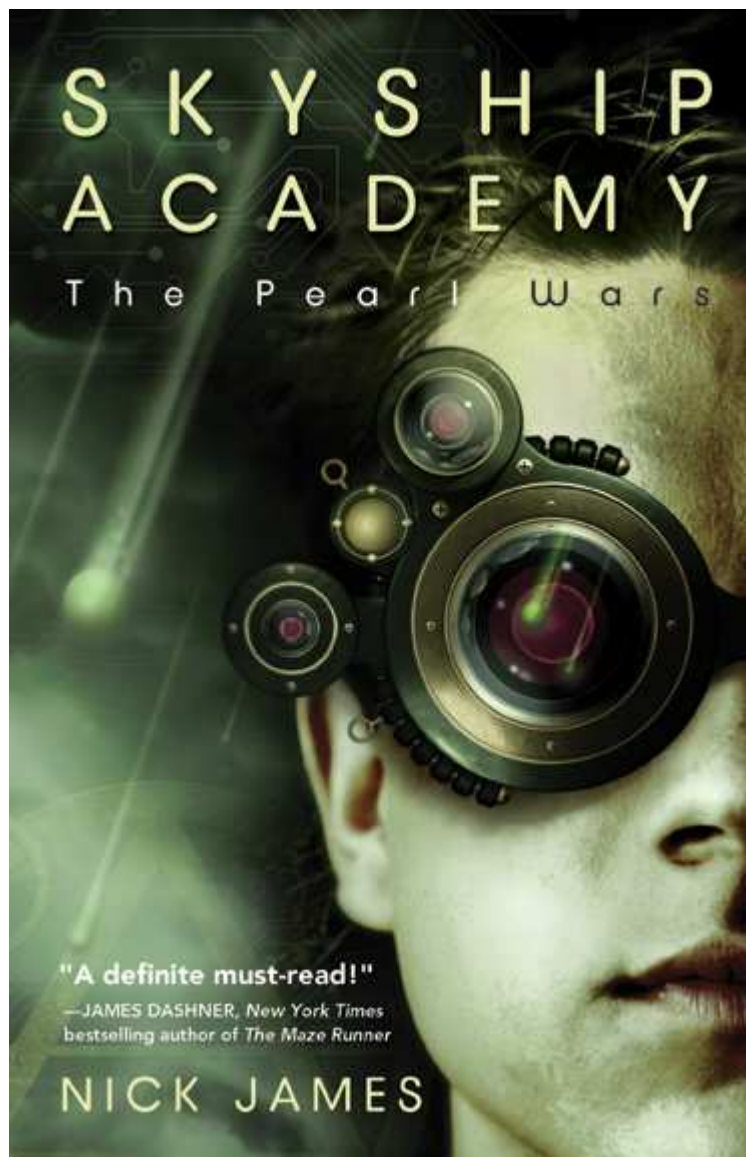


# Skyship Academy: The Pearl Wars

by Nick James

## Reader's Guide



## END OF CHAPTER QUESTIONS

### Chapter One

1. Based on information from the text, what events can you infer occurred just prior to the beginning of this chapter?
2. Why do you think the author chose to open the book with this specific scene? How would it have been different if the story would have began before or after this event?
3. On page six, Cassius accuses Jesse of thinking that the United States has become a "failed country." What do you think might have happened to make Jesse think this?

### Chapter Two

1. The reader is introduced to Fringers for the first time in this chapter. What role do they seem to play in this dystopic, "failed country" future? Why do you suppose they're living in such a dangerous part of the country? Are there people like this in our world now?
2. Jesse ends the chapter by saying the following: "*Wishful thinking is what I live on.*" What does this tell you about him?

