The
DEEP

A NOVEL

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author of *THE HUNGER*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1

The Deep is inspired by one of the most famous events in history: the sinking of the *Titanic*. Did previous knowledge of the *Titanic* impact your reading of the novel? How much of the *Titanic*'s history, and that of its sister ship, the *Britannic*, did you come into this book knowing?

2

Discuss the ways in which the passengers aboard the *Titanic* did and did not believe in the presence of the paranormal or otherworldly. Were you surprised at who believed in ghosts, especially among the wealthy and influential?

3

This novel follows two voyages: that of the *Titanic* and, a few years later, the *Britannic*. How did the dual narrative influence your understanding of the story? Discuss the differences between the two journeys, especially through the eyes of Annie.

4

Annie is shocked when she discovers Mark aboard the *Britannic*. Did you, like Annie, think it was fate that brought them together again? Or some other force?

5

Much of the tension in the novel surrounds Ondine, Mark and Caroline's child. How are parenting anxieties exhibited by both Mark and Caroline? How did you feel about Annie's close bond with the child?

6

Within the book, class becomes a major distinction among characters. Between those of the working class—Annie, Violet, Dai, Les—and the wealthy—Mark and Caroline Fletcher, Madeleine Astor, Benjamin Guggenheim—discuss the ways in which class worked as a dividing and connecting force, especially in the contained world of the ship.

7

Documents are used throughout *The Deep* to provide additional context: letters, doctor's reports, telegrams, etc. Discuss how their inclusion shaped your understanding of the narrative.

8

Throughout the novel, how were the female characters affected by attitudes toward their gender? Which characters transcended these rules, and which characters remained bound by them?
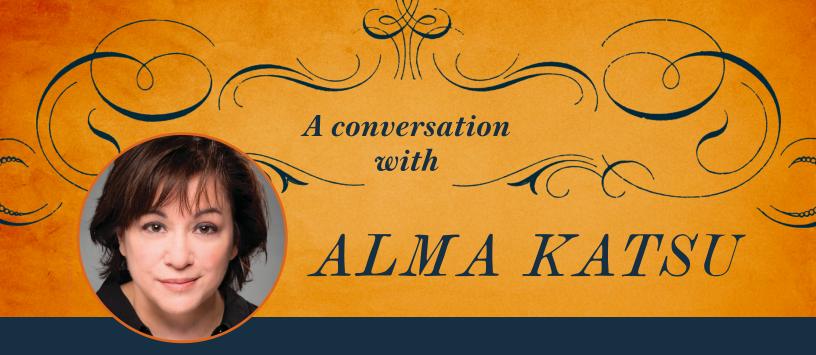
9

What did you find to be the most frightening moment in the novel?

10

The Deep ends with a surprising twist to the relationship between Mark, Caroline, and Lillian—and Annie, of course. Did you see this coming? What did you think their backstory was leading to?

11

Why do you think we continue to be fascinated by the *Titanic*? In fiction, nonfiction, and popular culture, what are lessons we can take from its history? What most intrigues you about it?

So much has been written about the Titanic—*how did you make the story you tell about the ship in* The Deep *different and fresh?*

Making it new is definitely a challenge with a story as well known as the *Titanic*'s, but I think it comes down to avoiding the parts that have fallen into cliché, and finding nuggets that people don't know about. For instance, the fact that the *Titanic* didn't have enough lifeboats to accommodate everyone on board wasn't a mistake: protocol of the time was to stay with a damaged ship rather than take to a vast ocean in a tiny lifeboat. I combine these nuggets with fictional aspects—characters, an event, a plot twist—that enrich the historical story and the themes I'm trying to convey.

I also look for aspects of the history that will resonate with modern readers. For instance, two of the biggest issues of the day were class disparity (the ultrarich were getting richer while the lower class was widening and getting poorer—what better metaphor than the difference between first-class and third-class passengers on the *Titanic*, with wealthy male patrons ultimately being called to account?) and women's second-class status in society. Calling out the commonalities between that time and now make us see that while a hundred years have passed, things haven't changed much.

