

River God Study Guide

River God by Wilbur Smith

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Plot Summary

At its heart, Wilbur Smith's novel, *River God*, is a love story. The narrator, Taita, is a slave. He is well educated and loyal to his mistress, whose name is Lostris. Lostris is a young lady at the beginning of the novel. She is full of romantic ideas and interested in her childhood friend, Tanus, as a future mate. Tanus is a kind young man, fiercely loyal and equally interested in Lostris. The two make promises to one another, but fate intervenes. Lostris is the only daughter of a wealthy noble, Lord Intef, who ensures his favor with the Pharaoh by promising his daughter in marriage. Pharaoh Mamose believed that a young and virgin bride would provide him with a well-bred heir to his crumbling kingdom. Lostris went reluctantly to Pharaoh's palace and brought Taita with her. Over the years that followed, Lostris did bear a son who eventually inherited the Egyptian kingdom. His name was Memnon and he was a strong boy who received an excellent education on both scholarly and military fronts from his mother's closest friends, Taita and Tanus. Like his sisters who would come after him, Memnon was sired by Tanus, not Pharaoh, but their paternity was kept a secret. Memnon was raised as prince regent and his sisters as princesses.

Troubling times fell upon Egypt. Its borders were attacked continuously and gradually the prime instigator, the Hyksos people and their ruler, Salitas, drove the Egyptians into exile. Pharaoh Mamose died in battle, and Lostris, fearing for her son's safety and the future of Egypt, fled southward. Following Pharaoh's death, Lostris inherited the regency until Memnon came of age. Thousands of her people followed her to exile. For over ten years she and all her followers traversed the Nile riverbanks continuing southward to the place of the Nile's origin. Battles were waged, deaths endured, and new babies born. Memnon reached adult age and took a wife by the name of Masara. She was not Egyptian, but like the relationship of Lostris and Tanus, their love could not be denied. Towards the end of the novel Lostris leads her people back to their homeland. By that time Tanus had died and Lostris lost her will to live. Fortunately, the task that Lostris set out to accomplish (to keep Memnon safe so he could return and set Egypt free from its suppressors) was nearly complete. Memnon returned north to Egypt's delta and engaged the Hyksos' military in battle. During their exodus, Lostris developed cancer. She returned to Egypt with Memnon and died in Taita's arms. Taita had loved her from the perspective of a man, not just as her servant, and his pain would have been overwhelming except that Memnon still required his friendship. Taita continued to live with Lostris' family and serve them after her death.



Pages 1-47

Pages 1-47 Summary

River God opens with Lady Lostris, only daughter of the Egyptian noble Intef, aboard a boat on the Nile River. She is fourteen years of age and accompanied by her slave and care provider, Taita. Taita is an enuch, a slave of highest regard and a wealthy possession. He is well known as a physician, astrologer, poet, architect and inventor. As such, he also served as Lady Lostris' tutor. They are joined by Tanus, a mutual friend and elite officer of the Egyptian guard.

On this day they were aboard Tanus's ship called the Breath Of Horus and were enjoying the excitement leading up to the festival of Osiris. An injured hippopotamus rears up and Lady Lostris was thrown from the relative safety of the boat through the air. Tanus was momentarily stunned but quickly responded by jumping onto the beast's back and inflicting a mortal wound with his sword. The two were childhood friends and he could not bear for harm to befall her. As soon as the hunt ended the three enjoyed a meal together. Taita took some time to engineer improvements for Tanus's ships and to record the events around him.

Lady Lostris and Tanus used this lapse to slip away undetected. Tanus had escorted her to an island temple devoted to her patron deity, the goddess Hapi. The two left offerings for Hapi. They also made vows of love to one another. Taita had mixed feelings about this pairing. He knew their love would be more likely to create suffering than joy. As a trusted employee of Intef, Taita was aware of Intef's inclinations towards Tanus's family. He knew Intef would never allow the marriage for which the two longed.

Following the hunt and expedition to the temple, the party returned downstream to the city of Karnak. In the morning Taita was present as Lord Intef held his usual meetings. When everyone else had been excused Intef questioned Taita on Lady Lostris' activities. He had numerous spies throughout the country and one had apparently reported unfavorably about her antics. As Taita began to speak in favor of a union between Lostris and Tanus, Intef met him with accusations of impropriety. Her virginity was of prime concern to Intef and her happiness was irrelevant. For his part in her rebellion, Intef ordered that Taita be whipped by the state executioner, Rasfer. Additionally he suggested to Pharaoh that Tanus's squadron be sent up-river on royal business.

Pages 1-47 Analysis

In this section the main characters of Taita, Lostris and Tanus are introduced. Taita describes himself as an intelligent man but admits his status as a slave. Slavery is the foundation for the Egyptian empire. Although Taita is embarrassed by his role, he is loyal to his mistress and could not dream of a better lot. If not for the arrogant nobles



who scorn him, Taita would be content as a slave. The discord between his status and intellectual worth will be a point of contention throughout the novel.

The current status of each of the main characters within Egyptian society is discussed. Classes are important to those of regal bearing and must not be overlooked. The relationship between Lostris and Tanus is a close one. They were brought up as companions and do not recognize the differences in each other's status. Although Tanus is the older of the two and should be more aware of his position within society, he is oblivious to everything except for his desire. As the younger of the two, Lostris is naive, and his heroic leap to save her only further cemented her notions of romance and chivalry. The setting is portrayed as being ripe for their blossoming love. The love between Lostris and Tanus unfolds throughout the book, so this particular section sets the stage for the events that follow.

Taita is not a naive man. He has been owned by Lord Intef for quite some time. He knows what motivates Lord Intef's actions, and love for his daughter is not included. Taita was employed by Intef when Tanus's father passed away and Taita knows of Intef's involvement in his death. Aside from being jealous of Tanus, Taita also knows that as a slave and eunuch he could never be in a real relationship with Lostris. Taita may fantasize about such an event, but he recognizes that it will never come to be. Since he can not benefit from Lostris' attentions he accepts that Tanus, his friend, will do so in his stead. Taita would like them to be happy but knows that it is impossible. Still, out of love for Lostris and Taita, he fulfills their request to speak to Intef on their behalf. As he expected, Intef did not approve of such a union and punished him severely for his efforts. Taita is familiar with Rasfer, Intef's employee who is responsible for carrying out Intef's punishments. Rasfer conducted Taita's gelding, whereby Taita went from an enslaved man to an enslaved eunuch as punishment for disappointing Intef.



Pages 48-107

Pages 48-107 Summary

On the fifth day of the festival, Pharaoh and his accompanying retinue made the trip from his palace on Elephantine island to the city of Karnak where the festivities were held. Tanus led his squadron, the elite Blue Crocodile Guards, as they escorted the king. As Lord Intef's favorite scribe, Taita was in charge of creating a pageant for the festival. He had revised the previous version and cast Tanus and Lady Lostris in the leading roles. The two had much time together in the form of rehearsals, both scheduled and impromptu.

The Pageant was held in the temple of Osiris. It included much drama and the citizens were pleased. All the nobility crowded onto risers to witness the play and the peasants lined the streets to see the procession into the temple. Once inside the temple Tanus played his part well. The executioner, Rasfer, had been given the part of Seth, an anti-God, who was feared and hated by the people. Rasfer enjoyed his role and when the time came to mock fight with Tanus, Rasfer's lunges were full of intention. Fortunately, Tanus was the better swordsman and prevailed. The pageant traditionally ended with an oration on behalf of the people. It was generally thought to be inspired by the God Horus and spoken through his actor, in this case, Tanus. In his specialized role Tanus dared to speak of civil unrest and corrupt nobles. Some of the oration resonated with Pharaoh. He was growing older and was in need of a strong heir to rule his kingdom in the future. Pharaoh requested Lady Lostris' hand in marriage. Lord Intef agreed and immediately began marriage preparations.

Pages 48-107 Analysis

The second section gives the reader a deep understanding of the state of Egypt at the time of the book. The pageant brings out the best and the worst of Egypt's inhabitants. Pharaoh's visit to Thebes is exciting for its citizens. They come out in great numbers to welcome him. On page forty-eight Taita compares Pharaoh's state barge to the current state of Egypt. He mentions that it lumbered along and was designed poorly. It was painted brightly and its hull was ornamented; however, as one looked closer it was apparent that the colors were faded and the sides soiled. Similarly, according to Taita, Pharaoh Mamose was the weakest ruler of a declining dynasty. There was nothing remarkable about the leader, yet his barge was decorated in high fashion and demonstrated his vast wealth. In contrast, Tanus stood aboard the bow of his ship, the Breath of Horus. He stood erect and strong. He paid full attention to the proceedings around him, but he did so without any fanfare. His squadron was perfectly aligned and awaited his instruction. Following his rescue of Pharaoh's barge, Tanus became widely recognized and was embraced by the people. Still, he remained modest, wanted none of the popularity and said repeatedly that he only wished to serve a safe and prosperous Egypt.



Again on page fifty-eight Taita speaks of Egypt's decline. He describes Pharaoh Mamose from a detached, physician's perspective. Pharaoh was a small man, almost hairless, and grown feeble with age. Taita went on to say that the king appeared nervous and had many concerns. Egypt had been attacked at its borders and lost much of its once vast territory. Currently, pirates from the sea threatened the delta. On the lower sections of the Nile River a man called the "False Pharaoh" had taken control and claimed to be the true Pharaoh. Desert nomads preyed upon the Egyptian trade routes. Merchants were forced to pay high prices to travel safely, and many shipments failed to arrive. The farmers were so scared of the nomadic pirates that they had abandoned their land, and crops were less abundant. Lastly, Pharaoh sired many offspring, but all were female, and so he lacked a male heir to inherit his throne. Pharaoh Mamose was less like a god and more like an average elderly man with an impossible task.

While Lady Lostris possessed the rare gift of both a beautiful inner spirit and a gorgeous appearance, she had enjoyed relative anonymity and lived the sheltered life of a wealthy noble. She had not been exposed to the people, who were struck by her beauty and amazing voice. Word of her charms spread and she became widely admired. Her assets were also noted by Pharaoh. Pharaoh was captivated by Lady Lostris' beauty and planned to marry her at the festival's end.



Pages 108-145

Pages 108-145 Summary

Taita rushed to the riverbanks to inform Tanus of Lord Intef's marriage plans. Knowing the people were ripe for rebellion and saw Tanus as their hero, Taita encouraged Tanus to incite a civil war. Before they could act on their plan, a party of Pharaoh's men arrived at the riverside to arrest Tanus on grounds of treason. Taita immediately set off for Lostris' quarters to inform her of the evening's events. Upon arrival he found her quarters empty. She had already been relocated to the Pharaoh's harem and Taita was not allowed access. Taita did not see either Tanus or Lostris again until the commencement of the festival.

On the final day of the festival of Osiris Pharaoh again gathered his people in the temple. All strained to hear what he had to say. The speeches were interminably long and the hot air was stifling. Pharaoh addressed the concerns put forth in Tanus's speech. Pharaoh gave Tanus a challenge. He provided him with a royal seal and encouraged him to use it to acquire everything he needed to defeat the desert pirates. If he succeeded, than on the final day of the festival, two years later, his sentence would be lifted. If he failed to remove the pirates that threatened Egypt, Pharaoh would interpret his failure as lack of support from the gods and find him guilty of sedition, punishable by death.

The festival culminated in the marriage of Pharaoh and Lady Lostris. Taita watched from the crowd as his mistress was heavily guarded and kept from him. Lord Intef had requested Taita's advice on an appropriate dowry and they had agreed upon a gift composed of both gold and irrigable land. Following tradition, however, it was the daughter who had to make a public request for her dowry from her father and he was obligated to comply. As her father prompted, Lostris requested ownership of Taita. Intef was irate upon hearing her petition but could not refuse her request.

