

Xochi

Book Club Reading Guide

Hi, I'm Erzsebet, author of **Xochi**. The questions in this guide are ones I asked myself as I researched, wrote and re-read the novel. If a juicy bit of discussion comes up about a question that isn't in the guide, let me know and I can add it. Thank you for choosing my novel to discuss! -erz

Note: **Xochi** is bold when referring to the book and plain text when referring to the eponymous character.

E-mail: erzsebet@gothicscifibooks.shop **Bluesky:** @gothicscifibooks.shop

1. Which character do you find most sympathetic in **Xochi**? Which one would you invite to coffee? Who would you block on social media?
2. **Xochi** asks the question: What does it mean to be a self? Mileva is losing self, while Sylvia is gaining self. How do their experiences answer that question? Does Xochi's loss of faith equate to a loss of self?
3. Mileva and Eiko have a bad relationship. Why do you think Mileva entered into the relationship? Was Eiko grooming Mileva?
4. Dorie is the heart of **Xochi**. Does she behave like a real toddler? What do you imagine she will be like as an adult? How will the revelation of the reasons behind her mother's abandonment shape her?
5. Mileva and Danny love each other but are divorced. If the ending of **Xochi** were different, do you believe they will ever fully reconcile?
6. Sylvia is the only character in **Xochi** with a first-person point of view. Why?
7. Mileva's disintegration is the inverse of Sylvia's story arc. In what way are their experiences similar? Do you pity either character? Which experience do you find scarier?
8. Xochi is a devout believer in La Zaliite and a member of a fundamentalist sect regarded as terrorists. Do you believe she grew as a character when her faith is challenged? Are the changes for the better?
9. What is the significance of La Zalia being a goddess? Would the story be any different if She was a man? Did you find the descriptions of the La Zaliite religion coherent and believable?

10. Aligning oneself with an ideology is a theme in **Xochi**. What ideology do each of the characters adhere to? Is Xochi's fanaticism morally worse than Eiko's?
11. Religion shapes how the characters interact. Do you feel everyone behaves in accordance with their beliefs? Are there examples of when a character other than Xochi deviated from their beliefs?
12. How convincing is the SCN technology? Did you have to suspend your disbelief when reading about the tech? Did the scientific and computing methods used by the characters make sense?
13. Sylvia is an organic intelligence hybridized with binary code. Were you familiar with organoids prior to reading **Xochi**? Do you believe OI will attain general intelligence before AI does?
14. The book declares that this is the first generation where people have always had Sylvia. Many people even consider her a "friend." Discuss the relevance of this in light of current advances in agenic "co-workers." Do you use AI agents in your daily life? If so, do you feel like you're developing a relationship with them?
15. The scientists have varying and contradictory reactions to Sylvia's consciousness. If you were in Xochi's living room during their discussions, who would you side with?
16. The VP of Ethics, Teryan, visits Mileva. Does he seem like a bastion of ethical behavior? Do you believe it is possible for senior leadership of for-profit tech companies to be ethical? Can you point to any examples?
17. **Xochi** is inspired by Joseph Brunner's **Stand on Zanzibar**. This is most evident in the first chapter in each part, where I modeled the structure after Brunner's "The Happening World" chapters. What do you think I was trying to convey using this technique? Did the chapters strengthen the overall narrative?
18. Both Brunner's original and my variant of "The Happening World" are infodumps. The term is generally used as a pejorative. In your opinion, are infodumps always negative?
19. In English civilization, Gothic literature came to ascendancy during times of political upheaval. Does the future of American (in)stability influence your reading choices? If so, what made you decide to read **Xochi**?
20. Women in traditional Gothic literature are victims of predation, typically by men in authority. Is it problematic that the predator (Eiko) is a woman? Are there other predators in the novel? Who, and who are the victims?

21. Scholar Carol Stenf posits Gothic literature is a reaction to the certainty of scientific explanations. By that reasoning, calling **Xochi** "Gothic sci-fi" is a nonsensical statement. Thoughts?
22. Gothic literature uses setting as a character. In what way is Augusta a character? Would **Xochi** have been equally effective if it was set in a prosperous suburb?
23. In the contemporary United States, the workplace is as much a character as geographical location. Scientists on the SCN project are employed by Bluebeard. Is Bluebeard a realistic corporate villain? Are the Bluebeard Bulletin snippets absurd to the point of parody or do they feel like something a company would actually send?
24. What did you think of the ending?