

Topics for Discussion for *Her Majesty the King*

- (1) Did you know much about Hatshepsut before you read *Her Majesty the King*? How does the portrayal of Hatshepsut in *Her Majesty the King* differ from the way she's usually depicted by historians? Did reading this novel about Hatshepsut make you want to learn more about her?
- (2) *Her Majesty the King* describes the culture of ancient Egypt as accurately as possible. What aspects of life in ancient Egypt surprised you? How do you think you would fare if you had lived in Hatshepsut's era?
- (3) Did you think Hatshepsut's brother Tuthmosis is a truly evil character, or is he simply a victim of Nefer-Weben's manipulation? Why does Nefer-Weben hate the royal family and Hatshepsut in particular?
- (4) Who do you think was responsible for the death of Huy's daughter, Tefnut? Can you guess who attacked General Ahmose-Pennekheb at the festival?
- (5) Women in ancient Egypt had more legal and social rights than women anywhere else in the ancient world. This situation was brought to an end when Egypt was conquered by the Greeks in 332 BCE, and the Greeks imposed their social norms which were harshly restrictive of women. If history had been different and the Egyptians had prevailed over the Greeks, do you think contemporary women would be better off?
- (6) Throughout *Her Majesty the King*, Hatshepsut has to cope with many difficult and troublesome burdens. She is often reluctant and sometimes runs away, but she always goes back and takes up her responsibilities. Do you see a common thread with women's lives today, when they have responsibilities foisted on them that they don't feel equipped to handle—but must cope with them anyway—because no one else will take up the burden?
- (7) Can you think of elements of the ancient Egyptian religion mentioned in the book that foreshadow the beliefs that Christians developed 1500 years later? Were you shocked or surprised at the rites that Hatshepsut performed as the God's Wife of Amen? The

ancient Egyptians regarded sexuality with great reverence and considered it to be an integral part of religious practice. Discuss how that attitude differs from that of many of today's religions.

- (8) Discuss how the following factors would have influenced Hatshepsut's personality and temperament as she grew up: being a member of a military family with three older brothers; having a different mother than her brothers; being her father's favourite; being the only girl attending the *kap* (royal school); knowing she would marry one of her brothers; being exceptionally intelligent.
- (9) Which character most appealed to you? Which one did you dislike most? In *Her Majesty the King*, three men have a romantic interest in Hatshepsut: Senenmut, Hapuseneb and Neshi. Which man do you think would make the best match for her? Do you think she will ever be able to make a permanent commitment to any of them?
- (10) Hatshepsut's father had no royal blood, yet he became a king. What did an Egyptian king have that gave him the right to rule? How does Hatshepsut acquire it?
- (11) When you read historical fiction, is it important to you that authors keep strictly within the known historical framework, even if the story ends in tragedy? Does knowing you're reading about real people and real events increase your emotional involvement with the characters, or do you prefer to have more fantasy without the constraints of history?
- (12) When Hatshepsut and Senenmut first meet, they very quickly develop a rapport, despite the vast differences in their backgrounds. What is it that draws them together so strongly?
- (13) One of the major themes of *Her Majesty the King* is the isolation that exceptional individuals feel throughout their lives. By having Hatshepsut narrate her own story, do you feel better able to understand the issues such a complex character must face?
- (14) Hatshepsut lived in an era when all rulers were supposed to be men. The few women who had attempted to rule Egypt before her had brought disaster in their wake. How do you think the Egyptian people reacted to Hatshepsut's accession? How would foreign rulers have regarded a nation ruled by a woman?

- (15) When Hatshepsut finally claims the throne, do you think she's ready to be a Horus King? Do you believe her plans will succeed? What do you suppose Nefer-Weben will do when he learns that Hatshepsut has become king? Do you think Neshi will succeed in controlling Alodia?