



# King and Goddess

*Judith Tarr*

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## **King and Goddess** Judith Tarr

Hatshepsut was the only daughter of Thutmose and his Great Royal Wife, and carried the King's Right in her person. She was trained to govern, and loved her land and people above all other things. But custom and the Gods decreed that she must wed her half brother and be the Great Royal Wife while he reigned as Pharaoh. When her husband died, she should have stepped aside, allowing her husband's son by a concubine to rule over Egypt. But Hatshepsut was still young when her husband-brother died, and his heir was a mere child. The Temple of Amon gave the regency to her. And then Hatshepsut did the unthinkable - she took the crowns of Upper and Lower Egypt in her own name and made herself king. Until the twentieth century, the life of Hatshepsut was veiled in mystery. After her death, the nephew whose throne she usurped had taken his revenge in a peculiarly Egyptian way: He eradicated her names from the annals of Egypt, chiseled them off every monument, destroyed every statue he could find, dispersed the goods of her tomb, and hid her nameless mummy. He tried to hide her from history forever. But buried deep in the rock beneath a lovely temple lay the tomb of the architect Senenmut - Hatshepsut's secret lover. And in his tomb was found the history of Hatshepsut, images of her, and the story of a lifelong love that Senenmut could reveal only in death. Judith Tarr has built from Senenmut's true account a novel of great power, about a queen who loved her land too much to see it in the hands of a weak king, and about a woman whose passion for ruling was stronger than her love for one man.

## **King and Goddess Details**

Date : Published July 1st 1998 by Tor Books (first published 1996)

ISBN : 9780812550849

Author : Judith Tarr

Format : Paperback 407 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Northern Africa, Egypt, Fiction, Fantasy, Literature, Ancient

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# From Reader Review King and Goddess for online ebook

## Kelly says

This is a novel about the rise and rule of King Hatshepsut. What makes this novel unique is that the majority of the novel is told through the POV of Senenmut. Senenmut is a historical figure associated with King Hatshepsut. There are also smaller sections told through the POV of Nehsi, another member of King Hatshepsut's inner circle.

The story of Hatshepsut is very familiar to me and there are various ideas of the specifics of how things unfolded. I found most of the information/character development and personalities plausible. There was nothing that stood out as wildly historically inaccurate based on what we know about Hatshepsut and the people in her life.

Excellent read.

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## Jenny GB says

Great historical fiction novel about ancient Egypt. The novel follows the rise of queen Hatshepsut from queen to regent to queen. She easily gains the love of her servants, Senenmut and Nehsi, as well as her people. She is shown as a fierce and capable leader of her people and rules in peace and prosperity. Judith Tarr described her characters so well and really brought them to life, especially Senenmut and Nehsi. The love story is incredibly moving, especially the end of it when the lovers are finally parted by death.

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## Shari says

One thing about historical fiction, if it is well done, is the lessons it gives us regarding the cyclical nature of history and historical ploys. Some history is made for narrative having all the excitement needed for page-turning. The reuse, historically, of methods that serve to validate power and authority, such as the 'child of God' story we find in this novel, as well as other uses of propaganda that assure that a leader's power and authority is accepted and respected -- the justification of God-given lineage, the threat of punishment if one is not abjectly accepting, the way that regal authority could intrude on private life.

The patriarchal denial to women of their right to lead their own lives or to enter into the heretofore fields that have been dominated by men, even though there are women whose talent exceeds that of the men of the moment is also part of this story and it is good to know that the fight has been waged for millennia.

Hatshepsut, female daring to usurp the double crown of Egypt -- even she used the agendas that had been tools of the men of her regal family, but as a woman she opted for peace and negotiation. It never hurts to have that sort of quiet, to see if the art of negotiation can make roadways into peace, to watch as peace strengthens a country and brings wealth and surplus. A breather to rest from conflict -- most of it unnecessary and prompted by greed and gain and power -- to grow strong and find quiet and pleasure that is not constantly threatened.

