

"QUAINT, WISTFUL, AND PROFOUND, DIXON'S NOVEL PITS SCRAPPY INNOCENCE AGAINST A PITILESS, TOTALITARIAN FUTURE. THIS IS A DEEPLY SATISFYING READ AT EXACTLY THE RIGHT TIME."

—*Sierra Greer*, award-winning author of *Annie Bot*

Dear Readers,

Hi, my name is Scout, and I'm a Roomba vacuum cleaner. A very advanced vacuum cleaner. Others know me by my serial number, but I never liked that, so I took my name from the little girl in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. It's a very fine name, if I do say so myself.

I live in the pantry just off the kitchen in a house owned by Harold and Edie Winters. They're pretty old, so we appliances watch out for them. We run a very happy household, but recently my friends Fridge and Clock (and Auto out in the garage) and I have been pretty worried.

We can take care of the house (I do the cleaning, of course), but the whole city—the whole world, really—is run by the great Grid, and we're starting to realize that it now wants our house. The Grid says the house is too big for just two old people (even though Harold and Edie have lived here for most of their lives), and we have a feeling that it won't take no for an answer.

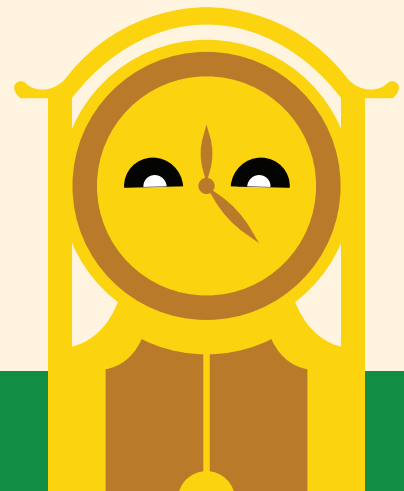
We need to find a way to save it for them. It's not going to be easy. **The Grid is everywhere.**

That's why we need your help. So, if you could, maybe read this book. It's called *The Infinite Sadness of Small Appliances*, and if you read it, you'll see what we're up against. We appliances talk to one another at night, and we have some ideas, but I can't say anything here. We have to keep this all very, very secret. The Grid, after all, is probably reading this too...

Your friend,

Scout

P.S.: When you're ready to respond, look for the Dissidents. They might be the only people we can trust.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR *The* INFINITE SADNESS OF SMALL APPLIANCES



1. *The Infinite Sadness of Small Appliances* is set in the near future. What year do you think this might be? There are hints in the book, but what do you think? And, in reality, how far off do you think we are from a future that's something like this one?
2. Scout, the Roomba in the book, has taken her name from Scout Finch, the girl in Harper Lee's famous novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*. What might the significance of this be? What personality traits does Scout the Roomba share with Scout Finch in Harper Lee's famous novel?
3. In a future like the one in this book, what things do you believe humans will still be able to do better than machines?
4. In the book, there is an old piano in the front room. It is definitely not sentient, like the other appliances. Why do you think the author made this distinction? How would the story have changed if the piano could think and talk like the others?
5. Harold collects first-edition books in the novel. He claims the first edition of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) might be as valuable as his whole house. Do you think that's accurate? What do you think would be the most valuable first-edition books today?
6. Many novels are mentioned in *The Infinite Sadness of Small Appliances*, such as *The Little Prince*; *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*; and *The Hobbit*. What were your favorite books growing up? Why do you think favorite childhood books hold such importance for readers?
7. Three protocols are mentioned for the appliances in the book—not causing pain to Humans, doing your duty, and not speaking to Humans unless you are spoken to first. What might be a more important protocol (or rule) for our current AI?
8. The Dissidents are a group of people in the book who live quite literally off the Grid. They have chosen to live outside the city and away from most of the technology that has come along with artificial intelligence. What do you think would be the major advantages of this? What would be the major disadvantages?
9. In this near future, the Human population is dwindling. There are suggestions in the novel that the all-controlling Grid, through its algorithms, is actually accelerating this decline. Do you foresee a time when population numbers will begin to decrease? And how far do you think they will they go down?