### Chapter Three

1. Based on the descriptions in this chapter, would you like to live in a Chosen City? Why or why not?
2. On page twenty-five, it's noted that the President works in secrecy and that nobody knows his name. Why do you think this is? How does this information fit with the other things we know about this future world?
3. Why did the Skyshippers separate themselves from the rest of the country?
4. Using examples of the ways in which Cassius and Madame interact (both physically and verbally), what can you tell about their relationship?

### Chapter Four

1. On page 41, the reader learns a little about Jesse's deceased parents. How do you

think their past accomplishments affect the way Jesse thinks about himself?

2. On page 51, Captain Alkine describes the Unified Party as a “silent dictatorship.” What do you think he means by this?

3. After his meeting with Alkine, Jesse longs to move away from the Academy and strike out on his own. Can you relate this feeling to an event or experience in your own life? Explain.

4. Why would Skyship Academy have to operate under the front of a liberal arts school? Do you think it's morally okay for them to lie about their activity? Why or why not?

### **Chapter Five**

1. What do you think happened to Cassius that caused him to explode? What might this mean for Jesse Fisher?

2. Madame is willing to break laws and send Cassius up to the Skyship Community to kidnap Jesse, yet she constantly talks about how the Skyshippers are the ones breaking laws. Do you think she's being hypocritical in her decision making, or is she justified? Why?

3. Do you think the fact that Madame isn't Cassius's birth mother changes the way that he interacts with and feels about her? How so?

4. What do you think might be in Madame's mysterious black cube?

### **Chapter Six**

1. Jesse interacts with Avery Wicksen through much of this chapter. How is their interaction different from the way Jesse interacts with characters like Eva Rodriguez and Captain Alkine? What does this tell you about Jesse and Avery's relationship?

2. On page 67, Jesse uses the following phrase to illustrate his sudden disappointment: *“My inner symphony hits a bum note and the orchestra lights flicker off.”* Using this quote as a model, write your own metaphorical phrase that indicates the same feeling of disappointment.

3. What common experiences and character traits do Jesse and Avery share? Think about a good friend of yours. Do you share common experiences or traits? If so, how do these affect your friendship?

### **Chapter Seven**

1. In this chapter, the reader gets a brief glimpse at how Pearls are harnessed. What do you think our world would be like if humanity discovered something as powerful as

Pearls? Would it change for the better or worse? Why?

2. How do you think Cassius feels after witnessing the death of the Fringers on page 79? What kind of effect, if any, do you think this will have on how he approaches his upcoming mission in the Skyship Community?

3. In pages 80-82, the reader is given a glimpse at the world outside of America. What seems to be happening in Europe (described in the book as “the Commonwealth”)? What do you think might be happening in the rest of the world?

## **Chapter Eight**

1. While playing Bunker Ball, Jesse has a very different strategy than his teammates. If you were to play a game like this, what would your strategy be? What do you think this says about you as a person?

2. During the game, Eva continually tells Jesse not to hesitate. What are some other areas of Jesse’s life where he seems to “hesitate”? Do you think Eva’s advice would make Jesse a more successful trainee at the Academy? Why or why not?

3. Jesse blacks out and sees a mysterious, mist-clogged city. What importance do you think this vision has to the rest of the story? Who might be casting the shadow that he sees at the bottom of page 92? Why do you think this?

## **Chapter Nine**

1. Jesse runs into Avery late at night. What do you think she was doing out of her dorm room? What evidence is provided that supports your thinking?

2. On page 99, Avery tells Jesse that “*emotion compromises a person.*” What does she mean by this? When a person is involved in an activity or job that requires important decision-making, what role do you think emotion should play? Explain your thinking.

## **Chapter Ten**

1. How does the Skyship Community’s system of government seem different than the Unified Party’s? Compare and contrast. Which do you think would be more effective? Why?

2. On page 105, Representative Leone first addresses Madame using her “real” name, Jessica. Why do you think he chooses to call her this?

3. The word “unified” in “Unified Party” seems to carry different meanings depending on which character is using it. Think about the word “unified.” In what ways would a “unified” government be positive? In what ways might it be negative?