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## Libbie Hawker (L.M. Ironside) says

I'm wavering between a 3 and a 3.5 on this book.

Given that she was such an intriguing and impressive historical figure, there is a very sad dearth of fiction about **Hatshepsut**. There are perhaps three or four traditionally published novels -- this being one of them -- and a small handful of independent novels (self-published and small press), most of which are **just bad**.

Compare that with **Cleopatra**, who was, in my opinion, **roughly equal in fascinating-ness**, but who's got dozens of traditionally published novels devoted to her, as well as several wonderful biographies.

What gives? Is it just because Cleopatra's story was made into a movie that featured Elizabeth Taylor lounging around on a barge, **purring**? Seems unfair. If Hatshepsut hadn't paved the way for her, Cleopatra likely never could have ruled Egypt as Pharaoh -- especially not during the misogynistic Greek period.

For those who are unfamiliar with King Hatshepsut, she was the first woman in recorded Egyptian history to rule the country as **full-on Pharaoh**, not as a queen or as a regent. She co-ruled with her stepson, and several years after her death a **nasty campaign** spread throughout Egypt to erase her image and name from monuments -- the symbolic equivalent of **killing her in the afterlife**.

Yikes! What did she do to piss off the State so badly that somebody with power felt he had to **kill her soul**? For many decades Egyptologists thought that her co-regent stepson, Thutmose III, must have been **pissed** that he'd shared the throne with his stepmom for so many years (22 by most counts), and he finally got sick of it and **murdered her**, then went on an **afterlife-slaying rampage** with a chisel and a pick.

However, more recent discoveries seem to indicate that Hatshepsut and Thutmose III got along famously, that their co-reign was peaceful and equitable, that Hatshepsut took care of things at home while her studmuffin stepson led armies all over the place to expand Egypt's borders. Certainly it is now known that Hatshepsut was not murdered, but died at the relatively advanced age of 55-ish from an **abscessed tooth** (and she also had bone cancer which would have gotten her **sooner or later**.)

Even though we now know more about Hatshepsut's history, what we didn't know just ten years before left **plenty of room** for an **interesting-as-hell novel**. Possible usurpation of a baby's claim to the throne? Pissed stepson/co-regent? Maybe a murder, and then an afterlife-murder? **Crap, that's awesome!**

But virtually none of the novels about Hatshepsut delve into the **mysteries and intrigues** that surrounded her reign. They focus heavily instead of Hatshepsut's **possible/probable romance** with the commoner Senenmut, and that's all fine and dandy, since that's also an interesting aspect of this woman's history -- but the Hatshepsut novels out there leave me wanting more.

Judith Tarr's treatment of Hatshepsut's tale falls a touch short of the mark because it never delves very deeply into Hatshepsut's personality. She comes across to the reader as too aloof and mysterious, and we're never able to sympathize with her enough to really understand why she makes the choices she makes. With a personality as potentially complex and strange as Hatshepsut's must have been, why not explore it more fully?

The pacing was occasionally dragging, making this a long-haul book that took me several months to finish.

However, I still consider it a good read because the setting is explored remarkably well, giving the reader a real sense of immersion in 18th-Dynasty Egyptian culture. King And Goddess is perhaps **one of the best Egyptian novels out there** for feeling a real sense of time and place.

It is an enjoyable read, and perhaps to people who are not such **nerd-os for Hatshepsut** it's a much more satisfying experience. However, be aware that if you are a Hatshepsut fan, you may feel vaguely dissatisfied with certain aspects of this novel.

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### Shawn says

Really not a bad book. Although you have to wait until getting through half of this story before it starts to pick up some steam. And somewhere between the middle and the end there are a handful of short chapters that deal exclusively with a secondary character that completely interrupts the flow of the story.

