

Book Club Discussion Kit - *The Blade of Milan* by Warren R. Basla

Dear Book Club Member,

Thank you for adding my debut novel to your group's most-likely-stacked 'to read' list. Having thoughtful fans of the genre read my work is a thrilling experience in a way that is difficult to put into words. As all writers do, I've spent countless hours in my setting, talking with my characters, considering plot points and trading time in the 'real world' for time at my desk. Knowing you are having an engaged dialogue about *The Blade of Milan* with your peers is an honor. I hope you enjoyed it. Please stay in touch.

Sincerest wishes,

Warren R. Basla

Discussion Questions

- In your own words, what was *The Blade of Milan* about?
- What themes struck you the most and how might you apply them to your own life, if at all?
- What were your first impressions of our protagonist, Rebecca?
- How does the setting in the story act as a character, if at all?
- Would you have done anything differently if you were Rebecca?
- How did your opinion of Rebecca change throughout the novel?
- In what ways did *The Blade of Milan* fit into typical historical or thriller genre conventions?
 - How does the novel differ from those genres?
- Are there any major or minor characters you would have liked to spend more time with?
- How did you feel about the ending? Did it feel inevitable, shocking, or both?
- What were your favorite scenes? Did you earmark a page with a memorable quote?
- Do you think the story provides a strong argument for a sequel?

Bonus Discussion Topics

- If *The Blade of Milan* were to be made into a movie or limited series, who would be cast to play the main characters? Is Rebecca more of an "established actress" or an "up-and-coming" star?
- Are there songs you listened to while reading? Did the story inspire you to listen to, or engage with, any genre of music or other media?

Stay Connected: warrenrbasla.com

Additional Reading Suggestions

Here are some texts and novels to explore if you want to extend your learning.

- The Family by Mario Puzo
- The Scarlet Contessa by Jeanne Kalogridis
- Assassin's Creed, Renaissance by Oliver Bowden
- Nicked by M.T. Anderson
- A Travel Guide to the Middle Ages by Anthony Bale
- Heart of Europe by Peter H. Wilson

Behind the Scenes

- Warren's great grandfather, Francesco Pietro Basla, was born in Sizzano, Italy. In May 1914, as a young man, he traveled through the port of Genoa bound for New York City. He intended to settle in Rochester, but ended up in Syracuse, the city where Warren was born.
- While Rebecca Guarna in *The Blade of Milan* is fictional, there was a real Rebecca in history. She was known as a 'lady of Salerno', an early physician and surgeon who studied at the University of Salerno. Rebecca pays homage to this remarkable woman in terms of the persistence and dedication she demonstrated to overcome adversity and societal expectations of her time. There are also elements of the author at 23—arrogant, impatient—and shades of the strong women mentors in his life that have shaded Rebecca's character.
- Similarly, Rustichello da Pisa was real. He was a medieval writer imprisoned in Genoa with Marco Polo. Rustichello is credited with recording Marco's travels, specifically his time serving Kublai Khan's court. The narrative required a foil to Rebecca's character arc; Rustichello felt larger-than-life. Anyway, who better to string compelling arguments and twisty deception together than a writer!

Your Turn to Write

The Blade of Milan has received favorable reviews online. However, you just read the book! What are your thoughts?

Write a 50-100 word honest (and spoiler-free) review below. If you're willing to spread the word about the novel, please consider sharing what you wrote on Goodreads, Amazon, B&N, and/or Bookshop. Thank you for helping other readers discover this debut historical thriller.

Your Review:

- "Overall, Basla delivers a novel that is thrilling, immersive, and deeply satisfying—an adventure that lingers long after the final page." – **Jeyran Main**, Review Tales Magazine
- "Loved it! A creative and at times, gritty reimagining of Assassin's Creed that will please fans of historically-set fiction." -- **Paul Jariabek**, Adventures of Francis Drake Author