

# Angel Mage

By Garth Nix

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Paperback  
Recommended for 14-year-olds and older



## Summary

The icon-maker and angel-summoner Liliath, long believed dead, has woken from her century-long sleep to pick up the threads of a plan that has already destroyed one kingdom and may yet destroy another. To succeed, Liliath must bring together Agnez the musketeer; Simeon the doctor; Dorotea the mage; and Henri, one of the Cardinal's clerks, and take them into utmost danger ...

Set in an alternate 17th century where angels can be summoned (and controlled) by those with a talent for magic, *Angel Mage* is an action-packed story of angels, heroes, gunpowder and high magic.



Garth Nix has once again proven that he is a master of the high fantasy genre. His vividly realised and totally convincing settings—this time an alternative 17th century France—draw the reader into a world full of hooded cloaks, silver chased pistols, palaces and fortresses – a world where magic and sorcery co-exist, humans summon angels for assistance, and a mysterious ash blood illness transforms men and women into monsters. But Nix offers more: his characters are complex—sometimes flawed and struggling with their identity—and he expertly balances high drama, suspense and good old-fashioned adventure to create a narrative that is wholly original and satisfying.

The best person to describe the book's style is the author himself, who says of it, 'It is a YA [Young Adult] *Game of Thrones* with gunpowder and angelic magic, seasoned with *The Three Musketeers* and *The Book of Exodus*.'

## Use in the curriculum

*Angel Mage* is suitable for students aged 14 years and older and can be used in the English or Philosophy classroom.

Used as a class text, it could lead to in-depth discussions relating to the definitions of (historical) fantasy; the enduring meme in literature of the quest or 'hero's journey'; the uses and abuses of power; the religious, psychological and literary uses of magic; the 'appropriation of' reference in literature to classical texts, such as the Bible and *The Three Musketeers*; genre-blending; gender and power; revenge and redemption; personal growth through responsible use of talent; character archetypes e.g. action figure, wise figure, villain; fictional world-building...and many more.

Intertextual resources include *Shadowhunters: The Mortal Instruments* film and TV series and original book *The Mortal Instruments* by Cassandra Clare, and the *Bible*.

*Angel Mage* also lends itself to an introduction to 17<sup>th</sup> century France – Versailles through a glass darkly!

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## Themes

Fantasy, adventure, power, quests, magic, romance, icons, angels, historical fiction, *The Three Musketeers*, responsible use of power and talent, gender and power, destiny

## Discussion questions and activities

### Language Exercise

Read the prologue of *Angel Mage* and consider the following questions:

- a) What literary term describes opening a novel in the middle of action with little explanation of what has already occurred?
- b) What affect does it create here?
- c) Read chapter 1 and consider how the author has contrasted the ending of the prologue with the resurrection of Liliath in the first chapter.

### Comprehension Exercise

Write a paragraph to explain your understanding of the following terms:

- Angelic Magic
- Archangel
- Icon
- Cardinal
- Mage
- Musketeer
- Refuser
- Beastling
- Pursuivant
- Ash Blood Plague

### Literary Theory

Briefly explain the concept of 'The Hero's Journey' to your class. (A pattern of narrative identified by the American scholar Joseph Campbell that appears in drama, storytelling, myth, religious ritual, and psychological development and is outlined in the following link: [http://www.thewritersjourney.com/hero's\\_journey.htm](http://www.thewritersjourney.com/hero's_journey.htm).)

Now ask your students to see if they can match as many of the steps described in the article to the characters and events of *Angel Mage*.

### Gender

Garth Nix said of *Angel Mage*: 'I wanted my world to have gender equality, because that's how it should be, and so from the beginning there are women musketeers, cardinals and everything else.'

The book's setting—a world similar to 17th century France—sharply contrasts with a very modern representation of gender roles. Explain in detail this contrast and whether it created a more interesting reading experience for you.