My big issue, however, deals with the protagonist, Queen Hatshepsut. Usually, the main character of a story is one you root for. But I would describe her character traits as arrogant, vain, disloyal, greedy, power-hungry, self-serving, and controlling. I know the author doesn't intentionally make her out to be this way. But that's how I found her to be. And it's hard to be on the side of somebody with these traits.

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### Monique says

Amazing..this book was all a historical novel should be: full of action, romance, drama, intrigue, politics, culture and above all the introduction to a fascinating historical figure, Hatshepsut, Egypt's most notorious and successful female pharaoh. Although she may not have been the first Hatshepsut was definitely the most memorable as she did what she believed and what no one thought was possible and that was to rule the greatest country in the land by herself as King and Goddess. The novel takes you from Hatshepsut's childhood where she was raised as a haughty, spoiled princess given a tutor in the form of arrogant and prideful Senenmut who feels he was made for better things than doting on a princess he did not even care for. As the years went on and their relationship grew the time came when Hatshepsut was of age to marry her brother Thutmose and rule as the Great Royal Wife. Tradition in Egypt dictates that the children of the Pharaohs carry the God's blood line and they are required to procreate and enrich the throne of Egypt with heirs to insure the pharaoh lineage.. however Hatshepsut resented Thutmose because he was male, the one fact that allowed him to be King which she could never be. Aside from her resentment she also despised him and his manner with women and enlisted a conniving and beautiful maidservant Isis to teach him to please women. Doing her job well Isis reluctantly turns the King unto Hatshepsut and together they have a daughter and a stillborn son whose death also takes away her ability to bear more children. Raising her daughter and ruling Egypt she stubbornly remained true to her one desire, to become King and rule in her own name as she dreamed her father the god Amon wished her to. Harboring these irrational desires and stubborn dream of becoming King she draws closer to Senenmut and the two begin a marvelously secret and clandestine love affair to last the ages.. When Thutmose passes away she rules in the name of her daughter and the son of Thutmose and Isis until they are of age..and also hatches her plan to make her dream a reality and name herself King. Miraculously she does this and rules brilliantly until her stepson, heir to the throne and natural enemy overthrows her and tries to erase her name from the world's memory after her death. As fitting however it is through her true love Senenmut and his tomb carvings that Hatshepsut lives and their love

endures. Awesome book and I will be reading more on Hatshepsut as she was enthralling and ruthless and I adored her..Historical inaccuracies aside this was an awesome story highly recommended...

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## **Lisa says**

*King and Goddess* is a well-written, engaging novel that brings Ancient Egypt in the reign of Hatshepsut to life. Unfortunately, I had a lot of niggles with it that meant that I didn't enjoy it as much as I feel that I have should have.

Early on, I found both Hatshepsut and Senenmut unsympathetic and unlikeable characters. In the early chapters, both are limited to ambitious and arrogant, before Hatshepsut developed a cruel streak. In one scene, Hatshepsut refuses to have anything to do with her newborn daughter, Neferure, because she is not the son. In another, Hatshepsut seems inordinately cruel to her husband, Thutmose II, who Tarr depicts as having loved, or was in love with, Hatshepsut.

It's possible, of course, that Hatshepsut was really an ambitious, cruel and arrogant woman – but it's hard to take these qualities and create a heroine that we're meant to root for. Particularly, when, Tarr's Thutmose II is far from unlikeable enough that Hatshepsut's cruelty towards him come across as warranted or necessary.

I was disappointed by Isis, the mother of Thutmose III, and the relationship she has with Hatshepsut. Initially, they are depicted in a kind of alliance with Hatshepsut, but this quickly develops into an one-sided rivalry, with Isis as a petty, jealous concubine to Hatshepsut as the munificent queen.

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Hatshepsut and Senenmut do become more than arrogantly ambitious, but we're never shown them growing as characters. Still, I had issues with Tarr's Hatshepsut right until the end. Her blindness and hatred when it comes to Thutmose III are majorly off-putting. Her own ambitions are never developed beyond her belief that she, alone, is worthy of the kingship.