During the weeks following their marriage, Taita came to know the Pharaoh as a kind man. He was gentle with Lostris and charitable by nature. He spoke kindly to Taita and requested his services as a physician. With this newfound trust, Taita convinced the king that he should wait ninety days before taking Lostris to his bed. Although he was dismayed, the Pharaoh's need for an heir overrode his own desires. Lostris was thankful for the respite but longed for Tanus. Taita prescribed a sedative for Lostris and went to locate Tanus. Tanus could not be found. His quarters left no clues as to his whereabouts; he had even left behind his favorite hunting bow, a gift from Taita. Taita returned to his previous home to gather belongings and check on the birds of prey he kept as pets. He gave them milk left over in his room. When it resulted in their quick death he realized that Rasfer and Intef were trying to eliminate him.



Pages 108-145 Analysis

Considering the state of Egypt, it is understandable that Taita would incite Tanus to rebel. He was confident that most of Tanus's squadron and the general populace would gladly follow him into battle. Members of his legion agreed and were inclined to follow him to their deaths if necessary. They were tired of working under an inept government and frightened for their futures. Most importantly, Taita wanted Tanus and Lostris to be happy. Tanus refused Taita's appeals and threatened to report him for treason if he did not stop suggesting it. As a compromise, they decided to remove Lady Lostris from her apartment under the cover of night. Tanus figured that he and Lostris could be far away by morning when she was reported missing. Tanus demonstrated both his loyalty and naive nature in this section. When Pharaoh's guards came to arrest him, Tanus went willingly because he truly believed that Pharaoh would be merciful and see the truth in his oratory.

Taita was impressed by some of Pharaoh's suggestions for improving the country and laughed at some of his more ludicrous plans. To rectify the issue of corrupt officials, Pharaoh appointed Lord Intef as sole investigator and provided him with the highest powers of the office to see the plan carried through. Taita was shocked that such a corrupt noble would be given even more power and wealth and lamented how many more innocent people would be harmed by the king's well-intended but misplaced trust. Although Pharaoh did heed Tanus's advice, he had also been informed that Tanus's actions constituted treason. Lord Intef insisted that Tanus was attempting to incite a civil war and that the petitions were designed by Tanus and not ordained by the god, Horus. Pharaoh decides to act judiciously in this manner. He rationalized that if Tanus was supported by the gods, than he would be capable of unthinkable victories. Pharaoh used this scenario to his own advantage when challenging Tanus. Rather than deciding Tanus's fate himself, whereby he would risk alienating either the noble class, the common people, or the gods above, Pharaoh entrusted Tanus with his challenge. Tanus was willing to work for his country for two years and meet the challenge. When he learned of Lostris' engagement to Pharaoh, however, he lost the will to fight. He couldn't imagine his future without Lostris and didn't see the point in trying.

Taita and Lostris had always lived at Lord Intef's home. The idea of moving was frightening. Taita felt responsible for suggesting that Pharaoh marry a beautiful virgin, although it did not occur to him that Lostris would be chosen. Lostris was heart broken and there was little Taita could do to help her. At the marriage of Lostris to Pharaoh Taita was shocked when Lostris demanded ownership of Taita as her dowry. Taita was moved by Lostris' sense of loyalty, but Lord Intef was enraged at her insolence with regards to her dowry. It was not their agreement but he could not publicly deny her request. Furthermore, Taita's talents were numerous and he played an integral role in Intef's affairs. Taita knew that his relocation would leave Intef vulnerable. Taita correctly surmised that Intef would not allow him to live peacefully anywhere except within his own home. When Intef saw that Lostris could not be deterred, he relented, and as Taita came forward to accompany Pharaoh and the new queen, Intef whispered a death threat to him. Taita remained by Lostris' side in the ensuing days both to comfort her



and protect himself from Intef's revenge. With his life threatened, Taita was eager to set sail for the Pharaoh's palace. Lostris was not so eager. She was a pawn in the Pharaoh's game and did not wish to be with anyone but Tanus.



Pages 146-190

Pages 146-190 Summary

After the festival the king and his family returned to his palace at Elephantine Island. As the newest of his wives, Lostris and her slave, Taita, were required to make the journey as well. The king remained fascinated with her, and although he maintained his distance for ninety days with regard to sexual relations, he dined with her often and enjoyed her company. For her part, Lostris' heart belonged to Tanus, but she was growing fond of Pharaoh and readily accepted her new role in life. The two took to walking through the city streets. Lostris enjoyed talking with the commoners and would do so at great lengths. Lostris would then tell Pharaoh the concerns of his people. Through these actions she acquired a reputation as a compassionate listener and became the most loved of all his wives.

When ninety days had finally passed the king summoned Lostris to his quarters. Taita prescribed a numbing lubricant for her and prayed that the king would be gentle with her. Sex with Pharaoh didn't seem to hurt Lostris, but she received no satisfaction from it either. With Lostris' safety ensured, Taita prepared to leave in search of Tanus once again. Taita found Kratas in one of the ale houses along the river. He had sent a message in advance and Taita found that Kratas had not completed any of his requests. Taita argued that since Tanus had disappeared there was no point in preparing for his mission. Taita belittled his efforts and ordered him to start working on Tanus's behalf.

Taita finally found Tanus residing in a hunting shanty. It was nestled in the swamp area adjacent to the river yet downstream from the inhabited cities. He had hired a prostitute to cook and clean for him as well as fulfill his sexual desires. He was drunk and filthy and had lost much of his physique. Taita tossed him out the side of the hut and into the fowl water to wash off his stupor. Tanus had been drinking himself numb out of despair, but when he learned that Lostris still loved him and looked forward to their future together his attitude changed for the better. Taita convinced him of the merit of meeting Pharaoh's challenge with regards to vanquishing the nomadic pirates threatening Egypt's safety. With this newfound motivation Tanus leaped into action. They immediately set off on the return trip to Karnak. The pace they kept was brisk and Tanus's fitness returned. Along the way they discovered a man who had been slain. The color of his hair resembled Tanus's such that Taita brought the body back to Karnak and ordered it embalmed as Tanus. He hoped that the staged death would provide Tanus with some anonymity and added time onto his difficult quest. Taita sent a letter to Lostris informing her of the situation and boarded the Breath of Horus. Taita, Tanus, Kratas, and 100 men from their regiment sailed downriver. At a city called Safaga, Tanus used the hawk seal given to him by Pharaoh to purchase the equipment he required from a merchant named Tiamat. Tiamat also provided valuable information about the conduct of local pirates known as Shrikes.



Pages 146-190 Analysis

The king's palace at Elephantine is described in this section. It was the largest island of a cluster located in the Nile River. The land on either side of the Nile just before Elephantine rose steeply and forced the water through an area of rapids known as the Gates of Hapi. The Gates of Hapi conferred protection on the palace. On either side of the river, directly across from the palace, lay expansive deserts offering yet more protection. On the island, however, the weather was mild. The water glistened and the island was populated by trees, a unique factor that existed nowhere else in all Egypt. Aside from the royal palace, there were many laborers, and their families whose homes surrounded the palace and stretched to the edges of the island. The palace was enjoyable. Pharaoh had gifted a dozen of his most spacious rooms to his newest wife whom he believed would bear his son. They looked out onto the water and were adjacent to a courtyard. Taita immediately set to making the rooms even more comfortable. He designed and painted murals on the walls and expanded the gardens. Despite their initial reservations, Lostris and Taita developed a true affection for the Pharaoh. They cared for him, although their feelings never surmounted or even approached their love for Tanus.

Lostris was a junior wife and came to the marriage with no wealth beyond her slave. Taita explained court life to Lostris and taught her to be diplomatic in her engagements. He acquired valuable information through his friend and brother-in-law, Aton, and used this information to teach her about the hierarchy of court. Lostris was an avid learner and was soon advancing through the court. Her beautiful voice was often sought for musical gatherings and her kindness did not go unnoticed. She was adored by many at the palace, but even Elephantine could be infiltrated by spies. Taita received a gift basket of ripe fruit. When he reached in to obtain a piece, he was met by a poisonous cobra and screamed. It was Lostris who came to his aid. Taita and Tanus had taught her well and she was an excellent huntress. Lostris threw a melon at the cobra, shocking it long enough for Taita to grab hold of its neck. Lostris then beheaded it using a silver knife. The two roasted the cobra for dinner, but the second attempt to end Taita's life left them uneasy. Although Taita had trouble leaving her side, Lostris ordered him to leave in search of Tanus. Taita faked his own death in the morning, swam ashore, dressed in the clothing of a priest and set off on his mission.

Parts of this section review the education of Tanus and simultaneous childhood of Lostris. Following the death of Tanus's father, Taita became his mentor. He championed for Tanus when no one else could. While he could not return him to noble status, Taita did the next best thing by training him for a military life where he could excel. Taita taught Tanus how to hunt and Tanus learned quickly. The two went on many expeditions together and often stayed in an abandoned hunting shack that became their secret place. Because Taita was charged with the upbringing of Lostris, he began to bring her as well. It wasn't long before Lostris' skill was evident. Tanus couldn't help noticing her bravery and began to think of her as a friend. Lostris adored Tanus, but up until the days preceding the festival of Osiris, Tanus still thought of Lostris as a young girl. Lostris retained her hunting prowess and saved Taita's life when the serpent attacked. When

Tanus despaired of losing Lostris, it was to his childhood hunting shack that he retreated. Knowing him better than anyone else, Taita was able to track him down and motivate him to return for Lostris' sake.



Pages 191- 243

Pages 191- 243 Summary

Tanus and Taita traveled inland to where the squadron awaited them. They brought six donkeys, each loaded with varying baggage. The men were dismayed to learn that Taita's plan include that they parade through the desert dressed as Assyrian women. Tanus played the role of slave master and merchant. He hoped to attract the attention of the Shrikes. Being so secluded and presumably vulnerable, Taita fully expected the pirates to demand payment for safe passage or outright attack. On the second day of their journey a Shrike baron by the name of Shufti appeared and demanded payment in exchange for safe passage. Tanus refused to pay and captured Shufti. Rather than murdering him, he tortured him with a whip and then sent him back to his people. Tanus' caravan continued on and made camp at night. Meanwhile, Shufti was busy gathering as much support as he could muster. At dawn on the fourth day the Shrikes attacked. Taita and the men disguised as slave girls hid and screamed. Tanus and his guards met the Shrikes onslaught with determination. Once all of the Shrikes were deceived into entering the temple Tanus began to sing the battle song of his regiment. The soldiers disguised as slave girls took the cue and engaged the Shrikes in combat. The balance of the battle shifted and Tanus emerged victorious. Word of his heroic deeds began to filter back to Egypt's great cities. Still believing Tanus to be dead, the people began referring to him as Akh-Horus, the brother of their god, Horus. The last remaining Shrike stronghold was called Gebel-Umm-Bahari and was governed by a baron called Basti the Cruel. Basti had been responsible for destroying Tanus's father's estate and reputation. Tanus believed that this battle was his alone to fight and he ordered Taita to return to Lostris on the Island of Elephantine.

When at last Taita returned to Elephantine, he found Lostris near death. The slave girls informed Taita that she had not eaten since she had heard the news of Tanus's death. Taita revived her and fed her warm milk. He entertained her with stories of Tanus's many victories against the Shrikes. Slowly her health improved. Taita promised to arrange a meeting with Tanus when she had fully recovered. It was not long before Hui arrived at Elephantine bearing a message from Tanus. He had returned from another successful battle and was waiting nearby. Two days later the king and his royal family went hunting. Taita and Lostris sneaked away from the group. Taita had arranged for Lostris and Tanus to meet in the nearby ancient cemetery. A sandstorm materialized and forced them into a tomb. Tanus followed them there and the three were reunited. The storm lasted many days. Tanus and Lostris consummated their love. At other times Tanus and Taita discussed the next steps necessary to meet Pharaoh's challenge. When the storm abated, the three emerged from the tomb and went their separate ways. Taita was rewarded for protecting Lostris during the dangerous storm.