### Intertextuality

Garth Nix said of *Angel Mage* that it is heavily influenced by his love of *The Three Musketeers* by Alexandre Dumas and his favourite adaptation to film, the 1973 version by Richard Lester. Read the original book or watch the film and discuss in detail the similarities and differences between it and *Angel Mage*, making sure to highlight the new themes explored by changing the original book or 1973 film.



## Characters

*'But I do pity her, for as I said, this cannot be what she intended. So young, so impossibly gifted, and yet so unwise, all bound up together.'*

Page 6

*'She was so young,' said Dorotea, shaking her head. 'She had such power, from childhood on, it was too easy for everyone to forget she was only nineteen.'*

Page 468

Do you agree with Cardinal Alsysheon (first quote above) and Dorotea about Liliath? Is she a flawed character whose youth and lack of wisdom excuse or explain her actions during the course of the novel?

## Genre

Research the core elements of fantasy writing and then discuss the extent to which *Angel Mage* can be described as a 'fantasy' novel. Are there elements within the book that might justify it being labelled another literary genre?

## Design

Come up with your own icon design (it can be for a brooch, ring, or anything else you like) and describe the angel and angelic power it summons.

## Blurb

Imagine you are responsible for selling the book to as many people as possible and write a new blurb for the back cover to achieve that aim.

## Cover

After reading *Angel Mage* turn to the cover of the novel. Consider the title and cover design.

Ask students why they think the designer and publisher decided to use that particular mix of font, colour, illustration and composition.

What mood is evoked by the cover and is this an appropriate mood for the novel that follows?

Devise an alternate title for the novel and design a new cover.

## In the author's own words

'In high school, I learned to fence. We were allowed to take our épées home with us, and my friend John and I would practice at my place, in suburban Canberra. We were supposed to mark out a piste and fence within it, according to all the rules, just as we were supposed to wear not only masks but also protective jackets.

'Naturally, being thirteen, we only wore the masks and instead of marking out a strip on our small area of lawn, we fenced along the verandah and up and down the steps and across the bridge on the pond and sometimes in the pond, right up until it almost went terribly wrong when John's épée broke as he hit me and instead of a blunted weapon it became a very sharp but luckily somewhat shorter murderous implement and he managed to pull the lunge and I managed to hurl myself backward before it did more than rip through my hideous 1970s brown parka.

'Why were we fencing in parkas? I mentioned it was Canberra, didn't I, and it was July. Absolutely freezing. There may also have been fog.

'Why did I take up fencing? Why was I at age thirteen sword-fighting all over the garden, up and down the stairs and so on? The answer to that question is the same answer to the

question, why did I write *Angel Mage*?

'*The Three Musketeers* by Alexandre Dumas. (And the films directed by Richard Lester, written by George MacDonald Fraser.)

'It's all their fault.'

— Garth Nix

## The author

Garth Nix has been a full-time writer since 2001, but has also worked as a literary agent, marketing consultant, book editor, book publicist, book sales representative, bookseller, and as a part-time soldier in the Australian Army Reserve.



Garth's books include the Old Kingdom fantasy series, comprising *Sabriel*; *Lirael*; *Abhorsen*; *Clariel* and *Goldenhand*; SciFi novels *Shade's Children* and *A Confusion of Princes*; and a Regency romance with magic, *Newt's Emerald*. His novels for children include *The Ragwitch*; the six books of The Seventh Tower sequence; The Keys to the Kingdom series; and others. He has co-written several books with Sean Williams, including the Troubletwisters series; *Spirit Animals Book Three: Blood Ties*; *Have Sword, Will Travel* and the sequel, *Let Sleeping Dragons Lie*.

A contributor to many anthologies and magazines, Garth's selected short fiction has been collected in *Across the Wall* and *To Hold the Bridge*. More than six million copies of his books have been sold around the world, they have appeared on the bestseller lists of *The New York Times*, *Publishers Weekly* and *The Bookseller* and his work has been translated into 42 languages. His recent book *Frogkisser!* is now being developed as a film by Twentieth Century Fox/Blue Sky Animation.

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