Again, I found myself disappointed by the relationship between Hatshepsut and her heir, Thutmose III. The relationship was once thought to have been one of mutual hatred is known today to be far more complex. It is possible that Thutmose III had great respect for his aunt, stepmother and co-regent. Today, it seems more likely that that his actions were driven by the desire to safeguard his son's succession than hatred and resentment towards his aunt.

I felt as though the character of Thutmose III was wasted somewhat. Tarr gave us an uniquely awesome look at him as a child, but didn't really go anywhere after that.

The story is told mostly through the eyes of Senenmut, though Tarr occasionally offers a small scene through the eyes of Nehsi, the chancellor/guard of Hatshepsut. For the most part, this works. We're allowed extra insight into Hatshepsut and other characters, and it provides a natural way to continue the novel after Senenmut's death. But, it felt out of place and particularly uneven when the story switches to Nehsi and the voyage to Punt for several chapters, keeping the reader away from both Senenmut and Hatshepsut.

The book was published in 1996, and in some ways it shows its age, such as in Hatshepsut's pacifism and the largely antagonistic relationship she has with Thutmose III.

*King and Goddess* is a fantastic read, one that I would happily recommend. For me, it's disappointing and a little uneven, but this probably more a reflection of my own knowledge and attitudes towards Hatshepsut and Thutmose III than anything else. **3.5 stars.**

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### **Gretchen says**

If you are looking for a book that will give you an in-depth look at Hatshepsut, this may not be a novel for you. If you are looking for a book that will give you an in-depth look at the world around Hatshepsut, read this.

Hatshepsut is not really the star of this story. The reader gets to see Hatshepsut through the eyes of her advisers, mainly Senenmut and Neshi. If you want a novel where Hatshepsut gets to be the star, I can't recommend Stephanie Thornton's *Daughter of the Gods: A Novel of Ancient Egypt* enough. I can't recommend any thing by Stephanie Thornton enough. However, I thoroughly enjoyed this book. It was my first novel by Judith Tarr and certainly will not be the last.

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### **Colleen says**

I found this to be a richly woven historial novel. Judith Tarr has a way of writing historical women as strong and capable without removing all vestiges of what makes them women. In this tale, a woman declares herself King - a very male role to hold. Through it all, she maintains her independence. The only thing that keeps this from being a 5-star from me is that I feel I've read the same plot from the same author before. Not that it makes it less worthy of reading, just that it feels a lot like her other novels.

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### **Debbie says**

I really wanted to like this book. Hatshepsut is a fascinating figure in Egyptian history - the woman who ruled as a king. She is also something of a mystery. What prompted her to make such a dramatic and unprecedented move? Unfortunately this book really doesn't offer any insights into her motivations or what drove her. It is a good read told from the perspective of Senenmut, her royal steward, adviser, tutor to her daughter Neferure, and ultimately her lover, and from that of Nehsi her Nubian guard/protector and ultimately holder of many other titles in Hatshepsut's court. Both men love Hatshepsut in different ways and both are aware of her strengths and her flaws.[return][return]In the course of the story we meet Hatshepsut early in her marriage to Thutmose II. The Royal Wife has little use or respect for her spouse and sees him as something of an overgrown child with no manners. She does eventually bear him a daughter but soon realizes that she cannot have more children. A son is born to Thutmose II by his concubine Isis. That this child will become the next pharaoh of Egypt is something that bothers Hatshepsut. She becomes his regent after Thutmose II's death but has no tolerance for the boy and is unwilling to teach him. She

eventually declares she has been given a vision by Re that she must become the next pharaoh and begins taking control of the government.[return][return]During the course of the tale, I felt sorry for Thutmose who is portrayed as gifted, if a trifle slow in expressing himself. This is perceived as a lack of intellect by Hatshepsut but in reality he is overawed by her and prefers to think before speaking. We are given some insights into Hatshepsut's mind by her comments and statements to those around her but I would have preferred the tale be told from her point of view. I came away wanting to know Hatshepsut better; wanting to understand what truly drove her. Did she believe the statements she made or were they for political expediency? And Thutmose III, her unfortunately co-ruler who was consigned to obscurity until her death - did he hate Hatshepsut? Why did he wait so long to destroy any trace of her in Egypt? This book was a good read but I wish it had given me a deeper look into the mind of this fascinating female pharaoh.