Pages 191- 243 Analysis

The depth of love between Taita and Lostris is examined in this section. Taita's every action is meant ultimately for the benefit of his mistress, Lostris. When he brings Tanus back from wallowing in his sadness, Taita is doing so primarily to please Lostris. When Taita returned to the island of Elephantine, he was unprepared for what he found. He knew how much Lostris loved Tanus but he had not anticipated just how far she would decline without him. Taita had tried to shield Lostris from the news of Tanus's apparent death, but when he saw her state Taita instantly knew that his message must not have arrived. He held himself accountable for her ill health. Lostris was coaxed back to health by Taita's own hands and promises of a reunion with Tanus. It must have pained Taita to see the totality of her love for Tanus. Despite this, Taita hovered over her and encouraged her future with Tanus. Accordingly, Taita created a secret meeting for Tanus and Lostris. When the weather cooperated and gave them an alibi for multiple days, Taita was present to hear the joys of their love making. Again, he sacrificed his own happiness to ensure Lostris was fulfilled. At three times in the novel Lostris returns his deep love. In one such case, following their return from her secret union with Tanus in the sandstorm, Lostris gave Taita the ultimate gift. She held a banquet in his honor and in front of all of the royal ladies, she attempted to give him his freedom. Lostris saw his emancipation as an act of love. Taita, blinded by his love for Lostris, saw it as punishment. Fortunately for them both, the royal court thought it was all a joke. Such behavior was unprecedented and may have been viewed as scandalous.

Taita fought beside Tanus in his battles against the Shrikes. Tanus's resurrection was planned by Taita, and his strategic victories were orchestrated by Taita. Although it was Tanus who wielded the sword and shield, it was Taita who taught him how to fight as a boy and instructed him on how to squelch the enemy. Most of the Shrikes were slain in battle, but Taita had asked that Tanus spare some. Strategically Taita reasoned that they were necessary as informants. From them Tanus and Taita learned that there were thirteen clans of Shrikes each with their own baron. Shufti was captured and three other barons lay dead on the battlefield. To meet Pharaoh's challenge Tanus needed to destroy each clan. When faced with death, many of the lesser pirates chose instead to escort Tanus to their secret camps. One of the most useful Shrike captives was named Hui. Hui quickly adjusted to Egyptian ways and pledged his allegiance to Tanus. In this way Tanus and his men zigzagged across the desert destroying clans and displacing their women.



Pages 244-295

Pages 244-295 Summary

Pharaoh and his entourage began planning for the biennial trip upriver for the festival of Osiris. During the journey Lostris experienced much nausea and realized that she was pregnant. The festival remained the same but the actors differed. Tanus appeared as ordered for his trial. He reported his success and awaited judgment. Tanus insisted that there remained only one man in all of Egypt who still called himself a Shrike. That Shrike went by the name of Akh-Seth. The captured Shrikes all pointed to Lord Intef as the one named Akh-Seth. They claimed that he had directed all of the Shrikes' activities and was ultimately responsible for the death of Tanus's father. Lord Intef vehemently denied the accusations spoken against him. Pharaoh was inclined to believe Lord Intef's assertions of innocence. He asked Tanus to provide truth beyond the oath of captives who may or may not have been coerced. Tanus admitted that he had none and trusted Pharaoh to make a just decision. Taita bravely stepped forward and offered up knowledge that he had gained when working for Intef. He knew of a secret chamber in which Intef stored the wealth he had amassed through illegitimate means.

The following day Pharaoh assembled his court and prepared to pass judgment on Lord Intef. He was convinced of his guilt and meant to punish both Intef and Rasfer accordingly. In front of a full audience Pharaoh condemned Intef and removed all his titles and honors. He proclaimed Tanus innocent and returned to him all his father's wealth, land, and good reputation. In addition he rewarded him with the Gold of Valour. Intef, Rasfer, and the captives were sentenced to death. On the morning of the execution the royal guard went to retrieve Intef from his holding cell and discovered him missing. The guard had been poisoned by mushrooms and experienced painful deaths while Intef escaped. The other executions were carried out. Long after all of the others had succumbed, Rasfer remained tortured yet alive. Taita could not stand the sight, and he slit Rasfer's throat to end his suffering.

Pharaoh's return to the Island of Elephantine was delayed by the dismantling of Intef's estate. Pharaoh was overjoyed at the news of Lostris' pregnancy. At her request they remained in Thebes for the baby's birth. Lostris labored easily and delivered to Pharaoh a healthy son. Following her expeditious delivery, Pharaoh named Lostris as chief wife and supreme regent until the prince came of age to assume the role. Lostris thoroughly enjoyed motherhood but longed to share Memnon with his true father. Following Tanus's promotion she suggested that, as the best of their warriors, Tanus be entrusted with Memnon's military training. Taita was chosen as Memnon's primary care provider and tutor. Thus the three enjoyed each other's company often without scrutiny from the royal court. Memnon grew stronger over the ensuing years and Egypt enjoyed prosperity.



Pages 244-295 Analysis

Lostris and Taita were pleased to return to the city of Thebes. For many years it had been their home and nostalgia prevailed, but they both knew that Intef and Rasfer were capable of assassination; therefore, they remained guarded and observant at all times. At the festival, Lord Intef graciously welcomed Pharaoh. His pleasure was an act for he truly coveted the throne of Egypt. In his oratory, Intef listed all of his accomplishments and titles. It seemed important that everyone be reminded of his significance. He was the governor of Thebes and also held the title of grand vizier. In the past two years since the last festival he had been promoted from tax collector to investigator of the treasury. It was his charge to weed out the nobility whom he found guilty of corruption. The reader understands this to be a futile effort and an easy way for Intef to be rid of his adversaries under the auspices of serving the king. Unfortunately, Pharaoh's generous nature made him unable to see what was so obvious to many other people. Intef was stealing and Pharaoh was enabling him to do so. Pharaoh had difficulty believing that Intef, in whom he had placed so much trust, was capable of the crimes he stood accused of. The fight that followed only served to prove the extent to which Intef would go to protect his own wealth, regardless of who he harmed along the way. When Intef was found guilty, Pharaoh added to Intef's rage by awarding Taita, a mere slave, a portion of his hoarded wealth. Pharaoh also found Taita not liable for any crimes he was forced to commit as a slave under Intef's direction. He rewarded Taita with gold confiscated from Intef's stash but paid the sum to Lostris, because it exceeded what a slave could personally own. Taita was pleased by his newfound wealth, and although it would be delivered to Lostris, he trusted she would be generous. Taita's comfort would have been ensured if Intef's sentence had been carried out. Although he was not able to forget Intef's threats, the immediate danger seemed to have abated with Rasfer's passing.

Lostris had not slept with Pharaoh since her miscarriage which meant that the baby she carried must have been conceived during the sandstorm and her tryst with Tanus. She was elated with the idea of carrying Tanus's child. Although Taita was also pleased by the news of her pregnancy, he knew the king would accuse her of impropriety. Taita informed the king that Lostris was again ready to perform her marriage duties. Lostris endured the Pharaoh's advances to ensure that the child's lineage remained a secret. Pharaoh therefore believed that he impregnated Lostris. Taita went to Tanus and shared the news of Lostris' pregnancy with him. He wanted Tanus to know that the child was his, although upon birth the baby would certainly be claimed by Pharaoh. Taita found solace at the palace of Elephantine with Lostris and her newborn son, Memnon. Lostris wasted no time in suggesting that Tanus be promoted to the station of Great Lion of Egypt. As his successor, Tanus named Kratas as the Best of Ten Thousand and commander of the Blue Crocodile Guards.

Foreshadowing can be found on pages 294-295. Taita struggles to keep Lostris and Tanus apart for the sake of their reputations. As Memnon's military tutor, Tanus takes joy in spending time with his son. That duty also brings him in close proximity with Lostris and their chemistry is undeniable. Taita finds himself praying for the gods to intervene,

hoping that they do not overstep their bounds while Lostris still belongs to Pharaoh. He goes on to say that "Sometimes it is best for men not to attempt to interfere with destiny. Our prayers can be answered in ways which we do not expect and do not welcome." The quote itself is unremarkable except for the last four words, which, when taken in context with the plot of the story, leave the reader feeling trepidation for the characters.



296-350

296-350 Summary

When Memnon was five years old, news of trouble traveled upriver. The Egyptian army, led by Tanus, marched north. Under Pharaoh's insistence, Taita and Pharaoh went to the northern border as well. Lostris and Memnon accompanied them but remained on the royal barge offshore. On the eleventh day of their encampment, Taita noticed an unnatural and ominous cloud on the horizon. The cloud quickly advanced and he realized that it was not a cloud, but dust rising from an approaching party. Tanus and Kratas prepared for battle in the traditional formations. Pharaoh was carried on his throne to the crest of the hill to supervise the battle. As the dust clouds subsided the men observed the enemy, complete with horses and wheeled chariots. The Egyptian infantry were slain in large numbers, yet Taita was intrigued by the military tactics of the enemy. The wheel was a marvelous invention and he was embarrassed to not have thought of it himself. Their bows also exhibited dual curved ends which allowed them enhanced flexibility. This flexibility translated into increased distance, and it was with one such arrow that the Pharaoh Mamose was slain. Tanus called a retreat and his men carried Pharaoh to the awaiting fleet. In their retreat the men began to fight more efficiently. The chariots could not maneuver through the vegetation at the river's edge. They learned that the way to halt a chariot was to aim for the horses. On board Taita attended to Pharaoh but was unable to save him. Although he successfully removed the arrow's point, it had pierced a lung and caused widespread infection. In his last moments Pharaoh entrusted Lostris with the care of his son and his entire kingdom. He also asked her to ensure that he had a proper burial in a tomb worthy of his rank according to Egyptian religious practices.

The remaining fleet sailed downriver and caught up with the Hyksos as they advanced by land. They decimated every fortification they came across, but they were incapable of crossing the Nile River. Tanus engaged them in battle from the water and overcame their regiment. Taita spotted the escaped convict, Lord Intef, among the Hyksos warriors. Although Tanus tried admirably to capture him, Intef was a skilled swimmer and escaped their efforts. Although many Hyksos had escaped, Tanus had won a small victory and was eager to continue south. Taita pleaded with him to capture and breed some of the horses. He saw them as a resource but Tanus saw them as a burden. Lostris agreed with Taita and Taita, accompanied by Hui, went to gather the lost herd while the fleet continued south. Hui had previous experience with horses and was an asset to Taita's efforts. Tanus reluctantly watched as Taita, supported by the Queen, designed chariots for a new generation of Egyptian infantry.

296-350 Analysis

Memnon's childhood entertained Lostris and the years passed by uneventfully. During Memnon's fifth year, Taita heard rumors of an awful and unnatural enemy from the



North. A messenger relayed the fall of the cities Memphis and Avaris. He said that the enemy came swiftly from the east and called himself Salitas, the Shepard King of the Hyksos people. Pharaoh deliberated with his war council. Tanus was in favor of studying the enemy's tactics before engaging them in battle. Nembet and the elder military members disagreed and favored immediate retaliation. Tanus was ordered north to defend the Egyptian border against an enemy he knew nothing about, and the older generals followed with their southern regiments as back-up. Despite Tanus's reservations, he was a brave soldier and the Great Lion of Egypt. His sense of loyalty was important to him and to those who fought beside him. The fleet stayed anchored in the river and the infantry took up battle stations on land. The Egyptians were trained only in archery and hand-to-hand combat. Tanus waged a strong battle against a foe who fought in an unprecedented way. They were unprepared for this new form of battle and the men feared the horses, whom they viewed as evil beasts. Taita watched the battle with both amazement and horror. Despite Tanus's heroic efforts, Pharaoh was still injured on the battlefield and the Egyptians were forced to retreat. Before boarding a ship Taita studied a chariot's wheel and pilfered a recurved bow.

