

"Clamorous, gripping, absolutely heaps of fun. I loved this."
—LUCY FOLEY

DEATH IN THE AIR



A NOVEL

RAM MURALI

READING GROUP DISCUSSION

Reading Group Discussion Guide for

DEATH IN THE AIR BY RAM MURALI

This reading group guide for Ram Murali's *Death in the Air* includes an introduction, discussion questions, and ideas for enhancing your book club. The discussion questions may contain spoilers for readers who have not yet read *Death in the Air*.





INTRODUCTION

Ro Krishna is the American son of Indian parents, educated at the finest institutions, equally at home in London's poshest clubs and on the squash court, but unmoored after he is dramatically forced to leave a high-profile job under mysterious circumstances. He decides it's time to check in for some much-needed R&R at Samsara, a world-class spa for the global cosmopolitan elite nestled in the foothills of the Indian Himalayas. A person could be spiritually reborn in a place like this. Even a very rich person.

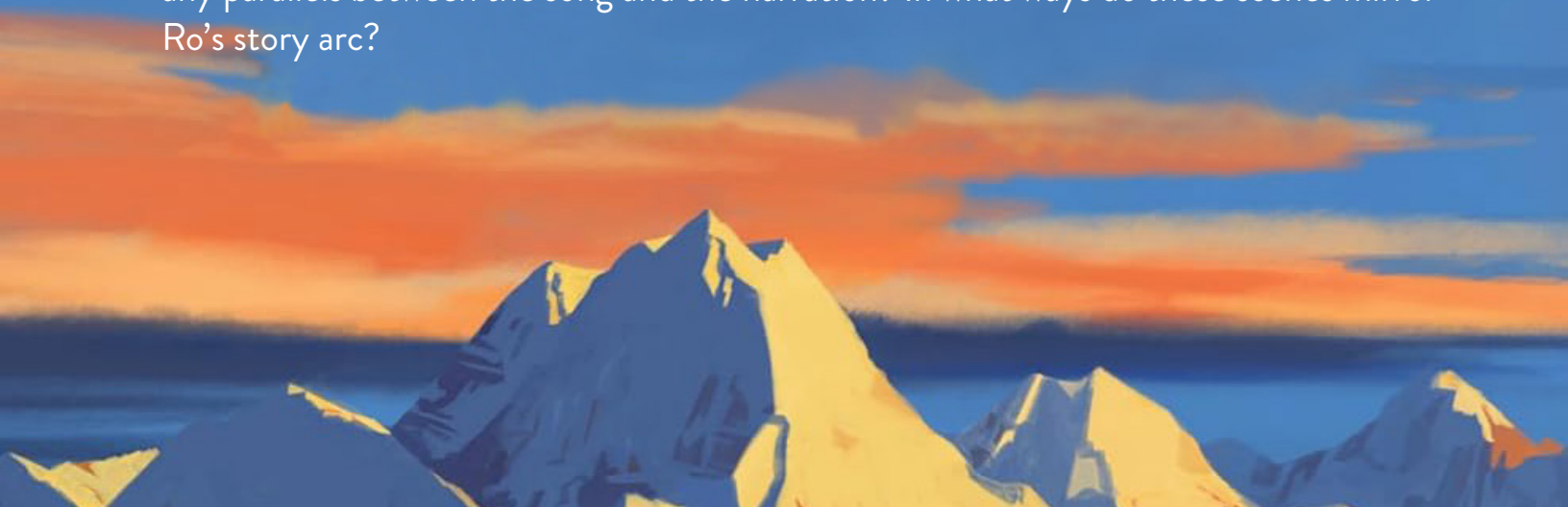
But a person—or several—could also die there. Samsara is the Sanskrit word for the karmic cycle of death and rebirth, after all. And as it turns out, the colorful cast of characters Ro meets—including a misanthropic politician; an American movie star preparing for his Bollywood crossover debut; a beautiful heiress to a family jewel fortune that barely survived Partition; and a bumbling white yogi inexplicably there to teach meditation—harbors a murderer among them. Maybe more than one.

As the death toll rises, Ro, a lawyer by training and a sleuth by circumstance, becomes embroiled in a vicious world under a gilded surface, where nothing is quite what it seems . . . including Ro himself.

QUESTIONS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

The questions below may contain spoilers for readers who have not yet finished *Death in the Air*.