4. After watching the way in which Madame interacts with the Tribunal, do you think Cassius's opinion of her has changed at all? Explain.

### **Chapter Eleven**

1. Why is Jesse so upset about being "*saved by a girl*" (pg 119)? How do you think his reaction makes Eva feel?

2. When the falling Pearl moves off course at the end of the chapter, Jesse knows that something's wrong. What implications do you think this has for the rest of the book?

### **Chapter Twelve**

1. Despite feeling overwhelmed and inadequate as a member of the Academy's training program, Jesse isn't opposed to sneaking around with Avery. Other than his affection for her, what motives might be driving his decision to explore the Academy's secrets?

2. On page 123, Jesse mentions a class lecture called "The History of Pearls." Based on what you know about the future world of Skyship Academy, write a title and short course description of a class that might be taught at the Academy.

### **Chapter Thirteen**

1. Jesse learns a lot of new information about his past and his relationship with Captain Alkine and Eva. Name two or more instances of foreshadowing that occurred before this chapter and would point toward these new revelations.

2. The faculty at Skyship Academy have differing views on whether they should tell Jesse about his past. Give a reason why you think Jesse should know this information and a reason why it would be better if the secrets remain hidden. Explain your thinking.

3. How do you think Eva feels, reporting information about Jesse to Captain Alkine behind Jesse's back? Why might she feel this way?

### **Chapter Fourteen**

1. Skyship Polaris is an entertainment ship, dedicated to amusements, gambling and shopping. If you were to build or live on a skyship, what would you want to have onboard. Why?

2. Despite breaking from the surface world, the Skyship Community builds replicas of many of Earth's monuments on their ships, like the scaled-down Eiffel Tower and Taj Mahal on Skyship Polaris. Why do you suppose they do this?

3. On page 148, the study of philosophy is described as one of the "Wasted Subjects," according to the Unified Party. Why do you think this is? And what effect might it have

on society?

### **Chapter Fifteen**

1. Why do you think Jesse was dishonest with Mrs. Dembo about his sudden health crisis? Do you think he was right to downplay it? Explain.
2. How does Jesse's "explosion" episode differ from Cassius's? How is it similar?

### **Chapter Sixteen**

1. Cassius arrives at Skyship Academy. What opinion does Cassius seem to have about the ship itself? Use evidence from the text to support your thinking.

### **Chapter Seventeen**

1. Cassius's pistol is loaded with Pearl energy. Given what you've learned about the substance so far, what other uses do you think Pearls may have?
2. Mr. Wilson sacrifices himself for Jesse even though they have a strained relationship, at best. Write about a time that you or someone you know sacrificed something for the good of someone else. What effect did this sacrifice have?

### **Chapter Eighteen**

1. Jesse suspects that something's going on with Avery. What do you think it might be? Offer evidence from this chapter—or previous chapters—to support your idea.

### **Chapter Nineteen**

1. Does Cassius's opinion of Madame change at all in this chapter? If so, how?

### **Chapter Twenty**

1. From the descriptions in this chapter, what impression do you get about Chosen Cities?
2. Several pieces of futuristic technology are alluded to in this chapter. Brainstorm a new technology of your own that would fit into the world of Skyship Academy. What would it be called? What would it do? Who would use it?

### **Chapter Twenty-One**

1. Cassius carries with him a lot of political power on the Surface. In other words, he usually gets what he wants as far as passing government checkpoints, avoiding scrutiny from authority figures, etc. How do you think this has affected him as a person?

2. Madame tells Cassius that “*something has come up*” (pg. 186). What do you suppose she might be talking about?

### **Chapter Twenty-Two**

1. In this chapter, Jesse has the second of his dream visions. What connection might it have to his first one? What do you think is happening in this scene?

### **Chapter Twenty-Three**

1. What do you think about Avery's secret? Does it change how you feel about her as a character? Was she justified in keeping this secret from Jesse? Explain.

