

BOOK CLUB

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR BOOK CLUBS

Beyond the Crescent Sky

A. L. SOWARDS

1. For much of the story, the Serbs are vassals to the Ottoman Empire. Their duties include military service, financial tribute, and providing hostages. If you were in a similar situation, which element of vassalage would you most want to end?
2. Though they have much in common, the Serbs and the Greeks clash in a skirmish that harms both sides. Discuss the reasons each side chooses to fight. Do you think Iskandar's lies would have been as effective on Konstantin and his men as they were on the Greeks? Why or why not?
3. How does the label of "enemy" affect how those in the kastron treat Ivan—and how he sees them? Can you find examples in the news or your community where labels play a large role in how people are treated?
4. Over the course of the book, Ivan's relationships with several Greek characters evolve. Discuss how and why his relationships with Helena, Matthias, Demetrios, and Gregoras shift throughout the novel.
5. Discuss Helena's work as a midwife. Have you ever assisted anyone with a birth? Were there any moments when you disagreed with her medical choices? Did the story make you more grateful for modern medical knowledge and procedures?
6. In *Beyond the Crescent Sky*, how do Ivan and Helena balance expectations, roles, and personal desires? In your own life, how do you navigate the tension between these three?

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7. Helena tells Ivan, “God sees farther than we do. Perhaps, in time, you will see His purpose even in this.” Later, Danilo gives Ivan nearly the same advice. Can you see this idea play out in the story? Have you found this to be true in your own life?
8. Discuss Ivan’s level of confidence as the book progresses. How does he view himself and his role at the beginning of the story? During his time in the Greek kastron? As he prepares for the military campaign as a župan? By the book’s end?
9. Discuss Helena’s greatest sacrifice for her people. What does it cost her? What choice would you have made in her circumstances?
10. Consider the relationships between Ivan and Konstantin, and between Ivan and Danilo. What are they willing to sacrifice for each other? Did any of their advice resonate with you? For example:
11. From Konstantin: “The future is yours to create. You’ve never been ordinary, and now, my brother, it is time to be great. Take Fate and make it your servant.”
12. From Danilo: “Do not let this setback—no matter how devastating—become your Achilles’ heel. You’re stronger than that. ... Be the leader I have always known you could become.”
13. Would you have shown mercy to Iskandar at the book’s end? Why or why not?
14. How will you try to take Fate, make it your servant, and create your own future?