

Book clubs: discussion topics

"The Girl from Berlin: Standartenführer's Wife"

1. What is your opinion concerning Richart Meissner's (Annalise's father) decision to join the Party despite his family's heritage?
2. In your opinion, how did Annalise's attitude change towards the situation in the country after the Kristallnacht?
3. Why do you think Annalise feels so confused about her Jewish heritage? How is it shown through her interactions with Adam, Heinrich and her grandmother Hilda?
4. Talk about Heinrich's personality and views on the Nazi Party policies before and after he was ordered to remove the unwanted immigrants from the German border.
5. The interrogation scene: what was your first impression of Dr. Kaltenbrunner? Why do you think he decided to release Annalise? Do you think agent Kuntz's words about Dr. Kaltenbrunner's reputation as a vicious interrogator were the truth or a lie to trick Annalise into signing a confession? Why?
6. Why do you think Annalise decided to join her husband Heinrich in his counterintelligence activities? Did she make a good spy at first? Why do you think she made so many hasty decisions and mistakes?
7. Talk about Norbert. What are his views on his service in the Waffen-SS? What is his attitude to his recent appointment as a guard in Auschwitz?
8. Talk about Gruppenführer Heydrich. How is he different from Dr. Kaltenbrunner or are they actually very much alike? Why?
9. Talk about Heydrich's inspection of Auschwitz. How do you think it affects Annalise? What does Norbert think of his service there?
10. Do you agree with Annalise's decision to exact her revenge on Heydrich for the death of her brother? In your opinion, why did she choose to go to Dr. Kaltenbrunner for help and not her husband? How did Norbert's death change her?

"The Girl from Berlin: Gruppenführer's Mistress"

1. How does the relationship evolve between Annalise and Dr. Kaltenbrunner during their collaboration? Do you think she feels attracted to him or sees him solely as a means of achieving her goal? Why?
2. Talk about Annalise's relationship with her fellow counterintelligence agents, Ingrid and Rudolf. Do you feel that there's resentment between Annalise and Ingrid? Why?

3. Talk about the interrogation scene. How does Adam react to Annalise's presence in the cell? Do you think Dr. Kaltenbrunner would have stopped his "interrogation techniques" if Annalise pushed his hands away? Why didn't she try to object? How did Annalise's and Dr. Kaltenbrunner's relationship change after that?
4. What was your reaction to Heinrich's decision to kill Josef? Was it justified or perhaps there was another, non-violent way of getting Josef out of the Gestapo reach?
5. Talk about Walther Schellenberg. Is he a devout Nazi like his late chief Heydrich was? What do you think of his personality?
6. Both Gruppenführer Heydrich and Dr. Kaltenbrunner occupied the same post of the Chief of the RSHA. How in your opinion did each of them view this position and their responsibilities? Did you believe Dr. Kaltenbrunner when he told Annalise that he refused to accept his appointment? Why?
7. Why do you think Annalise tries to "save" Dr. Kaltenbrunner with such persistence despite his constant harassment? Do you think she still carries guilt for not saving her brother in time and sees the same signs of inner torment in her new chief that brought Norbert to suicide? Or does she feel genuine affection towards him?
8. Why do you think Dr. Kaltenbrunner suffers from such a split personality? Which course, in your opinion, would his life and career have taken under different circumstances if the Nazi Party didn't come to power?
9. Talk about Annalise and Dr. Kaltenbrunner's night in Poland. Did she consider what happened a rape in the full sense of a word? Why did she decide to continue their affair after the Christmas night?
10. Why do you think Dr. Kaltenbrunner couldn't shoot Annalise even after learning about her deception and her being Jewish? Why didn't she kill him when she had a chance? Do you think their feelings were simple lust or something deeper? Why?

"The Girl from Berlin: War Criminal's Widow"

1. Talk about Annalise's thoughts concerning the D-Day. How did she see her involvement with the counterintelligence after that?
2. Talk about Walther Schellenberg and his collaboration with Himmler. How does Himmler's initiative to start talks with the Allies and the failed coup d'état reflect the political situation in Germany?
3. Why do you think Annalise chose not to go with Ernst when he offered her to run away with him?

4. Talk about the Red Army and Annalise's opinion of them before and after she met an actual soldier, Misha. How is he different from the other Soviet soldiers and why do you think he treats Annalise and her husband so humanly?
5. Talk about Sergeant McMahon and his treatment of Annalise. How does the contrast between him and Agent Foster show the difference of opinions concerning the Germans among the Allies?
6. What is your opinion on the Operation Paperclip during which the American counterintelligence smuggled over a thousand Germans, most of which would have been convicted of war crimes and possibly hanged, into the US? Was it a justified measure or hypocrisy?
7. Talk about the Nuremberg trials. Do you feel like they were held in a fair manner or not? In your opinion, was there a need for a trial or should the Allies have just executed the main perpetrators?
8. Why did Heinrich decide to go to Germany and help Ernst? Do you think Heinrich still loved Annalise at that point or simply stayed with her out of his spousal duty? Do you think that he might have still carried guilt for the execution of innocent people and tried to right as many wrongs as he could because of that?
9. In your opinion, did Annalise make the right decision to stay with Ernst or should she have stayed with Heinrich instead?
10. How do you think Annalise's and Ernst's married life turned out? Has Ernst changed at all after the war ended? How do you think they would raise their children?

