

# READER'S GUIDE

## I. INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR

1. Why do some spirits appear as corporeal while others are translucent or ghoulish?

The opacity issue is addressed in the dialogue. In the world of the three novels, the spirits who died aboard the *Queen Mary* can appear as they did in life. Gina's the only spirit who has trouble staying 'solid' if you will, because technically, she has no business haunting the ship. She didn't die aboard. As for when the spirits look scary, they appear that way only when they need to get a living person's focused attention. In *Cooking for Ghosts*, you remember that the two spirits in the story looked as they had in life, until they needed the characters they were haunting to wake up to certain realities they hadn't faced. So, the spirits appear as they did in death, and shortly thereafter, the characters are forced to come to grips with their issues. The same is true in *Spells and Oregano*. The character who can see the spirits aboard the ship deliberately ignores them, until one shows up in her ghoulish state in order to grab her urgent attention.

2. Makes sense. But, why Dolores?

What happens to Dolores in *Cooking for Ghosts* brings so many elements of the plot forward, but she has such a lonely existence and such a miserable death, that it just broke my heart to leave it

that way. In *Spells and Oregano*, Dolores makes a powerful statement with her cameo appearance and I ... wanted that for her.

3. Would you say that Gina lied when she said that Sarita was in danger?

Clever question. I'd say Gina knew Sarita was in danger of becoming a very unhappy recluse. And she also knew that Luca needed to be aboard that ship.

4. Both Angela and Sarita suspect the perpetrator, but dismiss their concerns. Why?

I think it was obvious to all the female characters who the culprit was, even if his actual identity isn't readily apparent. But the women tamp down on that thought, they feel bad about pointing out his peculiarities, because that's what we women do *all the time*. We're so afraid of making a fuss, of making others feel uncomfortable. We've been trained that way. Women have been killed in real life because they didn't want to speak up about someone they perceived as a threat. But it's better to be rude than dead.

5. In *Cooking for Ghosts*, Jane argues with Cynthia and Angela about hiring Cristiano, and walks off when she loses that argument. In *Spells and Oregano*, Cristiano argues with Angela and Rohini about hiring Luca, and walks off when he loses that argument. Just a coincidence?

I'm glad you noticed. I wrote it that way deliberately. Jane was afraid of Cris's past as a felon, while Cristiano's reason for

not wanting Luca aboard isn't as clear, and I wanted there to be that comparison. I thought it was a fun way to introduce the 'guy' stuff going on with Cris in this novel that wasn't present in the first novel, wherein he was mostly the Byronic hero. We know he committed murder, but in some ways we admire him for it, due to the circumstances. We know he's devoted to Rohini. We know he's a feminist for the most part, but, this is ten years down the road from the time period in the first novel, and I felt it important to flesh him out, as I did with the other recurring characters. Apart from his explosive temper, which, while never directed at the women, is part of who he is, and is a constant struggle for him, I wanted readers to see his other foibles — his insecurities, his obtuseness, his stubbornness, his sexism, which, though mild, does exist. And eventually, his coming full circle back to the good guy with flaws that Rohini fell in love with in Book I.

6. I noticed another juxtaposition. The line, "I only meant to knock her out." With the exception of one pronoun, that same statement was uttered by another character in the first novel.

Right again. Well-spotted. The contrast between the two characters who say it, their poles-apart motivations, was too delicious. I couldn't resist highlighting those differences by having them say the same thing.

7. Why is the heading for Chapter 13 the only one not written out?

It was like that in Book I, too. In Book I, all the ghosts reveal themselves in that chapter, but apart from that, the number "13" is

a significant one in the ship's history. That's why I told you to come up with thirteen interview questions.

8. Oh, that's fun. I didn't know that was the reason, and it was hard to come up with just thirteen. Here's the next one: What's the significance of the seagulls on the shore with Rohini and Cristiano?

That an easy one. At the beginning of the novel, Sarita mentions that seagulls "mate for life." When I found myself writing about Cris and Rohini walking along the shore as they uncovered some hidden problems in their marriage, I put in the two seagulls in the background as a metaphor.

9. Nice. What was the most interesting research you did for this novel?

Talking to law enforcement people is always fascinating. Talking to David Copperfield the magician was amazing. But I think the most unique research for this novel was asking an acquaintance who was staying aboard the *Queen Mary* to time how long it took to fill up the bathtub in her suite with her in it.

10. How did you learn to talk like a magician? Was that one of the things you spoke with David Copperfield about?

No, David and I spoke primarily about the time-consuming, vital, and grueling details of creating a successful performance. And there are so many. But as far as the silly things Santino and Luciano say during their act — that was all derived from Francis C. Hill's 1910 book, *A Half Hour of Magic*. It's a resource book that teaches novice magicians how to chat up their audiences.