2. On page 199, when Jesse tells Avery that the Academy are the “good guys,” she replies by saying: “*It's never that simple.*” What does she mean by this? How does this statement reflect what you know about the story so far?

### **Chapter Twenty-Four**

1. How has the way Jesse and Cassius interact changed since the first chapter? Why might this be?

### **Chapter Twenty-Five**

1. Jesse does something pretty spectacular with the Pearl in this chapter. What implications do you think this newfound power is going to have?

### **Chapter Twenty-Six**

1. This chapter occurs at the same time as the last chapter. Why do you think the author chose to rewind time and give the reader Cassius's perspective here, rather than simply continue on from the end of the previous chapter?

### **Chapter Twenty-Seven**

1. Do you think boarding the Chute System was a smart move for Jesse and Avery? What would you have done in their situation? Why?

2. Jesse worries that his newfound power may start a war between the Skyship Community and the Unified Party. Can you think of a time in history where a single person or resource has triggered a war?

### **Chapter Twenty-Eight**

1. Do you think it was smart of Cassius to shut off his com-pad? What implications

might occur because of this decision?

### **Chapter Twenty-Nine**

1. Why would the Fringers throw rocks at the passing train?
2. How does Avery and Jesse's initial meeting in Lookout Park frame their friendship? What seem to be some of the important, persistent characteristics of their relationship?

### **Chapter Thirty**

1. Why do you think the author chose to widen the perspective away from Cassius in the last three paragraphs of this chapter? Is this technique successful? Explain.

### **Chapter Thirty-One**

1. Jesse seems to regain some of his trust of Avery in this chapter. Do *you* trust that she has his best interests in mind? Why or why not?

### **Chapter Thirty-Two**

1. This chapter represents a big turning point for Cassius. Using a t-chart, make a list of his characteristics and motivations *prior* to the train crash and a list of what you think his characteristics and motivations will be *after* the train crash. Some may be similar.
2. Explain the meaning of the following statement:  
*"It was a game. They were pinballs, him and Fisher. Pinballs filled with gun powder."*

### **Chapter Thirty-Three**

1. Avery reveals that Madame has a strategy of taking in young, orphaned kids and training them to work for her. Why do you suppose she chooses to do this rather than just train adults that have already enlisted in the military?
2. On page 244, Avery tells Jesse that she's drawn to him because he "gets it." Knowing what you know about these characters, what do you think she means by this? What does it say about Avery as a character?

### **Chapter Thirty-Four**

1. How does Bobby Henderson seem different from other Fringers we've met throughout the story?
2. This chapter introduces the concept of "City Salesmen," who attempt to profit from the very people they've thrown out of the Chosen Cities. Does this idea mirror any current social issues? Explain.



### **Chapter Thirty-Five**

1. Cassius chooses not to leave the Fringe driver outside to die, yet at the beginning of the book he has no qualms with allowing Jesse to fall to his death. What's changed throughout the story that would affect his decision making?

### **Chapter Thirty-Six**

1. What could the Unified Party and Skyship Community learn from the success of the small society in Lenbrg? Could the people of Lenbrg learn something from the Unified Party or Skyship Community? Explain.

2. Explain the relationship between the Skyship Community and the Fringers. Do you think they could exist without each other? Why or why not?

### **Chapter Thirty-Seven**

1. Based on what happened last time Jesse held a Pearl, what do you suppose he's going to do with it this time? What effect might it have on the people of Lenbrg?

### **Chapter Thirty-Eight**

1. How do you think Jesse feels about seeing Captain Alkine on the Surface? Was he right to run from him?

2. Why do you think Jesse is quicker to forgive Avery than he is Eva?

### **Chapter Thirty-Nine**

1. What do we know about the Cascadians? How do they seem to be different from other Fringers? How are they the same?

### **Chapter Forty**

1. For several chapters now, the scene has been restricted to the inside of George Barkley's van. What effect does this have on how the story is told? Why do you think the author chose to confine these five characters in this way?