When Pharaoh succumbed to his injuries, Tanus demanded to know if Taita had tried his best to heal him, or if he had aided the king's demise. Although Tanus wished to take Lostris as his own, he was first and foremost a soldier of Egypt. He was feeling guilty for his secret thoughts about Lostris and wanted to clear his conscience. By that time, Lostris and Taita had come to care for Pharaoh and wished him no ill will. Their efforts to save the king were sincere. Knowing that they had both performed their duties as best as they could, Lostris and Tanus were at peace being together following his death. Following the events of that dreadful battle, Taita paints an eerie picture in the readers mind when he notes that the dust from the Hyksos chariots mingled with the sunset to turn the clouds the color of blood.

Taita had the gift of intellect. Unlike many around him, Taita felt the need to question and ponder how to improve upon everything. During the Egyptian massacre at the hands of the Hyksos, Taita viewed the sights around him but had the presence of mind to wonder how the enemy knew so much about Egyptian military tactics. The Hyksos seemed prepared for Tanus's attacks. Taita was also inquisitive about the use of chariot and recurved bow. Taita's curiosity was answered when he saw Intef amongst the Hyksos troops. The Hyksos did have superior technology, but much of the battle was won by use of privileged information that Intef provided to Salitas. Intef was a traitor, and much to Taita and Tanus' dismay, he escaped for a second time. Knowing he was still alive and working with the enemy, and would someday need to be stopped, Taita kept working on improvements for Egypt's army. He was a visionary. Unlike Tanus, Taita immediately saw the use of a chariot and horses and set about on ways to improve upon the remarkable trio. Fortunately, Lostris also saw their benefit and supported Taita's efforts.

Also of importance in this section is Lostris' promise to Pharaoh at the time of his death. Her vow to him and her perseverance to see it through, will directly influence her actions in the ensuing sections of the novel.



Pages 351-404

Pages 351-404 Summary

Queen Lostris' coronation was bittersweet. The mummification process for Pharaoh lasted seventy days. At its conclusion his tomb was still not completed. Instead he was placed in his sarcophagus and remained at the palace of Memnon awaiting the final preparations for his burial. Queen Lostris was determined to keep her vow of burying him, along with his possessions, in a sealed and fitting tomb.

Three days later the Hyksos army made another attempt to cross the river. Tanus and his men were barely able to hold them back. Soon the Hyksos army attempted to cross the river again and had more success. Queen Lostris and her retinue were forced to flee. Taita divined the future once again and determined that the safest route was downriver into the unknown lands of Cush. They had little time to prepare but took all they could. Pharaoh's body was brought on board the Breath of Horus, and his treasure was distributed among the fleet. The horse herd was dispatched in advance of the fleet and would make the journey overland with a regiment of guards. Queen Lostris refused to knowingly leave behind any of her people amid the onslaught of the Hyksos. She allowed all who were interested to accompany her but admitted that the journey would be long and difficult. To those who chose to remain in Egypt she promised to return and install Memnon on his rightful throne. As the flotilla was setting sail they could see the dust rising from the approaching Hyksos army. The Hyksos army followed the flotilla. At every turn in the bend the Hyksos army could be seen on land. At the famous gates of Hapi they awaited the arrival of the armada. Another battle ensued, and some ships were lost, but the majority continued safely south. Eventually, the Egyptian flotilla gained distance and the Hyksos ceased their pursuit.

Taita used their forced time aboard the ships to educate Memnon. At that time Taita was also redesigning his models of the wheel and recurved bow. When the royal family landed on the Island of Elephantine, Hui was waiting along with the herd of horses. They reconnoitered and prepared for the remainder of the voyage south. Although they had evaded the Hyksos army, they knew it was just a matter of time before the Hyksos breached the river and gave chase. The largest barrier to their southward journey were the cataracts along the way. They waited for the Nile River's yearly inundation. The extra water made the ride smoother than it otherwise would have been. Each cataract required that the ships either enter dangerous rapids or be lifted up, out, and over the roughest sections. Taita designed a method of pulleys and ropes, pulled by his horses on either side of the riverbank, for this purpose. Once beyond the first cataract the river ran smooth again and the Hyksos abandoned their chase. Lostris ordered that they live as nomads, never building any permanent structures during their exodus. During this time Lostris confided in Taita that she was pregnant again.



Pages 351-404 Analysis

Queen Lostris' accession to the throne marked a time of change in the novel. Her education over the years served her well and she had many allies at court. When a problem plagued her, she still consulted with her trusted servant, Taita. She was free to take Tanus as her lover, and their love was unbridled. Taking the throne also meant great responsibility and the kingdom was not stable. The Hyksos continued to raid Egyptian land and their superior methods of war made vanquishing them difficult. Just before the exodus, three thousand of the Hyksos warriors landed on an unguarded section of Egypt's western bank. Once there, they began to assemble their chariots. Fortunately, Taita and Hui were practicing maneuvers nearby with the chariot squadron and raced to the area. Tanus joined them by way of the river. The battle was bloody, but Egypt was victorious. Most importantly, Tanus finally realized the importance of a chariot squadron and strong horses to lead them. When Lostris and her people began the exodus southward, the Hyksos were determined to follow. Fortunately, Tanus and his army were able to prevail on sea the way they could not on land. Foreshadowing can be seen in Taita's assessment : "However, none of us believed that they had given up entirely. In the end, the lure of Pharaoh's treasure must prove too much to resist."

One result of the exodus is that the legend of the Prince is born. Queen Lostris' oath to her people, that she would bring Memnon back and that he would not only reign but also release them from their oppression at the hands of the Hyksos, gave them something to look forward to. On the day their flotilla departed, Taita estimated that fifty-thousand people came to the riverbanks to bid farewell to the royal family. They waved farewell but prayed for his safe return. Queen Lostris was adored in her own right, but the people's love for her was intensified by their perception that by leaving, and keeping Memnon safe in his youth, she was protecting Egypt's future. Memnon was expected to be their savior and during his time away the oath was repeated and hope was kept alive in the hearts of the Egyptians who stayed behind.

Taita mentions on page three-hundred and ninety-four that the culture of Egypt was changing. It was evolving imperceptibly every day, but when viewed collectively Taita predicted that the changes would rewrite the face of the nation. From a population of scholars and priests arose a war-like people determined to not just survive but return to conquer. The daily lives of Egyptians on the exodus included talk of war which was previously reserved for men of the military. All the people, regardless of career and status, were joined together by their desire to overcome persecution.



Pages 405-444

Pages 405-444 Summary

To explain Lostris' pregnancy and keep her reputation intact Taita invented another of his powerful dreams. He told the people that Pharaoh Mamose had risen from his sarcophagus and bedded the queen during the night. The people were enraptured by the story and fell in love with their queen even more.

On the river's second inundation the exiled Egyptians reset their pulley system and continued over the next cataract and down the river. They lost some men and five galleys in the crossing but prevailed. On the other side, they planted crops and waited for the water to rise again so they could mount the third cataract. In that unknown land Queen Lostris gave birth to her and Tanus's second child. She was named Princess Tehuti and all acknowledged that she was sired by the Pharaoh. Before it was time to traverse the fourth cataract the Queen was pregnant yet again. The people tired of the journey and many wanted to turn back, but the Queen was determined to move forward. Shortly thereafter the Queen gave birth to her third child. The promise of an easier transit and the birth of Princess Bekatha calmed the people. When Princess Bekatha was two months old the Egyptian people traversed the fourth cataract. On the other side of the fourth cataract the topography changed dramatically and they paused to hunt onshore. The fifth cataract proved not as arduous as its predecessors. The riverbanks on either side were wide and much of the convoy traveled by land. The terrain downriver was called Cush and was inhabited by a primitive people by the name of Shilluk. The voyage over the sixth cataract was the easiest of all. The Nile forked and was apparently created from the confluence of two previously-unknown rivers. Queen Lostris declared that this was the sacred place where her people were to rest and fortify before returning to Thebes. She named it Qebui. At Quebi the queen ordered Taita to design a fitting tomb for Pharaoh. She demanded that it be fitting in stature and impenetrable to thieves. Many of the people were happy to hear that the journey had ended. They were weary of the continuous traveling.

Taita and Memnon enjoyed exploring their new surroundings. They climbed mountains and found new animal species. They also experienced the phenomenon of altitude-induced weather changes. They decided that the mountain peaks must be the home of violent gods. This idea was echoed in the annual migration of a herded beast known locally as gnu. They were hunted and consumed. Although the meat was good, twenty days later illness fell over the horses of the Egyptian army. In their passing, the gnu had transferred an illness to which they were immune but to which the horses were susceptible. The Shilluk had encountered this illness before. Although there was no way to prevent it, they explained that any horses that survived would never be sick again. They lost seven thousand horses, the equivalent of half their herd. Taita predicted that it would take many years before the herd multiplied in sufficient number to wield a successful attack on the Hyksos.



Pages 405-444 Analysis

Taita is a very influential character in the novel. His visions had proved accurate in the past and his education was so well regarded that no one doubted his assertions. Taita's invented dream that Pharaoh Mamose came back from the dead to impregnate Queen Lostris was unrealistic. He claimed to have heard his footsteps and witnessed an illuminated figure. He said that Pharaoh spoke to him and claimed to have planted his seed again in the queen so that his kingdom may know that he lived forever and watched over them. The population was superstitious by nature and their religion supported the idea of Pharaoh being equivalent to a god. In addition, Taita was astute enough to recognize that the people wanted to believe that their future appeared good. Although the journey south was long and difficult, Egyptian life continued unabated. The elderly perished; unions were made, and babies were born. The people labored daily but in different ways than they had worked previously. They wanted to believe in the Queen's good fortune. Taita's embellished dream instilled confidence in the multitudes. Alternatively, if the child had not been sired by Pharaoh, Queen Lostris would have lost her regency and Memnon, not yet old enough to rule, would have been cast aside while a distant relative was installed as king; therefore, Taita's dreams benefited everyone.

As time moved on the children grew. Lostris conceived and delivered another healthy baby girl and Memnon grew into a fine young man. He received the Gold of Valour and was later promoted to Best of Ten Thousand, a position that was previously held by Tanus. Under the tutelage of Taita and Tanus he was becoming an excellent warrior. He was smart, perceptive, and strong, all characteristics required of an Egyptian leader. He was fulfilling his mother's prophecy to the people. He revered Tanus and followed his example in all military lessons except one. Tanus remained distrustful of the horses. Taita and Queen Lostris saw the purpose in breeding and utilizing them. Memnon had been young and inquisitive at the time of the first Hyksos battle. He admired what the horses were capable of and learned to love them. While Tanus reigned on the water, Memnon and Taita were united in their exploits on land.

From his view on deck, Taita charted the distance and turns of the river. He believed that the river often turned back on itself and that a more direct passage could be made on the return journey. A search party was sent out to verify Taita's calculations. Lord Aqer was restless and so was chosen to lead the expedition. He returned safely and confirmed the faster route. For his efforts the queen rewarded him extravagantly and forged a powerful relationship.

The Egyptian army grew in an unexpected way. Egypt's culture was dependent upon slave labor, so when the flotilla rested after mounting the fifth cataract, parties set off immediately to capture people for that purpose. The Shilluk lacked the civilized ways of Egyptians but had their own culture. They resisted capture and showed unbelievable stamina on the battlefield. Tanus was determined to add them to his infantry. He learned their language and befriended them. Thereafter, Shilluk came to Tanus willingly and were incorporated into his army.



Pages 445-494

Pages 445-494 Summary

Taita, Tanus and Memnon led many hunting expeditions from Qebui. On one expedition a sudden storm broke out, replete with torrential hail. The rain came down faster than it could be absorbed and resulted in an impromptu river flood that swept away everything in its path. Many men, including Taita, were washed away and tumbled down the mountain. Taita lost consciousness and later awoke to Memnon's voice. Tanus reported that all their men, their horses, and food stores had been lost. Taita had been the only one they were able to save. At dawn they began their descent of the mountain. The way down was mired by rubble and the trek was difficult. Among the litter Taita found his medicine chest. He was pleased to find it and strapped it to his back with the harness of a fallen horse. The trio encountered a tribe of unknown people and a captive girl. Memnon was enchanted by her beauty. He was riveted in place and had difficulty leaving even as the guards approached. When Memnon finally left, the strangers were close behind. Memnon and Tanus managed to escape, but Taita still carried the weight of the medicine chest. The burden slowed his pace and his pursuers managed to capture him.