"The Austrian: A War Criminal's Story"

1. Talk about the very first scene, where Ernst is heading for his execution. How does it reflect his personality? What was your first opinion of him?
2. Did Ernst have a good childhood? Was there anything that could have influenced his future decisions? How was his relationship with his father? With his mother?
3. How does Ernst's life change after his father returns from the war? How does it affect his relationship with Dalia? Do you think Ernst sincerely believes the parting words that he tells her or says them just out of spite?
4. Talk about Ernst's incarceration. How does he take it? How do his relationships with Agent Foster, the prison guards and psychiatrists reflect his personality?
5. Talk about the Nuremberg trials. Do you think that Reichsmarschall Göring's words about the hypocrisy of the Allies ring true to some extent? Do you agree or disagree with him when he implied that the Soviet command committed the same crimes as the Germans did and should

have been prosecuted as well in this case instead of judging them? Explain why.

6. Talk about Ernst's days in the University. How did the involvement with the nationalistic fraternity change him, if it did at all? Did his relationship with Melita influence him in any way?

7. Talk about the scene in the prison courtyard. Why did Agent Foster refuse to bring Ernst poison? Do you think Ernst would have taken it if Agent Foster agreed?

8. Do you think Ernst was happy to join the Party and the SS? How does his attitude change after his incarceration in the camp? After the Dollfuss assassination? After the Anschluss?

9. Why do you think the memories of Annalise are so important to Ernst? How does he view her? How does his feelings for her differ from those he has for Dalia? Melita? His wife?

10. In your opinion, was Ernst a fanatical Nazi? What about Otto Skorzeny? How are these two different from Reinhard Heydrich and Heinrich Himmler in their views, if they are?

"The Austrian: Book Two"

1. How does Ernst react to the declaration of the war? To Heydrich's announcement of his plans concerning the Jewish population?

2. Talk about the mood of the war criminals incarcerated in Nuremberg. Do you feel that some of them feel remorse for their actions or all of them feel to be unjustly accused?

3. Talk about Ernst's drinking and his relationships with his numerous mistresses. What are the reasons for his behavior? How does it change when he meets Annalise?

4. How does Ernst's attitude towards the Party policies change after he learns about T4 program from Melita? After he visits the Warsaw ghetto?

5. Talk about Ernst's relationships with his children. Was he a good father? Why do you think he reacted in such a way to his young son's interest in the SS?

6. How does Ernst take the news of his appointment to Heydrich's post? In your opinion, was it possible for him to refuse?

7. Talk about Ernst's relationship with Henry, his Nuremberg prison guard.

8. Talk about Ernst's relationship with Otto Skorzeny. How does it characterize both of them?

9. Talk about the parallels between Ernst's last days as a free man in Austria and his days leading to his execution. Why in your opinion didn't he kill himself following the example of many high-ranking officers in May 1945? Why does he take Otto's attempts to help him so grudgingly at first? How does Annalise's involvement affect his decisions in both 1945 and 1946?

10. According to historians, Bormann and Müller's deaths were never confirmed. Also, the questions still remain concerning the authenticity of Hitler's remains taken out of Germany by the Soviet Army. What do you think really happened to each?

"Emilia"

1. How does life in Krakow and her "relationship" with Richter change Emilia? Do you think like she made the right choice in trying to secure her family's safety by offering herself to the SS guard?

2. Talk about Magda and her influence on Emilia. Why did Magda decide to take Emilia under her wing right away?

3. Do you agree with Idit's attitude towards the girls? Why do you think there was so much hostility between the inmates? In your opinion, did girls deserve the scornful treatment of the others or they merely survived the best they could?

4. Talk about the guards. How did they view the Jewish women in the camp? Talk about the differences between Richter, Bergmann, the Bear and Manfred.

5. How does Emilia's life change after she becomes a maid in the Kommandant's villa? Talk about the differences between the Kommandant and his adjutant, Engel. In your opinion, how did each view their job? What about their treatment of Emilia?

6. Talk about the liberation. Do you agree with how the Soviet soldiers treated German POWs? Why?

7. Why do you think Emilia decided to help Bergmann die in peace? Do you agree with her decision? What would you do in her place?

8. What is your opinion of Major Vlasov? Is he any different from the Germans who treated Emilia the same way?

9. Why do you think Emilia invited the two POWs in her house knowing that they were former soldiers? How does Klaus's presence in the house change Emilia's life?

10. Do you feel like Klaus carried a part of the collective guilt for the crimes of the German army or was he also a victim of the war? Why do you think Emilia bonded with him so much before developing romantic feelings for him? Do you agree with her decision to forget her past and start a new life with Klaus and his son? Why?

"The Indigo Rebels"

1. Which sister do you identify with, Giselle or Kamille? Why, in your opinion are both women so different even though they come from the same family?

2. How does each sibling view the German occupation? Do their opinions of the Germans eventually change? How exactly?
3. Talk about the occupants. Are they all the same in their devotion to their Party goals or did they have different views on the war and treatment of the French "terrorists?"
4. Do you feel like Karl Wünsche was essentially an evil man or the certain circumstances turned him into one? In your opinion, if it wasn't for Fritz's death, would he still join the SS or would he remain a doctor?
5. Talk about Giselle. Do you see her as a collaborator or an early Resistance fighter? How does she change with time and what exactly provokes changes in her attitude towards the Germans?
6. Why did Kamille feel an almost instant attraction towards Jochen? Do you think that her previous marriage and her daughter's affection towards the new tenants could play a role here?
7. Talk about Marcel. How does he see himself right after he deserts from the front? Do you agree with his decision to take a German officer's life in retaliation for the boys' execution? Why?
8. Why do you think Jochen agreed to help Kamille with her brother Marcel and later with Augustine and her little daughter? How does it characterize him?
9. What about Kamille? Do you view her as a collaborator? How does her friendship with Augustine and the risks she takes to help her friend characterize her?
10. Do you agree with Giselle's decision to kill Karl? Why? Do you feel like she felt any remorse or not? What do you think will happen to her and Philippe in Dijon?