1. When the reader first meets Ro, he is taking refuge in Bermuda from a situation at his job. He reveals during a game of Truth or Joke with Alex and Bronya, who are both strangers at the time, that he has never told anyone about his boss's discriminatory behavior, or that he's thinking of settling his complaint at his job (for a large payout) rather than pursuing it. Why do you think Ro felt comfortable revealing this information to strangers? What influence did this conversation have on the events of the novel, if any?
2. Many of the characters we see Ro interact with in Bermuda, London, and Samsara are interconnected and move in the same circles. Is this a coincidence or by design? Discuss the significance of these connections and how you think they played a part in the events of the novel.
3. Ro first uses Pendy, a divination pendulum, when he visits Parvati in Paris, and asks if he will have a mission while he is in India. Do you think the mission Ro took on while in India is the mission Pendy intended? Based on what you deem his mission to be, did he succeed or fail? Discuss why or why not.
4. As the plane takes off to India and Ro begins his journey to Samsara (Location 851), a song plays over the announcements from the pilot as the omniscient narrator foreshadows the events that are about to happen. Similarly, at the end of the book when Ro is leaving Samsara (Location 5658), a song plays on the car radio. Do you see any parallels between the song and the narration? In what ways do these scenes mirror Ro's story arc?



5. Throughout the book, various characters display different levels of mysticism. Bronya sensed a change in Ro's aura when they first met, Mrs. B had a recurring dream of the brakes being tampered in her vehicle, and Ro had a connection with Pandy. Do you believe that these powers were real and influenced the events of the novel or were they just coincidences that simply foreshadowed future events? Discuss the role of mysticism for each of these characters and the plot of the book.
6. Ro has a quite dark sense of humor. He often apologizes for laughing at inappropriate times or makes jokes about death/the dead. How did Ro's humor under these circumstances affect your reactions to him as a protagonist?
7. When Ro confronts the killer, he says "with whatever intuition I have, I do feel like the Universe is satisfied with how this has turned out... I don't think it's my place to judge you." Do you think the universe was satisfied with the outcome, or was Ro projecting? What do you think will happen to the killer after the events of *Death in the Air*?
8. Several times throughout the book, the Hindu belief in reincarnation is referenced. Do you think this belief influenced the actions of the characters? If so, how did it benefit them? How did it hurt them or others?
9. The Latrine, while only mentioned sporadically, ultimately drives many of Ro's actions throughout *Death in the Air*. Would Ro still have taken the actions he did if it hadn't been for The Latrine? Why or why not?



10. How did you respond to the end of the book and the end of Ro's story? How does karma play a role in how things resolve for Ro? For Mrs. B? How do you think the final scene mirrors Ro's journey? Who do you think is responsible for the act that sets the final scene in motion?
11. What do you think is the "executive role" Catherine has for Ro? Do you think Ro will take her up on it?
12. At the beginning of the novel, Alex tells Ro, "Maybe revenge would make you feel better." How are justice and revenge the same? How are they different? Reflect on each death in the book: Was it justice or revenge? Do you believe the killer felt better after exacting their plan?
13. Reread the first three chapters of the book. Did you notice any jokes or clues that resonate differently once you finished the book? What stood out to you? What do you notice upon a second reading?





ENHANCE YOUR BOOK CLUB

- The majority of *Death in the Air* is set at Samsara, a luxury resort and spa. Create DIY spa treatments to do before, during, or after the book club discussion that mimic those that Ro and the other Samsara guests would have experienced during their stay. Increase the spa-like environment by adding ambience in the form of meditation music, sitting on floor cushions or yoga mats, and inviting guests to come in their most comfortable clothes.
- Names have power. From our first introduction to Ro, he discusses the meaning of his own name and that of his new friends, Alex and Bronya. Later, Ro learns that he and Inspector Singh share the same nickname, giving Ro a connection to his Indian heritage that he confessed earlier he lacked during his childhood in America. Ask everyone in the book group to look up the meaning of their own name and to share how they feel about it - does the meaning reflect how they see themselves as a person? How did everyone feel about their own names when they were growing up? What name would they choose if they could?
- Ro references Agatha Christie several times throughout the book. Many classic sleuth tales, like those by Christie, take place in a remote hotel or spa like the one we see in *Death in the Air*. Select one as a group and plan a movie night alongside the book club.
- At the start of the novel, when Ro first meets Alex, he plays a game of Truth or Joke. Play a round—or several—as an icebreaker at the start of your book club.