In the ensuing months Taita learned that his captors were called Ethiopians. Their civilization was refined although different from Egypt's. During Taita's captivity in Arkoun's fortress he was summoned to the captive girl, Masara's, side. She had feigned illness in the hope that Taita would be called to attend to her. Masara wanted to escape, but she also longed for a friend. Over time the villagers became accustomed to their friendship and they spent many hours together. Masara gave Taita directions for finding her father's village. She instructed him to go there if he was ever able to break free. She promised him a warm welcome. Taita learned to love Masara. She was a sweet and gentle girl and he tried to make her captivity as painless as possible.

Arkoun ordered Taita to accompany him into battle. He wished to have Taita's skills as a physician as well as his companionship. Arkoun attacked Prester Beni-Jon's village. On the return trip Taita's horse slipped while crossing the river. Fortunately, the river junction was one of the landmarks about which Masara had told him. Taita and his horse were washed away by the current. When he pulled himself from the water he headed in the direction of Prester Beni-Jon's territory. Beni-Jon greeted Taita warmly and was encouraged by news of his daughter. Taita negotiated an allegiance between their kingdoms and returned to Quebi. He had been away for two years. Memnon had grown in physical attributes, intellect, and skill. He was the first one to notice Taita's approach and embraced him without reservation. Memnon brought Taita directly to the Queen. Lostris, Tanus, and Kratas were overjoyed to see their friend again. Once the greetings were dispensed, conversation quickly turned to talk of war. Memnon and Tanus were both anxious to carry out the plan that Taita had devised. The battle was won but not without losses. Tanus triumphed over Arkoun, capturing the sword he coveted and launching Arkoun over the cliff to his death below. The sword had managed



to pierce Tanus's shield, however, and Tanus received a deadly strike. Before dying Tanus asked Taita to care for Lostris and for their children. He asked to see Memnon and gifted him with the sword he had won in battle. With the battle completed, Taita and Memnon led their army back to Qebui to bring Tanus' body home.

Queen Lostris grieved for the man she had never married but considered her husband. She followed proper protocol but her sorrow consumed her. Tanus's death was followed by a festive occasion. It was difficult for Lostris to rejoice, but she was present for the marriage of her son, Memnon. He took Masara as his bride and an allegiance was created between the two countries. Lostris had hoped that he would marry an Egyptian, but Memnon had loved Masara since their first encounter and Taita believed the match was a strong one. When the river's yearly inundation came again Lostris called an end to their time in Qebui and began planning for their return north.

Pages 445-494 Analysis

Taita's capture has value, although it takes a while for the reader to discover it. His captors built structures as well as fine tents, wove cloth, domesticated animals, crafted metal weapons, and played board games. Taita used his medicine chest to treat his battle wound and earned the respect of the village's chief. Taita was not let out of sight, but he was allowed to roam the village. The language of his captors was melodic and Taita quickly mastered it. The chief, Arkoun, enjoyed a game of strategy similar to the Egyptian game of Bao. Much to his dismay, Taita won nearly every game. Masara beckoned to Taita on more than one occasion and he learned her history. She was the favorite daughter of a rival state's king. Arkoun had stolen her as leverage against her father, Prester Beni-Jon. They had been returning from the battle when they encountered Taita in the mountains.

When the group finally returned to Arkoun's fortress, Taita was shocked at the site. It was situated on an impregnable flat mountaintop. When Arkoun was displeased with someone he simply threw them over the edge. In contrast, Beni-Jon was a kind ruler and refused to meet Arkoun's ransom demands, which would bring harm to his people. After much negotiating Taita and Beni-Jon agreed to a mutually beneficial endeavor. Taita would return to Egypt and bring the Egyptian army south to help Beni-Jon overtake Arkoun and retrieve his daughter. In return, Beni-Jon promised that his daughter could marry anyone she pleased; Arkoun's best sword would be kept by Egypt's army, and Beni-Jon would protect the lands in which Pharaoh Mamose's tomb had been built. Beni-Jon also gifted two thousand of his best horses to Taita to improve his chances of success. Taita made these arrangements to benefit Memnon, Tanus, and Queen Lostris, respectively.

The relationships of Tanus, Lostris, and Memnon are explored in this chapter. While they have been evident all along, in these pages the reader is given the most poignant examples. Memnon has come of age and falls in love with Masara. In their effort to free Masara and gain privileges for themselves, the Egyptians underestimate the battle that they wage. Taita is reunited with his mistress and Memnon claims Masara but the price



is great. Tanus is killed in battle and takes the secret of Memnon's paternity to his grave, which is not surprising as his character has always been extremely loyal. On his deathbed he and Memnon engage in a heart-wrenching dialogue. Tanus gifts his most prized sword to Memnon and tells him that his education has ended. Memnon promises to call Tanus's name every time he uses the gifted sword in battle. In that moment, like many others that he could not speak of, Tanus is a proud father. He watched as Memnon turned the sword through the traditional warrior positions. Upon Memnon's departure he calls him by the familiar name of "son" and wishes him to "Go on to glory," but only Taita knows the true meaning of Tanus' words. Tanus dies sometime later but Taita is unable to watch. Taita keeps vigil but claims to have looked at the floor; Taita did not want to humiliate the noble warrior who was reduced to tears. Taita knew Queen Lostris would be beside herself with grief. Although he loved her and had no other responsibilities during the mummification period, Taita delayed his return to Lostris because he could not bear to witness her pain nor share his own sorrow. This is the only time in the book where Taita's actions may be considered selfish. He protected himself foremost in this instance and did not return to the Queen until such a time had passed that she stated "I have no tears left...My grief is all cried out..."

In keeping with her promise, Queen Lostris ordered that Pharaoh Mamose be laid to rest in a stately tomb impenetrable to thieves. Tanus and Lostris were similar in their honesty and convictions. Both believed in the seriousness of a promise. A smaller and less grand tomb was planned for Tanus according to his station in life. Taita viewed Tanus as a hero, leader, and true father to the royal family. He could not bear to see Tanus buried in obscurity while Pharaoh was buried with all the wealth of Egypt, so he conceived a devious plan. Taita's decision to switch the two men's bodies, thereby cheating Pharaoh of his fortune and rewarding Tanus, required much forethought and gumption. According to Taita, each received in death what his life deserved yet lacked. The reader should not misunderstand Taita's intentions as being malicious. Taita did not approve of the wealth obtained by Pharaoh; however, his statement was bent more towards elevating Tanus than deprecating the king. Taita claims that on the day of Tanus's funeral, something died in Lostris that "would never be reborn." Foreshadowing can be seen in Taita's perspective with regards to Lostris. He asserts that her "decline began on the day that we laid Tanus in his grave. She had lost the joy of living and the will to go on."



Pages 495-528

Pages 495-528 Summary

The war council nominated Kratas to replace Tanus as commander of the army. Kratas refused the post and instead nominated Memnon. Memnon was twenty-two years old at the time of his promotion to Great Lion of Egypt and commander of all its armies. The Prince sought Kratas and Taita's help in planning the return to Egypt. Masara proved to be a dutiful wife. She attended their meetings and supported Memnon's efforts. Taita suggested that they travel overland to the first cataract. After navigating they could quickly assemble a small fleet, conquer the Hyksos and add the Hyksos equipment to their own arsenal. In this way they would gain the necessary equipment without losing the element of surprise. When the gnu made their yearly migration, Taita and Hui captured many of the animals for future use and held them with their own, previously immunized horse herd. The preparations took two years to complete but the people were happy to comply. The population was nearing fifty thousand in number and the undertaking was enormous. They began the journey at the coolest time of the year and with favorable water levels, but it was still challenging. Lostris' health was in decline. She accompanied her people on foot when she felt well and rested when the pain in her abdomen made walking impossible. Taita prepared herbal infusions for her and made her as comfortable as possible.

Thirty days into their journey the caravan reached the first cataract. The trip overland had passed quickly. The men worked to assemble the fleet while the women and children at the end of the caravan completed the trek. Memnon sent spies to gather strategic information about the current state of the Hyksos military. Memnon planned to surprise the Hyksos and defeat their guards at Elephantine. He expected the elderly King Salitas to send forces south in retaliation. When Salitas did so, Memnon planned to switch direction, head to Thebes and encourage insurrection. Before engaging the Hyksos in battle, Queen Lostris summoned all her people. At the site of the first cataract, where many years previously Lostris had fled from the Hyksos and vowed to return, she made good on her promise and relinquished the regency to Memnon. Memnon swore to defend his people and accepted the name of Pharaoh Tamose.

The fleet survived the reverse trip and pressed on towards Elephantine. Meanwhile Remrem was leading a squadron of chariots across the river plain. The two groups barricaded the Hyksos forces and won the battle easily. The residents at Elephantine had kept alive the prophecy and rejoiced at the long-awaited return of their rightful king. With all obstacles cleared Taita returned to the rear to bring Lostris and Queen Masara to their temporary quarters at Pharaoh Mamose's palace. On the way to the palace Taita purposefully stopped by a shrine that had been erected to Akh-Horus. Taita and Lostris prayed to Akh-Horus and held Tanus in their hearts. When Taita settled Lostris into her old rooms they were pleased to find that the murals they had created still adorned the walls. Lostris was thankful to see her water garden again. She wondered aloud if she would return to her city of birth, Thebes, before she died. In the event that she was



unable to do so, Lostris made Taita promise to build her a tomb from which she could view Thebes.

When the Egyptian army had amassed all the equipment possible it set out to engage the Hyksos army. Rumors of revolt preceded them and many men joined along the way. Taita and Kratas herded the gnu northbound along the river. They used the gnu to inflict their illness among the Hyksos horses. Of their original numbers, half of the Hyksos horses died quickly and the remaining half were too weak for battle. Pharaoh Tamose planned to utilize their weakness. He called his troops into action and set out for Thebes. Although the Egyptian army had been decimated and forced to retreat in their previous encounter with the Hyksos, this time they fared better. They encountered a greatly reduced number of chariots because of the Hyksos's ill horses. . During their time in exile Taita had experimented with different kinds of wood and had perfected a spoked wheel that was light enough for speed and strong enough to last. It was superior to those of the Hyksos who had not improved their technology since their last encounter. The Egyptians were outnumbered by way of manpower, but the Shilluk who fought among them were swift and accurate, just as Tanus had predicted. Pharaoh Tamose killed Salitas' son, Apachan, commander of the Hyksos chariots, with the sword gifted to him by Tanus. Kratas, Remrem, Astes, Aqer, and Hui led the infantry divisions. They were victorious over Salitas's infantry, led by his other son, Beon, although it took them all night to hunt down every last Hyksos soldier. The citizens of Thebes hailed the return of their true ruler.

As soon as the battle was complete, Taita returned to Elephantine. He raced to be near Lostris and spread the good news along the way. Taita and the princesses accompanied Lostris on her return to Thebes. She spent much of her time in pain and the trip was difficult for her. Pharaoh Tamose greeted her arrival with reverence and walked beside her while she was escorted to her rooms. The people lined the streets to catch a glimpse of the Queen Mother who had restored Egypt to its greatness. In the quiet of her private rooms Lostris asked Taita to divine the future for her one more time. Because of his age, the divinations were becoming much more difficult; however, Taita could not refuse her. Taita foretold one hundred years of battle but an ultimate victory for Egypt. Lostris feared for her people but was contented by the prediction of eventual freedom for her people. Lostris died in Taita's arms.

The book concludes with a short note from Taita. He states that the text was written as an account of his mistress's reign and his dedication to her. In Lostris' absence he carries forth the responsibility of caring for Pharaoh Tamose and the two princesses, in fulfillment of his promise to his friend, Tanus.