The novel tells the dual story of another ship—the Britannic—*which was the equally doomed* Titanic's *sister ship. Why do you think her tragic story is less known or at least has not captured the public's imagination in the same way?*

There are probably a few reasons. For one, sinkings weren't all that uncommon and so it took a tremendous loss of life to capture the public's attention. Only around 50 people died when the *Britannic* sank, far fewer than the approximately 1,500 who died on the *Titanic*. Secondly, *Britannic* wasn't a luxury liner when it sank: it had been drafted into service as a hospital ship for British soldiers wounded in World War I and so it didn't have a roster of celebrity passengers, as *Titanic* had. It was the great loss of life, combined with the number of famous passengers, that propelled news of the *Titanic* sinking to the front page of papers around the world.

The funny thing about history: there's bound to be a lot more to the story than is commonly known.

Your last novel, The Hunger, *put a supernatural twist on the Donner Party story, and* The Deep *does the same with the* Titanic *and* Britannic. *What draws you to historical subjects in your horror writing?*

The funny thing about history: there's bound to be a lot more to the story than is commonly known. History class, as well as television and movies, don't have the time to get into the details, but the parts that delight and amaze are almost always in those details. Like divers who salvage sunken ships, you have to put in the time and hard work to dig up those treasures. That's where the reward is. Plus, that dovetailing of fact and fiction makes it extra satisfying for the reader, I think.

You've obviously done a lot of meticulous research—at times you describe the setting down to the ship's wallpaper. Do you enjoy the research aspect of writing your novels?

I do, though it can be a struggle not to get lost in the past. This was especially true with the *Titanic*, as there is no shortage of material available on the tragic event. The challenge here is making sure I'm not just going over well-trod ground but presenting readers with a combination of the familiar and the new. We all love to learn new things about people and events we think we know!

One of the most rewarding things about researching and writing The Deep *was learning the amazing backstories of so many of the people on board the* Titanic.

The Titanic **had some famous passengers on board. Which of the characters in the novel are based on real figures and which did you create?**

I found out from *The Hunger* that readers enjoy guessing which characters are real and which are made up. First, you should know that there are more fictional characters in *The Deep* than there were in *The Hunger*. Partly, this is because so many of the people who had been on the *Titanic* are famous, and it seemed disrespectful to impose major changes on their life story. That said, I did make some changes to real people when the changes seemed in keeping with that person's backstory.

Annie Hebbley, the poor Irish girl who is Fate's plaything; the man she falls in love with, Mark Fletcher; Mark's doomed lover, Lillian; and Carolyn, the new wife at his side on the *Titanic,* are all fictional.

Most of the rest of the characters, however, are factual. John Jacob and Benjamin Guggenheim, two of the richest men of their day. Maddie Astor, John Jacob's second wife, fresh from their scandalous wedding. Irrepressible Welsh boxers Dai Bowen and Leslie Williams. British newspaperman and crusader William Stead. Dressmaker to high society Lady Lucille Duff-Gordon and her husband, Cosmo. All the *Titanic*'s officers and crew, and the other passengers mentioned in passing. One of the most rewarding things about researching and writing *The Deep* was learning the amazing backstories of so many of the people on board the *Titanic*. It was remarkable story after remarkable story.

One character, Violet Jessop, really did survive the sinkings of the Titanic **and** Britannic. **Who was she and what role does she play in the novel?**

Born in Argentina to Irish parents, Violet was a teenager when she started working as a stewardess to help support her family after her father died and the family had to move back to the UK. She was a resilient, plucky young woman who didn't let the sinking of the *Titanic* end her career, which was how she found herself on the *Britannic* a few years later when it hit a sea mine in the turbulent Kea channel and sank off the coast of Greece.

