

Aulisyn

Book Club Reading Guide

Hi, I'm Erzsebet, author of **Aulisyn**. The questions in this guide are ones I asked myself as I researched, wrote and re-read the novel. If a juicy bit of discussion comes up about a question that isn't in the guide, let me know and I can add it. Thank you for choosing my novel to discuss! -erz

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1. I claim **Aulisyn** is a dual-timeline novel. Is that actually true? Can there be a dual timeline when the “times” are contemporaneous?
2. Did the alternation of Village and Institute chapters add to your experience of **Aulisyn**? Did it feel like the chapters supported one another as written? Would you feel like the novel is stronger had it been written straight through from Elicot to Bellumfort?
3. Early drafts of **Aulisyn** used era-specific terminology in the Elicot chapters. Early feedback indicated that got in the way of the story. Some of the items that changed are demesne to village; reeve to sheriff; donjon to jail. Was it a good choice to modernize the terminology? Did it diminish the verisimilitude of the Elicot chapters?
4. Who did you find the most empathetic character in **Aulisyn**? Who did you relate to most? If you could get a coffee with one of the characters, who would it be?
5. Which character do you dislike? Are there any you actively hate?
6. Is the portrayal of male characters problematic? Which character, to what extent, and what would address the issue?
7. The Ossuary engineer, Martha Tenenbaum, was a man in early drafts. Do you believe the sex of the engineer makes any difference to the story?
8. Sheriff Waite is put in a position where his duties to the village conflict with his love for Eliza. What is your opinion of his choices? What would you do in a similar situation?

9. When did you first understand “who” Aulisyn is? Do you find her to be a heroine or a villain? What do you think she does after Dead Start?
10. The Bellumfort Institute’s mission is not vague; it’s stated in the full name of the corporation: “The Bellumfort Institute of Historical Reclamation.” Is the mission worthwhile? Do future generations have a right to the experiences of generations past?
11. Martha attempts to blackmail Lowell by bringing charges of sexual misconduct with minors. Is Lowell’s casual abuse of the female emotional input units as morally corrupt as the Institute itself? Is Martha also culpable of abusing the girls? Do you agree with Martha that there is no transient property of consent?
12. Accusations of witchcraft seem quaint, perhaps even silly. Who would really believe a woman would steal penises and put them in a nest? It loses all humor when you realize that women were tortured and put to death for absurd accusations. Are there analogous situations today? Do you believe Western civilization has progressed beyond irrational accusations?
13. Hezekiah Landgrave realizes the cruelty of his part in maintaining the façade of Elicot when he explains his actions to Eliza. Martha only realizes it when the Medieval seepage causes the EIUs to harm themselves. What do you think accounts for this? Are ethical blind spots avoidable? Or can they only be seen in retrospect?
14. To us, VR technology is an explained phenomenon. If we entered the simulation, we would not mistake it for a supernatural (unexplained) experience. Do you believe it is valid to assert that the Ossuary program is supernatural from Eliza’s perspective?
15. Think of something you consider “technology.” How recently was your selection integrated into daily life? Is your definition of technology time-limited? Could you instead define it as skill-limited? For example, I do not know how to use a distaff. If someone gave me one, it would be new tech to me, due to skill limitation. Thoughts?
16. How likely do you think it is that something like the Ossuary program will exist in our lifetime? Would you use it? Would you volunteer to be an emotional input unit?
17. The Earth is becoming uninhabitable in **Aulisyn**. When the blind men tell their story, there is a moment where they reflect on the diminishing variety of plant life. Are there any changes you’ve experienced related to climate change?
18. The Day Star is a transport between Earth and the New Norfolk colony. Does that seem realistically feasible to you? Do you think that any of the current private industry players in aerospace will be around if/when humans colonize other planets?

19. Gothic fiction is sometimes referred to as “Gothic horror.” In what ways, if any, is **Aulisyn** a horror novel? If there are horrific aspects, are they stronger in the Institute or the Village sections?
20. Women in the Gothic genre are often forced into isolating environments. In this way, Eliza follows the literary footsteps of female characters throughout Gothic literature. Is Eliza’s imprisonment on Elicot more “Gothic” than her experience in Bellumfort? Does your opinion change if you narrow the comparison to Eliza’s time at the Institute after Sarah’s departure?
21. Gothic novels are often set in the Middle Ages and the Village sections of **Aulisyn** lean into that era. Does the juxtaposition of Medieval with near-future increase the sense of dread you felt as you progressed through the novel?
22. There is (primarily academic) debate as to whether there is such a thing as the “female Gothic.” To vastly oversimplify, female Gothic narratives involve a flight from an oppressive male and a search for a nurturing female. By that (oversimplification!), would you call **Aulisyn** female Gothic? Do you believe it is reasonable to divide the genre by gendered experience of persecution?