Pages 495-528 Analysis

Following Tanus' death and Pharaoh Mamose's entombment, Lostris felt her work was complete. She reasoned that her people had sufficient time to replenish their strength and Memnon was capable of leading their people north again. Her conviction in these matters allowed her to comfortably pass the rule of Egypt to her son. Taita was pivotal in



the planning of their return north. Both Lostris and Memnon consulted with him regularly. It seemed that no matter how they aged, Taita retained both his intellect and his powers of persuasion.

On the return journey Queen Lostris summoned Taita as both her friend and physician. Queen Lostris spoke to Taita in confidence. Although Tanus had been dead for over three years she wondered if he could have impregnated her in her dreams, similar to the fib they had used to conceal the princesses' true lineage. Not being trained in medicine, she concluded that the growth she felt in her abdomen must be another child. The growth that grew in her womb was not the gift of a child. Upon palpation Taita recognized it as being something much more sinister. It was an illness that he was unable to treat and would mean certain death for the queen. The reader should interpret the situation as advanced uterine cancer. Queen Lostris was in pain, yet had concealed her condition for quite some time. Taita grieved for the vibrant mistress he had always known and served lovingly. In the last sentence on page five hundred and thirteen she foretold that her own death was approaching when she said "There is so little time left for us to be together."

Preparations continued and Taita's planning bore fruit. When they received word that the gnu sickness had swept through the Hyksos horse herds, Memnon asked Taita "Are you ready to ride to glory with me?" Their initial battle with the Hyksos was not an easy victory but it was better matched than the battles that had driven them into exile. Queen Lostris wanted to know if all her efforts would be rewarded or if her people would have to endure Hyksos tyranny indefinitely. Although she knew it was a difficult task, she asked Taita to foretell the future one more time. Lostris found peace in his report that the battles would continue for many years, but that Egypt would eventually prevail. When she knew her death was approaching she confessed her love for Taita, saying that "I have loved only two men in my life and you were one of those. Perhaps in the next life, the gods will treat our love more kindly." Taita had dedicated his life to making Lostris happy and to hear that his love had been returned left him speechless. Lostris died in Taita's arms where she had found comfort on so many prior occasions. If it were not for his obligations to the princesses and the new Pharaoh, Taita would have gladly joined her in death.



Characters

Taita

Taita is the narrator of the story. He is an Egyptian slave owned by a wealthy family of noble status. Taita came to live in Lord Intef's home when he was just a boy. In addition to his servant status Taita was forced into sexual submission at the hands of his slave-master. Taita accepted his lot in life although he maintained what he considered a natural attraction towards women. When Taita was sixteen years old Intef learned that he was secretly dating a young girl who was also a slave. In a fit of jealousy and to enforce his authority, Intef ordered that the girl be tortured and killed while Taita watched, and then Intef ordered his torturer to castrate Taita, making him an eunuch. Taita was embarrassed by his mutilated body. He never touched a woman again although he yearned to do so.

However bad some aspects of his life may have been, Taita did benefit from living at Intef's home. Taita received an excellent education. He was an eager learner and his intelligence only increased his value as a slave. Eventually he became indispensable to Intef. As Intef was assigned more political duties throughout the city, he passed them along to his capable slave, who completed every task with admirable quality but was not recognized for his work. By the time he reached adulthood Taita was known as a scholar, astrologist, physician, musician, painter, mathematician, architect, bookkeeper, and inventor. Taita was intimately familiar with all of Intef's business transactions and recorded them, or hid them, as was required.

His greatest accomplishment was the education of Lostris, Lord Intef's daughter. He was charged with her care from a young age. She was an avid student as well as a generous soul. Taita learned to love her as a child and later as a woman, although their love was never consummated. Taita displays a fierce loyalty throughout the book. This loyalty is matched when Lostris demands Taita in place of the traditional wedding dowry. Taita then follows her to the Pharaoh's home and lives out the remainder of his life as a slave of Pharaoh. When Lostris dies as a widow, her property is inherited by her children, so Taita remains owned by her family. He is a friend, tutor, and confidant to Prince Memnon, and teacher of his two siblings, the princesses.

Taita can best be described as loyal and compassionate. With the exception of just two times in his life, Taita's first concern was for his mistress—Lostris' safety and happiness were paramount. Taita often secured her comfort at the expense of his own. Similarly, Taita stood by his friend, Tanus, through some less than flattering times. Taita views the human body as sacred, and respects it despite a person's wrongdoings. For example, when Rasfer, who had physically assaulted Taita on many occasions, was suffering, Taita couldn't bear it. He could have let the man die but instead he intervened as a physician ought to. Later, when Rasfer was condemned to death and was hanging, it was Rasfer's pain that spurred Taita to slit his throat. Again, Taita wanted to end his pain.



Lady Lostris

Lostris is one of Lord Intef's three children. Intef had two sons with whom he frequently associated and just one daughter in whom he showed no interest. Lostris learned at a young age that she could not rely on her family for emotional support. Her closest friend was Taita, the eunuch who watched out for her safety as well as directed her education. Lostris was taught literacy skills as well as history, diplomacy, law, hunting and etiquette. He also taught her less tangible lessons such as forging allegiances and navigating royal life. Lostris lived in the women's quarters and Taita provided Intef with regular reports of her growth.

At fourteen years of age Lostris began menstruating and Lord Intef saw her in a different light. Her availability for marriage made her more valuable in his household. Intef arranged for her to marry Pharaoh Mamose and become one of the junior wives in his harem, thus linking their families. As part of the arrangement Intef made Pharaoh promise to elevate her status if she bore him a son. The arranged marriage did not please Lostris. She grieved for the loss of her relationship with her childhood sweetheart, Tanus. Lostris went to Pharaoh's home, conceived his child and then starved herself. She miscarried the baby and nearly died. Taita convinced her in the value of surviving long enough to be reunited with her true love, Tanus. Taita nursed her back to health and lifted her spirits with news of Tanus's battle victories.

At the first battle against the Hyksos, Pharaoh was struck by an arrow and died. Lostris was truly saddened. Although she did not love him, she had grown fond of him. Lostris became regent ruler over Egypt. She was just twenty-one years old. The country she inherited was crumbling and she relied on Taita for guidance. Lostris took Tanus as her lover and they had three children- Memnon, Tehuti, and Bekatha . Lostris was known as a charitable and wise ruler. The people spoke of Queen Lostris with affection. She saw her people through a challenging time in their history and raised Memnon to do the same. Together they went into exile, navigated the cataracts, and explored uncharted territories. They survived, prospered, and returned victorious. Following Memnon's rise to the throne the people referred to Lostris as Mother Queen. Lostris ultimately died in Taita's arms from uterine cancer.

Lostris was brave in all aspects of her life. As a young child she was not fearful and became a skilled huntress. She exercised this training when saving Taita from a snake. She was aware of her father's power, yet did not cower in his presence. Demanding Taita in place of her dowry was a courageous act. She went to Pharaoh's harem as a naive girl and left it as a confident woman. She loved passionately and lived well. The idea of an exile would have paralyzed a lesser woman, but Lostris accepted it as a challenge and emerged victorious.

Lord Tanus Harrab

Tanus was a young military man of fallen societal status. Tanus' father, Lord Harrab, had been a wealthy merchant. Lord Harrab prospered in the community of Thebes, where



his reputation was sound and his life was blessed. His friend of equal bearing, Lord Intef, secretly harbored jealousy towards Lord Harrab. Intef maliciously set out to destroy Harrab's reputation and harm his trading relationships. Lord Harrab died in disgrace and his shame was felt by his family as well. With a tainted family name and no sponsor to help him, Tanus resorted to military life. Tanus' friend, Taita, educated him extensively in military tactics and designed for him a special bow made of strong wood which he lovingly named Lanata.

The military suited Tanus and he climbed through the ranks quickly. He attained the high rank of Best of Ten Thousand and commanded the Blue Crocodile division of Pharaoh's private guard. He was a sound soldier and prompted loyalty in the army men who knew him. His achievements and youth did not go unnoticed. In addition to his skill, Tanus was handsome. His physique was admired by many, but he was only interested in one lady. He fell in love with Lostris, the daughter of Lord Intef who was forced to marry Pharaoh Mamose. Their love affair was life-long and clandestine.

During his time in the military Tanus spoke against corruption in Egypt's government. His honesty awarded him with both friends and enemies. Tanus spent two years in the desert on a campaign to rid Egypt's borders of nomadic pirates. At the same time, he avenged his father's death and restored his family to its rightful place in society. Despite his desirable attributes, Tanus never married. He waited for his one love, Lostris, to become available. Tanus and Lostris had three children together. Tanus loved them dearly and, although they were named as Pharaoh's children, Tanus tried to be as involved in their childhoods as he could. Lostris ordered Tanus to be their chief educator in military tactics and he was happy to oblige. Following Pharaoh's death Lostris and Tanus shared their love more freely. Tanus died on the battlefield obtaining Memnon's right to marry the woman of his choosing. Tanus's death greatly impacted Egypt's army. Soldiers lamented his loss and Lostris wasn't interested in living without him. Rather than burying such a great man in modest arrangements, Taita and Kratas swapped the bodies of Tanus and Pharaoh Mamose. Thus, Tanus was buried in the splendor of a king.

Crown Prince Memnon

Memnon was the son of Lostris and Tanus. He was conceived during a sandstorm when the two were trapped together in a crypt. Although Lostris was bound to Pharaoh Mamose by marriage, it was Tanus who occupied her heart. Their children were created out of that love but, for propriety's sake, the children were claimed as Pharaoh Mamose's children. Therefore, Memnon was known as the Crown Prince and rightful ruler of Egypt. Following Pharaoh's death Lostris ruled until her son was old enough to do so. Memnon had two sisters, Tehuti and Bekatha, who were princesses of the same lineage. Memnon was an intelligent child. The novel asserts that he crawled when most babies just rolled and walked when most still crawled. He was an avid learner and studied with his mother's finest tutor, Taita. He grew in strength as well and became an excellent hunter. He was the youngest warrior ever to be named Best of Ten Thousand, and then again when he was promoted to Great Lion of Egypt.



During his youth the prince was affectionately called Mem. Later his name took on its fullness (Memnon). Memnon fell in love with a young woman from a foreign tribe. Her name was Masara and the two were soon married. They overcame their cultural differences and enjoyed a happy marriage. Following his marriage and preparation as a warrior, Lostris decided he was ready to rule all of Egypt. Memnon ascended to the throne and acquired the title of Pharaoh Tamose. Pharaoh Tamose successfully led the return of Egypt's populace from exile and fought to regain Egypt's previous territory. Memnon's reputation preceded him and the people believed in his character. They saw him as kind and wise like his mother, as well as strong and handsome like his father. Most importantly, the people saw their future in Memnon. The battles were difficult but he was a fine ruler and the novel foretells of his success.

Pharaoh Mamose

Pharaoh Mamose ruled over Egypt at the onset of the novel. His kingdom was unstable due to pressures from competing nations and corruption from within. He faced extreme stress that he was poorly equipped to handle. As a man he was rather ordinary. Pharaoh Mamose was short and past middle age. He had a bulging waist and pale complexion. Pharaoh Mamose was charitable to the point of being naive and lacked the strength to make decisions of value. His policies could be described as oscillating in nature. Unfortunately for him, Egyptian beliefs elevated the pharaoh to a godly status from whence grand expectations flowed. An additional problem was his lack of an heir. He had many wives and children, but all were females and would never be recognized as legitimate rulers. Pharaoh Mamose took another wife, Lostris, in hopes of siring a son. Lostris did have a baby boy, Memnon, who later ruled over Egypt. Pharaoh Mamose enjoyed Memnon and doted on him. When Memnon was five years old a neighboring country terrorized Egypt. Pharaoh was killed and Lostris and Memnon were forced into exile. Before his death Pharaoh requested that Lostris complete two tasks. The first was to bury him properly. Lostris carried his mummified body aboard her ship during the many years of exile until she was able to erect a suitable tomb for his resting place. The second task was to ensure Memnon's safety and install him onto Egypt's throne. Memnon did this with pride.

