

# BOOK CLUB

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR BOOK CLUBS

## Beyond the Crescent Storm

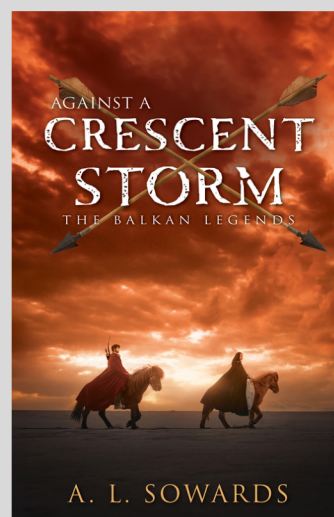
A. L. SOWARDS

1. Danilo is torn when asked to marry for the good of his people, despite loving someone else. If you were given the same choice, what process would you go through to reach your decision? How would you choose to respond?
2. Discuss this quote from Maja: Life was like a great mosaic and each experience a tesserae of glass or marble, limestone or ceramic. Some experiences were vibrant, others pale. Some were luminous, others dull. Some were light, others dark, but they all fit together to form a whole. Each was needful in its own way. Each had greater meaning and beauty only when complete. Do you feel a life needs opposite emotions (good and bad, happy and sad) to be complete?
3. In the story, Danilo quotes Ivan's frequent question, "Is it better to do what is wise or what is right?" As a general rule, do you agree or disagree with Ivan? When it comes to something more specific, like marriage alliances or battlefield tactics, does your opinion change?
4. Discuss this quote from Maja and compare it to life: "A mosaic is made up of hundreds of shattered pieces of rock and glass. Somehow, it's still beautiful." Think of events in your past that were hard at the time—perhaps experiences that left you feeling broken. Can you look back and see any beauty that resulted from them, either directly, or in how those events shaped you as a person?
5. How do Luka's relationships with Maja, Danilo, and Arcadius change throughout the course of the novel? What elements of those relationships remain constant?

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6. How did your opinion of Miloš Obilić shift and change over the course of the book? Or did it stay the same throughout? Do you agree with or disagree with the decision he made and the action he took on the second morning of the battle?
7. Did you ever feel any empathy for Iskandar? During which parts of the story? If your feelings changed, why?
8. Maja assists Helena in dealing with a Hungarian spy while Danilo, Ivan, and many others from Sivi Gora are away. How would you have handled the situation with Vadas? Were there alternative responses that Helena could have made that you think would have turned out better?
9. Maja says: “It seems we have to immortalize hardships either in song or in art. Perhaps to remind us that they can be overcome.” Are there pieces of art depicting moments of hardship that have touched you? Pieces of music? Novels? Name them and explain why they resonate with you.
10. Did your opinion of Helena change throughout the course of the novel? Did you feel more anger or empathy for her when she confronts Danilo about his arranged marriage? If some members of your book club have also read *Beyond the Crescent Sky*, Book Two in The Balkan Legends Series, did that seem to affect opinions at all?
11. In the immediate aftermath of the 1389 Battle of Kosovo, most saw the battle as a draw, though some of the earliest Christian references to the event considered it a victory due to the sultan’s death. Yet as the Ottoman Empire took over the Balkans, more and more people saw it as a defeat of the Christian forces, and that perception remained strong for centuries. Newer historians tend to conclude that the battle was a draw, but the Ottoman forces were able to recover more quickly. Kosovo, paired with the earlier battle of Maritsa, devastated the Serb warrior class. Both sides suffered tremendous losses at Kosovo, but the Ottomans were able to recover. The Serbs were not. Those facts affected centuries of history—and still affect the region today. Prior to reading this novel, did you have any knowledge about the Battle of Kosovo or about the centuries-long Ottoman rule in the Balkans? If so, did this story change your perception at all?
12. Are there other characters in the Balkan Legends cast that you would like to see in future books? Who and why?