

THE TAINTED CUP

ROBERT JACKSON BENNETT

1. How did the author play with and subvert the standard tropes of the mystery genre? Of the fantasy genre? What were your favorite parts of how he blended them together in this novel?
2. What did you think of the incredible world the author built? What parts of the Empire of Khanum and its workings intrigued you the most?
3. Do you think the world of *The Tainted Cup* is a dystopia? If so, what are the most dystopian things about it? What are the least dystopian things?
4. What were your first impressions of Ana and Din? How did those impressions change over the course of the novel?
5. What did you think of Ana and Din's relationship? Did you find it entertaining? Would you want to work under someone like Ana, who is both extremely intelligent and extremely unpredictable?
6. How did your perceptions of the Empire change over the course of the story? How might you relate it to the trials many nations and states are experiencing today?
7. What were your thoughts about the main mystery and its investigation? Were you able to piece together the clues, or were you surprised by the reveal? What did you think of the way Ana conducted the investigation?
8. What did you think of the way Commander Blas was murdered? How did it compare creatively to other ways you've seen a character be killed?



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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9. Din was magically altered to have a perfect memory. What did you think of that? Would you want to be magically altered? If yes, what alterations would you want?
10. Ana states in the story that the many human alterations of the Empire are a transaction, safety in exchange for strangeness. Do you think this is a fair deal?
11. While the characters' magical alterations come with some very cool upsides, they also come with various downsides—sometimes shorter lifespans and often mandated careers. Given that the magic in this world has a cost, is it a price you would be willing to pay?
12. What did you think about the motivations of the final killer? When you compare the broader consequences of their murders compared to why they killed in the first place, what do you conclude?
13. What did you think of the Titans? Did you find them mysterious, frightening, and intriguing, or something else altogether?
14. At the end of the story, how would you interpret the imperial mantra “You are the Empire”? What do you think it says about what the Empire’s values? Is it morally good, or not?
15. Who would you cast as the main characters in a TV show or movie adaptation of *The Tainted Cup*?



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