11. Was David Copperfield your inspiration for the characters of Luca and Santi?

Apart from their striking looks and their success at what they do, no. The inspiration for their personalities comes from a different source entirely, one that will remain anonymous. But in many ways, Luca and Santi could be the same person, except that their life experiences, their individual talents, their unique perceptions of certain events, brought out different characteristics and traits in each brother. Even their names have similar meaning: Luca means “light” and Santi means “saint.” I deliberately chose names for both that had positive connotations, because this isn’t your typical good twin-evil twin situation.

12. You love to give your characters names with significant meaning. In your author’s note you make mention of some of them. Any you left out that you’d like to tell us about now?

Let’s see — ‘Dr. Menville’ was named after Bruce Willis’s character in [Death Becomes Her](#). Nina Snyder is a friend who works in law enforcement in California, and ‘Lizzie’ is her daughter’s name. Angela’s ‘Uncle Nunzio’ who gets mentioned in the same context in both Books I and II — his “sleeping-with-the-fishes” death — is named after a friend’s cheating ex-boyfriend. It was really fun naming him and visualizing him down there at the bottom of the ocean with Naag. Gee, I sure hope Dolores is avoiding the areas where those two skanks sank.

13. Ah ... that’s scary, but okay. So, which character would you say you’re most like?

I think I share traits with all of the female characters, but if I had to choose only one, I'm most like Gina. I can see myself going up against a Navy Seal or the Queen of England to try to save my sons. Also, she's short, Sicilian, and hot-tempered, so a no-brainer.

*(The audio of this interview is available on Patricia's [website](#).)*



## II. QUESTIONS FOR YOUR BOOK GROUP

1. Both Angela and Sarita have changed drastically in the past ten years. What changes surprised you most? What do you think caused these changes? How would you say you've changed in the past ten years? What was the most dramatic change within yourself you've experienced thus far?
2. Luca has some fun magic powers, while some of the other characters aren't as lucky. If you could have only one magic power, what would you choose?
3. Would you say the portrayal of Rohini and Cristiano's marriage is realistic? Do you think they have a good marriage or a poor one? Despite their differing backgrounds, why do you think they continue to be drawn to each other?
4. Angela makes jokes in both novels about her "honeymoon from hell." Why do you think she pokes fun at that experience now? Do

you have a honeymoon experience like hers to share? Did you find it funny at the time, and if not, is it funnier to you now that time has passed?

5. Do you know anyone who has identical twins? If so, notice anything different about their sibling relationship as opposed to other sibling relationships?
6. What, if anything, surprised you about this story?
7. How does Book I compare to Book II? Do you have a preference for one over the other?
8. What do you think of the author's penchant for weaving real events, places, and people into the novels? Why do you suppose she uses that technique?
9. How many real-life people who appear or are mentioned as themselves did you spot in the story? Can you name them? (Answers are at the end of this list of questions.)
10. Have you visited any of the places mentioned in the novels? Would you say the descriptions of them are accurate?
11. Are there any places the author describes that you would now like to visit because of what you've read?
12. Which characters in Books I and II would you like to see come back in Book III?

13. Which new characters do you think we will meet in Book III?

Answers to Question Number Nine, in alphabetical order: War bride [June Allen](#), celebrity baker [Jose Barajas](#), magician [David Copperfield](#), *Queen Mary* dining host Avi La, escape artist [Alan Rabinowitz](#), former *Queen Mary* crew member [Ralph Ruston](#), WWII war veteran [George Schneider](#)



### III. LINKS OF INTEREST

[David Copperfield Video: The Fires of Passion](#): See the magic act that inspired the author of *Spells and Oregano*

[Alan Rabinowitz \(Alan Alan\) The British Houdini](#): Read about the real-life escape artist who invented the Burning Rope Trick

[Identical Twins Are Not Really Identical](#): How can one identical twin have powers and the other not? Read the article that explains the difference that can exist between real identical twins.

[Wives of Veterans Who Suffer From Posttraumatic Stress Disorder](#): Read about wives whose husbands came home from war zones suffering the aftereffects of combat.

[History of the RMS Queen Mary During Her Service in WWII](#): See photos and read stories about the ship during her tenure as “The Grey Ghost.”



Thank you for reading *Spells and Oregano: Book II of The Secret Spice Café Trilogy*. [Visit the book series page on Facebook](#) for information

on DEMONS, WELL-SEASONED: Book III in The Secret Spice Café Trilogy.

[Cooking for Ghosts: Book I](#), is available online and at all fine bookshops.

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