, how could they let insane people gain control of devices that could do so much harm? If you knew a man was out of his mind, you restrained him. You didn't give him power" (pages 44–45). Discuss this in terms of our world history. Do you agree?
13. When Akin encounters the sick man who refuses to be healed by an ooloi, he thinks, "How stupid to be sick and know where there was healing and decide to stay sick" (page 75). How do you see this attitude manifest in our own world, and why?
14. When Akin visits one of the human resister towns, they drive him away because his skin is darker than theirs. How does racism relate to the Human Contradiction?

15. Neci is determined to remove the tentacles from the kid- napped human-Oankali children, even though it will cause them great pain and perhaps mortally wound them. Why? Do you see any parallels to this behavior in our own world?
16. “You controlled both animals and people by controlling their reproduction” (page 222). Discuss this statement in terms of the novel and our own world. By what means do the Oankali colonize Earth? How does it compare to colonization attempts in our own world?
17. Do you agree with the Oankali that the human species is doomed to fail?
18. In this novel, each human must decide whether to join with the Oankali, join the human resisters, or, ultimately, rebuild the human species on Mars. Compare the decisions of Lilith, Tate, Gabe, and Tino. Why do they each make their respective choices? What would you do?