

## Discussion Questions

### Mistress of Rome by Kate Quinn

1. From the moment we meet Arius we are also introduced to his inner demon. At his core the Barbarian is a noble and kind-hearted soul, while the voice that haunts him is a ruthless killer. How do you think this maniacal monologue ever began within him? How can his son avoid inheriting this same curse?
2. Sold into slavery and torn away from her one true love, Thea also carries with her the guilt and shame associated with the murder of her family. How does the habit of spilling her own blood help her cope with her troubled past? Which other characters participate in similar self-destructive tendencies and why?
3. Thea admits that even after sharing the Emperor's bed, and spending days on end with him, that she does not truly know Domitian at all. Does any character truly know the Emperor and, if so, why has he given them his confidence?
4. One on-going theme in this book is forbidden relationships. Nessus has a long-standing romantic relationship with Ganymede, an imperial slave. Why do they choose to keep their feelings for one another a secret? What other characters have relationships, either romantic or platonic, that must remain undisclosed?
5. Lepida's cruelty towards Thea is incomparable. Does Thea ever show her the same level of cruelty? Does either character ever display any sort of mercy towards the other? Discuss their dynamic.
6. The Emperor's astrologer, Nessus, reads Arius' palm and foresees three fates. Did he ever die by the sword in this story? What do you think this prophecy means?
7. The Empress, Lady Julia, and Thea all fear and hate Domitian. What characteristics drew the Emperor to each woman? How do women in this story empower themselves or others?
8. Lepida's disgust for Sabina is clear. Why does she hate her child so much? Why give up the chance to create an ally? Was Marcus' influence too strong, or were there other reasons?
9. Do you believe Marcus should have divorced Lepida? Could his influence in the senate have exposed her? Who could he have turned to for help?
10. Loyalty and betrayal lie at the heart of the story. Why does Paulinus remain loyal to Domitian even after the Emperor's true self is revealed? Why does he betray those who love him?
11. Discuss how social class shapes the lives of Romans. Aside from name, deceit, or ownership, what other ways can characters rise above their class?
12. Power shifts constantly in the narrative. Who do you feel is the most powerful person in Rome and why?
13. Paulinus' hatred of and infatuation with Lepida is an addiction. What draws him to her beyond physical lust?
14. Lepida judges Thea as a whore due to the sexual acts forced upon her. Yet Lepida chooses multiple partners. What other double standards appear in the story?
15. Marcus pleads with Calpurnia to stay betrothed to his son. Did their relationship grow from this point? Why do you think she chose to stay?