Lord Intef

Lord Intef was the governor of the Egyptian city called Thebes. As governor, one of his responsibilities was to collect taxes, which he levied unjustly. He stole from the people and amassed a wealth that exceeded that of the Pharaoh's. Lord Intef employed many slaves, but his favorites, especially young boys, he kept in his own quarters. The book infers that Intef was a pedophile with a penchant for homosexuality. Intef had eight wives, all of whom brought him a dowry or political allegiance. He was proud of his two sons, whose finger knuckles he had removed so that they could live a life of politics and leisure without military service. He showed no interest in his daughter, Lostris, except when it came time to marry her away and reap the benefits associated with her union. Intef was a cruel man who often resorted to physical brutality to accomplish whatever he



saw fit. Intef also employed the royal executioner, Rasfer, to help in this regard. Intef was responsible for the widespread decline in Egypt's safety and prosperity at the hands of the desert nomads known as Shrikes. When his devious plots within Egypt were unveiled by Tanus, Intef escaped to the south where he helped to direct a bloody uprising. He died after being dragged behind a chariot driven by Taita, who was not remorseful for his part in the killing.

Rasfer

Rasfer was the royal executioner. He was also privately employed by Lord Intef. Rasfer was a ruthless man who delighted in the sufferings of others. He did not flinch before beheading, mutilating, or otherwise harming another person. It was Rafer who doled out punishments as directed by Intef. These punishments included Taita's gelding and subsequent whippings. When Intef's deceit became known Intef ordered Rasfer to attack Tanus and Taita. Rasfer was unsuccessful on both accounts only because of Tanus's superior military training. Rasfer's brute force could only be overcome by strategy and quick reflexes. Rasfer was eventually hung for his actions. His hanging was a pitiful scene, and Taita slit his throat to end his misery.

Masara

Masara was the daughter of Beni-Jon, a tribal leader in the realm of Cush. Memnon fell in love with Masara. Along with Tanus' help, Memnon rescued her from captivity and returned her to her family. In return, Memnon was allowed to marry Masara. Masara loved Memnon and was eager to learn Egyptian ways to please him. Taita aided her in this regard and taught her to speak Egyptian. When Memnon inherited the throne of Egypt, Masara took on the title of Queen Masara.

Kratas

Kratas was Tanus's best friend and second in command. Although he was worthy of promotion, he refused such recognition multiple times to fight beside Tanus. When Tanus was elevated from Best of Ten Thousand to Great Lion of Egypt Kratas finally accepted a promotion and took up the title of Best of Ten Thousand. Later when he was again offered promotion he refused, saying that he would prefer to fight under Memnon's direction. Kratas was a loyal military man and wanted his country to succeed more than he wanted his own comfort.

Remrem

Remrem was another of Tanus's closest friends and best soldiers. Following Tanus's death, Remrem echoed Kratas' interest in fighting beside Memnon.



Hui

Hui was originally a young member of one of the shrike's tribes. When Tanus decimated their tribe, Hui gratefully pledged allegiance to Egypt and joined the military. Taita worried about the presence of such people in the ranks. He felt that if their allegiance was so easily won they may be likely to repeat their behavior in future battles. Hui won Taita's affection when they realized their mutual appreciation for horses. Hui had had previous experience caring for them and became essential in both their care and husbandry. Hui gained Tanus' respect, too, and was rewarded with a commanding position over one of the military's regiments. This occurred in the battle between Egypt and the Hyksos as they marched on the city of Thebes.

Aton

Aton was a good friend of Taita's. He was a fellow eunuch and a servant of Pharaoh Mamose. Like Taita he was educated, although not to the same degree and was literate. Aton helped Taita and Lostris adjust to life in the royal palace following Lostris' marriage to Pharaoh.

Salitas

Salitas was the ruler of the Hyksos people. He was called the Shepard King and was feared by all nations who encountered him. He was a ruthless ruler and utilized chariots in his military. The chariots created large dust storms and often his enemy did not even know who was attacking nor in which direction they should fight. His reputation preceded him. Salitas was the father of two sons. One of his sons, Prince Beon, headed the Hyksos infantry and his other son, Prince Apachan, commanded the chariot division. Salitas and his sons sought to expand their territories and claim Egyptian land. It was during one such battle that Pharaoh Mamose was slain. Salitas forced Lostris and Memnon into exile, along with a great many of their followers. The Hyksos people presided over Egypt during Memnon's long absence, until Memnon returned to vanquish them.

Princess Tehuti

Lostris' first daughter. Tehuti's father was Tanus and she was born during the exodus. She was recognized as a child of Pharaoh Mamose and princess of his dynasty.

Princess Bekatha

Lostris' third child, fathered by Tanus and also born during the exodus. Like her older siblings, Bekatha was recognized as a child of Pharaoh Mamose and a princess of his dynasty.



Tiamet

At a city called Safaga, Tanus used the hawk seal given to him by Pharaoh to purchase the equipment he required from a merchant named Tiamat. Tiamat also provided valuable information about the conduct of local pirates known as Shrikes.

Aqer

Lord Aqer grew restless on the exodus, so he was chosen to lead the charting expedition. He returned safely and confirmed Taita's idea for a faster route. For his efforts the queen rewarded him extravagantly and forged a powerful relationship.

Prester Beni-Jon

Prester Beni-Jon was Masara's father. He was the chief of a prosperous Cushite village. Unlike his peers, Beni-Jon was a thoughtful ruler. He loved his family but he treasured his people as well. When Memnon rescued Masara from her captors, Beni-Jon agreed to their marriage.



Objects/Places

Egypt

The vast majority of the book is set in various parts of the country of Egypt.

Memphis

Memphis is the capital city of lower Egypt. It was said to be the "seat of the red pretender," an enemy who asserted his claim to Egypt's throne.

Elephantine

Elephantine Island was the site of Pharaoh's palace. It was nestled among other islands in the Nile River, providing it with both beautiful scenery and excellent protection. Lostris spent the first six years of her marriage to Pharaoh Mamose on Elephantine Island with brief interludes elsewhere.

Karnak

Karnak is a trading port in Egypt. It is a well-known city and battle site.

Thebes

Thebes is the city of Lostris' birth. Lord Intef is housed in Thebes and is governor of it. Memnon is born in the city of Thebes.

The Delta

The Delta is a fertile area of land at Egypt's northern most border. From here the Nile River flows into the Mediterranean Sea.

The Nile River

The Nile River provides Egypt with sustenance. It overflows its shores every year, bringing forth fertilizer for the land and water for the people. It is home to many varieties of animals and fish which are hunted by the Egyptians. The Egyptians navigate the river and are in harmony with it. The Nile originates from the merging of two rivers and flows out (at the delta) into the Mediterranean Sea.



Cush

Cush is the land south of Egypt along the Nile. Prior to Lostris' exodus it was unexplored by Egypt but had its own indigenous peoples.

Hunting expeditions

Hunting expeditions were crucial for male bonding and warrior training. Taita took Tanus on many expeditions as a child. This pastime continued as they aged but the duo added Memnon to their excursions, thus becoming a trio.

Lanata

Lanata was the name of the bow that Taita designed and crafted as a gift for Tanus.

Recurved bow

The recurved bow was utilized by the Hyksos military. Taita viewed it as superior to the Egyptian bow and attempted to recreate it for Egypt's military.

Chariot

The horse drawn chariot was a trademark of the Hyksos military. It was subsequently incorporated into the Egyptian military.

Tomb

The tomb is considered a very sacred place by Egyptians. The mummification process and burial were central in their ideas about life after death. Additionally, Lostris and Tanus were forced to hide from the sandstorm in a tomb, where Memnon was conceived.

Festival of Osiris

The festival of Osiris is a biennial event. It models the sacred story of Osiris. It is a joyful celebration for Egypt.

Royal Barge

Because the Nile River was central to Egyptian life, a royal barge was constructed. It functioned in transporting the royal family safely and efficiently around Egypt.



Painted Wall Scenes

Taita was a renowned artist. He designed and painted beautiful murals along the walls of Lostris' homes.

Scrolls

Scrolls held significant information for Egyptians. Taita was literate and kept scrolls for Lord Intef and for his daughter, Lady Lostris.

Measuring Devices

Taita invented measuring devices to account for the Nile's yearly inundation as well as for distance covered by boat.

Cataracts

The cataracts were large rock structures protruding from the Nile River. They impeded the royal flotilla's progress during the exodus and were overcome through much effort and planning.

Crown and Staff

The crown and staff are symbols for the Egyptian Pharaoh.

Gold

Gold was precious to Egyptians, who coveted highly-adorned materials.

Poison

Poison was used in at least three places of the book. It was given to Taita's pets (assassination attempt), administered to Intef's security guards (to procure his escape), and was presented again in the form of a cobra (a second assassination attempt).

Treasure

The treasure stockpiled by Lord Intef was impressive not just because of its quantity, but also because its value exceeded that of Pharaoh. It demonstrated Egypt's financial turmoil.



Egyptian Religion

The Egyptians were a superstitious people. They were polytheistic (believed in many gods). They believed gods could be angered or appeased and so regular celebrations were held and rituals conducted. Egyptians believed that an elaborate afterlife existed if procedures were followed properly (embalming, tombing, etc.).

Whip

The whip was used against Taita as a form of punishment on multiple occasions. It was also used by Tanus and his commanders against the Shrike invaders.

Sword of Arkoun

Arkoun's sword was stronger than any metal ever wielded by an Egyptian. It required frequent polishing and was a shiny, blue hue. Tanus coveted it and died in battle retrieving it. Tanus then gifted the sword to Memnon.

Horses

Egyptians were unaware that horses existed until the Hyksos employed them in battle. Because they were unknown and misunderstood, most Egyptians feared horses. Taita, Lostris, Memnon, and Hui saw their value. They cherished the horses, tamed and bred them, and then incorporated them into Egypt's military.

Medicine Chest

Taita's medicine chest was his prized possession. From it he created infusions and balms that helped the Egyptian people.

Mazes

Taita was said to be able to work the Mazes of Ammon-Ra. This was the process through which he foretold the future.

Costumes

Taita and Tanus employed costumes in their battle against the shrikes at Gallala.



Themes

Good and Evil

The universal theme of good versus evil is demonstrated in many areas of this novel. To promote this theme the author polarizes people and populations. In a general sense the Egyptians are perceived as good, while their enemies (mainly the Hyksos) are perceived as evil. The two populations are described using vastly different adjectives which sets an undertone and further enforces the theme. The Egyptians are described as cultured, while the Hyksos are described as barbaric. A less judgmental approach would be to say that the two cultures valued different things, but the author chooses to describe each culture in such a way that reinforces the ideas of good and evil. Much of the book is dedicated to the exodus, where the fragile Egyptian population is chased into exile by the ruthless Hyksos.

Similarly, Taita's character is good, while Rasfer is evil. Taita is a compassionate man. He is well educated and uses his abilities as a physician to care for all people, even those that others may deem as unworthy. Taita heals Rasfer as well, although Rasfer is a brute of a man. As the royal executioner Rasfer doles out punishments and seems to enjoy his work. Taita is described as physically handsome while Rasfer is lumbering and his face is disfigured. The reader is led to believe that Rasfer is evil personified. Indeed at one point the novel likens him to Seth, the dark god of Egypt. A similar comparison is made of the Hyksos people, who follow a warrior god akin to Seth.

Tanus is a good man, and his character traits are further highlighted when he is compared to Lord Intef. Tanus's father died without dignity and his family inherited his shame; therefore, Tanus came from no material wealth, but his character is exceedingly worthy of praise. He is brave, loyal, and loving. He believes in the value of a promise. He leads the Egyptian people in battle yet is aware that even in such a prestigious position he is their servant. He respects the dichotomy of his career and considers himself to be a common man. In contrast, Lord Intef is evil. As governor of Thebes, he levies taxes and controls the finances of the city. He believes he is above the people and steals from them regularly. He does not associate with the common people and orders them eliminated when he sees fit. Intef lies and schemes to manipulate everyone, including Pharaoh. Tanus and Lord Intef are polar opposites.

