

Pondering Questions for *Birthmarked* from Author Caragh M. O'Brien

(Warning! These are total spoiler questions for *after* reading the story. --Caragh)

1. Considering what you know of poverty, wealth, technology, the likelihood of being infertile or having a child taken from you, hemophilia, education, surveillance, and everything else in the world of *Birthmarked*, on which side of the wall would you rather live?
2. Which side of the wall do you live on now?
3. Why do you suppose Leon likes Gaia?
4. One of my favorite moments in the novel occurs when Gaia is in the Square of the Bastion, just after the hanging, when Gaia has to choose between going to her mother and trying to save the criminal's baby. Her choice changes the entire course of the story and defines who she is. What's your favorite moment in the novel?
5. Hemophilia and infertility are real health issues in human populations that have inbreeding, and they certainly exist for people now. The founders of the Enclave made a ruthless decision to have no hospitals at all. How far should our medical system go to save people's lives or help them have babies?
6. What object in the novel would you like to have for your own?
7. Considering that Gaia takes a baby away from her mother in the opening chapter, she risks being an unsympathetic character, yet many readers tell me they like Gaia. When and why did you start liking Gaia?
8. When I originally wrote the story, I had Leon leave for the wasteland with Gaia and the baby (and I figured privately that all of them were goners). However, when I was offered the chance to write a trilogy with a bigger story arc, I changed the ending. Now, even if *Birthmarked* weren't part of a trilogy, I would keep this ending. What would have been lost by having Leon go into the wasteland with Gaia and the baby?
9. *Birthmarked* was deliberately left with a few loose ends, such as Gaia's grandmother, the Dead Forest, and, of course, Leon, who was last seen getting bonked over the head, poor guy. If you were going to write the second book, what people and problems would you carry over, and what would you add to make it new?
10. What are the walls that now limit what you can do and who you can be?

Feel free to visit the author's blog for updates on her writing and occasional bit stories about characters from the world of *Birthmarked*.

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