

IMMORTAL



#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

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LONGINGS

A NOVEL

A READING GROUP GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

Every year, thousands in the kingdom of Talin will flock to its capital twin cities, San-Er, where the palace hosts a set of games. For those confident enough in their ability to jump between bodies, there is a fight to the death across San-Er for a chance to win unimaginable riches.

Princess Calla Tuoleimi lurks in hiding. Five years ago, a massacre left her parents dead and the palace of Er empty . . . and she was the one who did it. Before King Kasa, her uncle, and his forces in San can catch her, she plans to finish the job and bring down the monarchy. Her reclusive uncle always greets the victor of the games, so if she wins, she gets her opportunity at last to kill him.

Enter Anton Makusa, an exiled aristocrat. His childhood love has lain in a coma since they were both ousted from the palace, and he's deep in debt trying to keep her alive.

Thankfully, he's one of the best jumpers in the kingdom, flitting from body to body at will. His last chance at saving her is entering the games and winning.

Calla finds both an unexpected alliance with Anton and help from King Kasa's adopted son, August Shenzhi, who wants to mend Talin's ills. But the three of them have very different goals, even as Calla and Anton's partnership spirals into something all-consuming. Before the games close, Calla must decide what she's playing for—her lover or her kingdom.

TOPICS AND QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. The book opens before the games, when August discovers that Calla is alive. Do you think he suspected she was alive all along? How do you think Calla was able to stay hidden from the palace for all those years?
2. How would you describe the city of San-Er? What feelings does it invoke? Does it remind you of any real-world cities? From where do you think the author drew inspiration for San-Er and Talin?
3. What do you think is the mission of the Temple Society? What kind of threat do they pose, and to whom?
4. The games are described as “a thrill that anyone can participate in, a solution to a kingdom simmering with complaints.” How does this frame the relationship between the royal palace and the residents of San-Er? How do the people of San-Er seem to view the games? The monarchy?
5. There are several queer relationships within the novel. Describe them, and how sexuality and gender might be complicated by the ability to jump bodies. How are the characters' identities tied to their qi?



6. The narrative point of view shifts between various characters in the novel, but certain ones are more central to the story than others. Whom would you consider the novel's main character? Why?
7. We are taken to rural Talin twice in the book: first when King Kasa orders the burning of Eigi, and second when we learn Princess Calla's true identity. What do these scenes tell us about the rural provinces and how the monarchy rules Talin versus San-Er?
8. One of the main themes of *Immortal Longings* is betrayal. How is this explored throughout the book (i.e. between characters, through the setting, between social classes, etc.)? Were there instances of betrayal that surprised you?
9. The author was originally inspired by Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. What are the similarities in plot, setting, and characters to *Immortal Longings*? What are the differences?
10. Why do you think Calla fights her feelings for Anton? How does he approach his attraction to her? Does this foreshadow the ending? Why or why not?
11. In the final battle scene, Calla tricks Anton into lowering his guard before she makes her final strike. Do you think she ever seriously considered running away with him instead of completing her mission? Was there an alternative for them to both end the games alive? If so, what might that have looked like?
12. Otta Avia is in a coma for years until she suddenly rises from her hospital bed and requests to be taken to the palace. Why is this unexpected? How does this foreshadow the ending, and the next book?
13. When Leida is imprisoned for betraying Prince August, she says, "No king is selfless. No throne is built on bloodless ground. There can be no freedom until the crown is broken." How did she come to this conclusion? Do you agree with her? Why or why not?
14. In the final scene, Calla thinks she is crowning August as the new king of San-Er, only to realize she has crowned Anton. What happened? Would you consider this a happy ending for Calla? What are your predictions for the sequel?



— ENHANCE YOUR BOOK CLUB —

1. There is a strong undercurrent of inequality to the kingdom of Talin. Explore how this shapes the city, the monarchy, and the characters. Do you see this reflected in our world? What might the author be suggesting about the society we live in?
2. Certain residents of San-Er have the ability to jump from body to body, but not all of them. How might this affect how you interact with others you meet in a city? How does it contribute to the texture of San-Er? Is invading a body unethical? When might it be acceptable? If you had the ability to jump, would you?
3. Anton Makusa seems to blur the lines between obsession and love. What is the difference? If you were in Anton's shoes, would you go to such lengths to care for someone from your past? What if it required you to hurt others?