I would've loved to make Violet the star of *The Deep*, but her life is fairly well-known, and it didn't seem right to twist it around to accommodate the supernatural things that take place in the story. Instead, in order to respect her life story and be true to her nature, Violet has been cast in *The Deep* as the friend and confidante of the bedeviled Annie.

Before turning to fiction writing, you worked as an intelligence analyst for the government. Are the skills you honed in that work applicable to your writing career?

Absolutely! Analytic work is mostly research, so I use skills from my career for every novel. I think that's what makes it not quite so daunting to tackle a subject like the *Titanic* or the Donner Party: it's just another a day at the office. The main research portion usually only takes a couple weeks at most, though I do spot research throughout the writing process.

When you write a novel, do you approach each story anew, or do you bring things learned from writing one novel to writing the next?
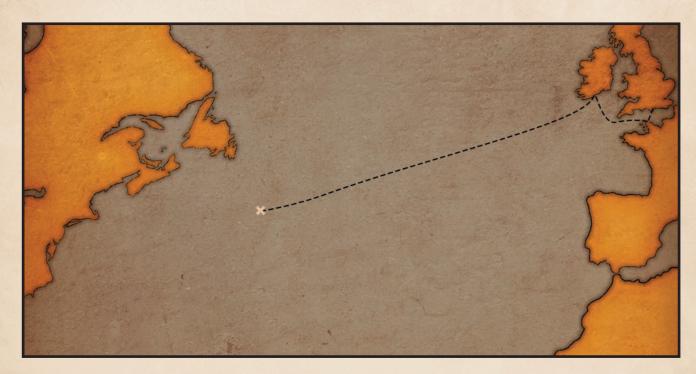
One of the things I find most satisfying about any work is being able to apply what you've learned to a new task. I think about what worked in an earlier book and what didn't, and try not to make the same mistakes (which ultimately end up taking time to correct, though you learn something from it, too). Writing fiction is a mysterious process, so deciding you're going to write a new book is bit frightening, and so when you think you might finally be making sense of it—that you're starting to internalize the process—it's rewarding.

Are you at work on a new novel? Can you give readers a sneak peek?

The next historical horror novel is set during World War II. It will take the story of fu-go (fire balloons), a little-known attempt by the Japanese to spread terror in the mainland United States, and combine it with the internment of Japanese Americans. It's going to include some references to Japanese folklore, in the same way that *The Hunger* referenced Native American beliefs. It's a very personal story to me as my mother was a teenager in Japan during World War II, and so I grew up hearing about the terrors of living in a country that's being devastated by war. My in-laws' family was interned and so I learned a lot about this complicated, disgraceful episode in U.S. history, and how fear drove America to violate our national principles.

I'd also like folks to know that I have a book coming out in a completely new genre: spy thrillers. Coming in 2021, *Red Widow* is a contemporary spy novel about the choices—and sacrifices—you make when you work in intelligence. It gave me the opportunity to combine my love with storytelling with my thirty-plus years working in U.S. intelligence, to create a story that's both a propulsive thriller and gives the reader an idea of what it's like to work at the CIA.

THE LAST VOYAGE OF THE TITANIC

41° 43' 32" N, 49° 56' 49" E

THE LAST VOYAGE OF THE BRITANNIC

37° 42' 5" N, 24° 17' 2" E

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Violet Jessop

Violet Constance Jessop was an Irish Argentine ocean liner stewardess employed by The White Star Line. She survived both the *Titanic* and the *Britannic* sinkings.

Benjamin Guggenheim

Benjamin Guggenheim was one of the seven sons of wealthy mining magnate Meyer Guggenheim. After realizing *Titanic*'s fate was sealed, he assisted with the rescue of women and children, then dressed in his finest clothes, to die.

Madeleine Astor

Madeleine Astor was the wife of John Jacob Astor IV, the richest man on the *Titanic*. Madeleine boarded the ship while five months pregnant and survived after boarding one of the last lifeboats. Her husband and their beloved dog, Kitty, did not.