Love

Many different kinds of love are examined in River God. Maternal love is shared between Lostris and her children, Memnon, Bekatha, and Tehuti. From the beginning of her first pregnancy, Lostris rubbed her growing belly and was elated with her state. She recognized that her children were created out of love and rejoiced in their lives. It was maternal love, along with an element of self preservation, that forced Lostris and her family into exile. Lostris was committed to keeping her children safe, at least until they



reached an age at which they could be independent. The reader should note that she did not order a return from exile until Memnon had reached adulthood.

Lostris also loved her people. As a child she lived a sheltered life of nobility. When she was older Lostris finally had the chance to mingle with the greater population. She enjoyed listening to them and brought their concerns back to the palace. She ordered Taita to bring treats along whenever they went out so that she could distribute them. When Lostris made the decision to leave Egypt she insisted that anyone who wanted to accompany her on the exodus was welcome to do so. This meant carrying more people than had been planned for, and the supplies had to be changed and reorganized. She was adamant, however, that she not desert anyone. To those who chose to remain behind, she made a solemn oath to bring Memnon back to liberate them from tyranny. On her deathbed Lostris was still concerned with the plight of her people. It was her concern for them that led her to request a final vision from Taita.

Friendship is a special kind of love. It is a selfless love with components of companionship and shared interests. Tanus is surrounded by good friends. His steadfast and true character attract equally good people. Taita cared for Tanus from an early age and offered him help whenever he could. Later in life, when Tanus was lost in despair, it was Taita who found him and pulled him out of his melancholy. Taita and Tanus shared such a long history that only Taita knew of his secret hiding place. Taita was also able to see past the state that his friend was in and inspire him to do better. Tanus was also very good friends with Kratas and Remrem. Kratas in particular seemed to honor his friendship with Tanus. The two shared such a bond that Kratas refused promotion many times to stay beside Tanus. They had an excellent working relationship and deep affection as well. Kratas was content to keep it that way.

The final kind of love demonstrated was romantic love. Although Lostris was married to Pharaoh Mamose she did not feel passion for him. She grew to care for him and wished him no ill will, but it was Tanus whom she loved. From fourteen years of age until the day she died Lostris loved only Tanus. He was the father of her children and the love of her life. When Lostris learned of his alleged death she began starving herself to expedite her death and join him in the afterlife. She nearly succeeded in her attempt until Taita returned with news of Tanus' health. Lostris felt that life without Tanus would be empty. Taita's intervention gained them many years of happiness together. Memnon was equally passionate about his bride, Masara.

Overcoming Adversity

The Egyptians had to overcome great adversity in the novel. Their government was corrupt and the people hurting. A wedge had been forced between the ruling class and the commoners and the result was a crumbling infrastructure. At times the population wished to rebel and at other times they prayed for Memnon's safe arrival and a return to the days of a ruling class. Tanus was a great example of this process. Tanus made a military career for himself. He was not considered nobility, although his father had once been a prosperous merchant. His father had suffered from the government's corruption



and their family had been irreversibly affected. Although Tanus was able to overcome his rough start, he still associated with the commoners and empathized with their struggle. Tanus was always quick to defend the common people and try to improve their lives. He even risked his own life to implore on their behalf.

Another fine example of adversity was the exodus itself. The Egyptian culture was built on a system of slavery, but few slaves went with the exodus. Most of the people were skilled workers. They were used to laboring in their homeland, with certain comforts and a safe home. However, the people were not used to the kind of physical labor that the exodus demanded. The journey entered previously unexplored lands and there was no way for anyone to know what would be required of them. The southern portion of the Nile River included six separate cataracts. Each cataract was created out of large, solid, and immovable rock, sometimes granite, with swirling rapids. There were times when each ship, of which there were hundreds, had to be physically carried up and over the cataracts because avoiding the rocks seemed impossible. An elaborate pulley system was created to aid in this endeavor. At other times, ships were disassembled and reassembled further downriver. When possible, the ships attempted to navigate the area, but some were always lost in the process. The exodus and return journey lasted nearly fifteen years. The people were disappointed at times, but with Lostris' direction they persevered. When they returned to Egypt under Memnon's rule they were victorious.



Style

Point of View

Wilbur Smith's novel, *River God*, is told in the first person format. The narrator is Taita, the slave of a noble family. His life is intertwined with theirs. Subsequently, when he recounts his story it also includes the lives of his owners, Lord Intef and Lady Lostris. During the last pages Taita explains that his motivation for writing the text (scrolls) was to record the heroic life of Lostris. His writing is supposed to be a form of lasting tribute. The author was inspired to write the novel after multiple visits to Egypt and tomb excavations.

Setting

The setting for *River God* includes all of Egypt, as well as the land at its southern border referred to as Cush. At the time of the story Egypt was experiencing great turmoil. The country is composed largely of deserts divided by the fertile plains surrounding the Nile River. For this reason the Nile is said to be the lifeline of Egypt. The Nile River pours through its delta into the Mediterranean Sea. Specific cities cited in the text include Thebes, Karnak, Memphis, Safaga, and Gallala. Nestled in the Nile River is a series of islands as well as cataracts. The largest island is called Elephantine Island. Elephantine is the location of the Pharaoh's palace. With the winds that blow off of the water and the presence of trees, Elephantine is cooler and lush compared to the mainland. The palace is also decorated more ornately than any other structure on the mainland. Taita adds to its adornment by designing and painting beautiful frescoes in Lostris' quarters. In opposition to the beauty and tranquility of Elephantine, the northern portions of Egypt are repeatedly attacked by nomadic pirates and later by the Hyksos people. Queen Lostris and many of her people were eventually driven into exile. The exodus occurs on water. The flotilla contained hundreds of ships, each of which had to bypass the six cataracts that impeded their progress southward. During the exodus the Egyptian people lived on their boats or camped on the riverbanks when the water levels were too low for safe passage. At the origin of the Nile, where two other rivers come together, Queen Lostris did create a temporary city known as Qebui. At Qebui the people finally rested, gained their strength, and prepared for their return trip.

Language and Meaning

The language of *River God* was very straight forward and not difficult reading. Although the book is long, it is well written and holds the reader's attention. Because the character names are not familiar to our language, it takes a little while to commit them, along with their interesting spellings, to memory. Examples of foreshadowing are interspersed throughout the book. They serve two purposes. First, the foreshadowing keeps the reader engaged and wanting to know what happens next. Secondly, when the

reader finally does encounter the event that was foretold, the story seems to really come together. It would be helpful to have a rudimentary understanding of ancient Egyptian practices and religion prior to reading the novel. This prior knowledge would add to the reader's ease and understanding but is not necessary.

Structure

In its 1994 hardcover edition, *River God* is five-hundred and twenty-eight pages long. There are no divisions in the the traditional sense (chapters, books, etc.). Instead each new section is identified with a hieroglyphic character and corresponding indentation of the text. A rough map of Egypt is included prior to the text and serves as a reference for battle locations and journeys in the text. An author's note is included after the conclusion of the novel.



Quotes

"The river lay heavily upon the desert, bright as a spill of molten metal from a furnace."
page 1

"She would grow more beautiful as the years passed, become more poised and regal, but never again would that glow of virgin womanhood radiate from her so overpoweringly." page 1

"Although I had heard it so many times before, I never could harden myself to the sounds of the children, and I felt a familiar pang of pity." page 34

"I watched Rasfer approach now at a trot that was surprisingly swift and agile for those heavy, tree like legs and the swell of his hairy gut, and I was transported back over the years to the day that my manhood had been plucked from me." page 39

"However, we Egyptians are a civilized people and we worship wise and just gods, not blood crazed monsters." page 55

"Tanus had struck exactly the right note with the people, and suddenly I was moved by the notion that this was all much deeper than it seemed." page 83

"Just a soft little godling of late middle age, with a small round paunch bulging over the waistband of his kilt and features intricately lined with lines of worry." page 92

"They would need every bit of protection I could give them during the stormy days that lay ahead for both of them." page 94

"No matter that its construction had contributed largely to the financial ruin of the kingdom, Pharaoh was delighted with it." page 95

"As I grew to know him better, I found that Pharaoh was a kindly man, and this was the first proof he gave me of it." page 127

"After great Thebes, west and east Elephantine together made up the largest and most populous city in the Upper Kingdom, a worthy rival to Memphis, the seat of the red pretender in the Lower Kingdom." page 152

"Although I knew well where my duty towards Tanus lay, life on the island was so idyllic, and I so much enjoyed the exclusive company of my mistress, that I delayed my departure with the excuse that she still needed me." page 160

"Tanus had taught her to forsake the awkward double jointed manner of throwing that is natural to the female, and she hurled the melon she held with the force and aim of a trained javelineer." page 162



"The scowls evaporated and the men grinned at each other in the firelight, as they surreptitiously tested the edges of the swords concealed beneath the sleeping mats on which they sat." page 200

"Her face, almost translucent with starvation, glowed like a pearl as she listened to my account of our adventures at Gallala, of how Tanus led the fighting like a god, and of how he sang with the wild joy of battle." page 219

"I remembered the bowl of poisoned milk and the cobra, and despite all my precautions, I was uneasy." page 251

"I lifted my hands to ward off the blow, but my legs were frozen with shock and terror, and I could not move or duck away from the hissing blade." page 264

"All the while his fascinated gaze was fastened on her belly from which the miracle would in the fullness of time emerge." page 284

"Accordingly it became the duty of Lord Harrab, when he was not on campaign, to wait upon the prince at the beginning of each week." page 293

"I understood it instantly and scorned myself for not having discovered it of my own accord." page 306

"I stooped over him and felt for the life-throb in his throat, but there was none, and the skin was cooling under my touch." page 326

"I have given my word that no one will disturb his rest." page 354

"The passage of the wind over my bare chest made me shiver again, and counteracted the bravado of the wine." page 355

"It was almost as though the gods were determined that we should undertake this voyage, and that they would not be denied." page 363

"I had never disobeyed her in my life, this was the first time." page 374

"Day after day their chariots pursued our flotilla down both banks of the Nile as we fled southwards." page 375

"As the weeks turned to months, the Nile described a slow and majestic bend beneath our keels." page 408

"Before the year was out it was necessary for me to dream another of my famous dreams, for my mistress had once more suffered a virgin pregnancy that could only be explained by supernatural means." page 409

"I should have been contented and replete, but there is a restlessness in my nature that was exacerbated by this new wanderlust that had come to plague me." page 445

"I felt the chill premonition of some awful tragedy, like the air stirred by the beat of vultures' wings as they settle to their gruesome feast." page 482



Topics for Discussion

Taita was an eunuch. What does this mean and how did it affect his relationships?

Taita was also a slave. Explain how slavery was woven into Egyptian society.

Briefly describe the religion of ancient Egypt.

Considering that Taita himself considered Pharaoh Mamose a kind, yet feeble, man, what do you think about Mamose's final resting place?

Lostris was said to be a charitable wife and eventually a beloved ruler. Please provide reasoning for the peoples' feelings towards her.

Trace, in general terms, Tanus' journey back to Lostris after his sentencing by Pharaoh Mamose.

Tanus took an oath to serve Egypt. In what ways did he make good on his word?

How did Lord Intef become more wealthy than the king?

Describe Memnon's education. How was it similar to his mother's? How did it differ?

What were the cataracts and how did they affect the Egyptian exodus?

What was the significance of the chariot?

Describe the Egyptian military and its evolution.

Rasfer was not presented favorably. Describe some of his character traits. Why does Taita still feel compassion for him?

Hui begins as a traitor, but Tanus accepts him as a friend. Why is this and was it a wise choice?

Despite his status as a slave, Taita was exceptionally well educated. Is it true to say that he ruled Egypt?