### **Chapter Forty-One**

1. Twice now, Jesse has seen a humanoid shape as he explodes the Pearls. What do you suppose this might mean?

2. On pages 305-306, a post-apocalyptic Seattle is described. Using the text as a model, write a paragraph describing what the city you live in might look like in the world

of Skyship Academy.

### **Chapter Forty-Two**

1. How might Jesse's ability to explode Pearls and Cassius's ability to self-explode be related?
2. The reveal at the end of this chapter adds a new ripple to the mythology of Pearls. What implications might this have?

### **Chapter Forty-Three**

1. Why does the girl from the Pearl call Jesse the "Key"? What does this mean?
2. On page 340, Jesse comes to the realization that every Pearl used as an energy resource has killed the person inside. If other people in the world of Skyship Academy knew about this information, what do you think would happen?

### **Chapter Forty-Four**

1. Madame's ultimate motivation is revealed in this chapter. What is it? What does she want from Jesse and Cassius?
2. Imagine if you learned that you were responsible for the survival of an entire race of people. How would you feel? How do you think Jesse and Cassius are feeling?
3. On page 334, Cassius tells Madame that, in her eyes, he's a "reaction" and "afterthought". What does he mean by this?

### **Chapter Forty-Five**

1. Beyond having her spy on Jesse, how has Madame used Avery throughout the book? Could this backfire?
2. Knowing what you do about the conflicts and relationships between the Unified Party and the Skyship Community, what potential ramifications might Captain Alkine's decision to bring the Academy to the Surface have? Was it the right decision? Explain.

### **Chapter Forty-Six**

1. Based on the revelations in the chapter, what is the relationship between Jesse and Cassius's powers? Which ability would you most like to have? Why?
2. How are Jesse and Cassius's reactions to their parents' message different? How are they the same? What kind of reaction would you have had?

3. Why do you think the author chose to end this chapter on a rooftop and hearken back to the first chapter, which also happens on a rooftop? How are these two chapters different?

### **Chapter Forty-Seven**

1. How has Cassius changed as a character from the beginning of the book to the end?

### **Chapter Forty-Eight**

1. How has Jesse changed as a character from the beginning of the book to the end? Do you think his friends see him differently? How so?

2. After reading this final chapter, what do you predict will happen in the next book, *Skyship Academy: Crimson Rising*?

## **EXTENSIONS**

**1)** A dystopia is an imagined world in which some, or all, aspects of society have degraded to a point where people lead fearful or unpleasant lives. An effective, resonant dystopia takes elements that are already present in our world and expands on them.

Create your own dystopic world, making sure to answer the following questions:

1. What is your world/country/state called?
2. What are some of its defining characteristics?
3. If there is a government system present, what is it like? Who runs the society?
4. Are there different classes in the society? Who's at the bottom? Who's at the top? How do these people interact?
5. Dystopic societies don't come out of nowhere. What are some of the events that led to the unraveling of your society?
6. What is day-to-day life like for an average citizen in your dystopic society?
7. Is there anybody fighting to work against this dystopia? If so, what are they doing?

**2)** Pick a character from *Skyship Academy: The Pearl Wars*. Recount the plot of the book in the form of a letter written to a news organization, using this character's perspective and voice as a guide. Make sure to include their unique opinions and character traits in your writing style.

**3)** Think about the science behind *Skyship Academy: The Pearl Wars*. Pick one of the following pieces of technology found within the book and explain, in a paragraph, how

this technology could work in the real world.

- *Skyships*
- *Bio-nets*
- *Antigravity ball (pg. 113)*
- *Water reprocessor (pg. 97)*

**4)** Pick a moment in U.S. or world history and compare it to a moment in *Skyship Academy: The Pearl Wars*. This moment could be part of any historical era, including current events.