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### **Lindsay says**

The idea of this book is wonderful, but in the end, it just didn't pan out. If this book had actually been true to history, I might have been able to overlook the slight lack of skill in its writing, but that just was not possible. Romantic fantasy and made-up nonsense fill Tarr's interpretation of the tale, and it is obvious from her depictions of everyday Egyptian life and ideals that she has never truly studied the subject. The orders of the characters' deaths, proven by archaeological evidence, is not even correct, as well as the character of her husband. I urge anyone interested in Hatshepsut or Egypt to read about this fascinating subject, but choose a more worthy and accurate book to spend your time on.

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### **Mica P. says**

3.5

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### **Stephanie says**

It was hard for me to imagine the pharaoh Hatshepsut as a protagonist after developing an early opinion against her thanks to reading "Mara, Daughter of the Nile" in J-high, where she's the villain. But still, I enjoyed hearing her side of the story and was completely supportive of her taking the throne to be king - and woman - at the same time. She was a strong, capable leader, although I can see how some of the regal things she did to cement her kingship might be interpreted as tyrannical. I would have liked to hear a little more about what happened after her death - was Thutmose a good king or a bad one? Why did he wait 20 years to destroy her name around Egypt? How do we know anything about her if he was so intent on getting rid of her? - but that would probably have made the book go on for too long anyway.

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### **Tara says**

I loved the personalization of history. This author really did her research and her take on ancient Egyptian life and culture is really spot on and kept interesting. This is what drives the novel. Getting to the why of what happened rather than relying on the facts we have, Tarr has made it plausible and a fascinating read. What is lacking is the depth of emotion. She sort of skims over passion and desire and anger. Any kind of extreme



emotion just isn't there in the sense of how it is described. While reading, I wanted to feel it along with them but didn't. I felt I was a distant observer rather than a participant in the time. Read it to facilitate the Museum book club and it is appropriate for that audience.

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## Iset says

I've been reading a lot of novels' interpretations of Hatshepsut recently, and Judith Tarr's book, if nothing else, puts a distinctly different spin on the story than others. The first thing to note is that, yes, this book was published in 1996, and that means it is stuffed full of Hatshepsut tropes that have been long since overturned in Egyptology as new evidence has come to light. These include the idea that Thutmose III had an antagonistic relationship with Hatshepsut – even though, in the author's note, Tarr recognises that it is odd that he didn't destroy Hatshepsut's monuments until decades after her death; she nevertheless says he turned on her 'suddenly' and 'viciously', whilst most Egyptologists consider the lengthy gap to indicate that it was a political rather than personal matter. Other outdated ideas include the notion that Hatshepsut as a female ruler concerned herself only with peaceful pursuits – a current evidence suggests otherwise, and the idea is grounded in antiquated perceptions of female rulership as inherently nurturing – and the Heiress Theory, which was the notion that while kings ruled in Egypt they ruled by right of the royal women who carried the bloodline and hence always had to marry their sisters. In fact these models were long since recognised as incorrect a good decade or so before Tarr wrote this novel, but I guess it takes time for myth-busting to reach the popular consciousness from the original research community. Tarr throws in a forbidden romance with Senenmut too but to be fair I have yet to read a single Hatshepsut novel, published in the past five years or several decades ago, that didn't throw in a romance with Senenmut, despite the gaping hole of evidence for it. A lot of novelists simply seem to consider it dramatic fodder far too good to pass up.

That said, *King and Goddess* does buck quite a few of the Hatshepsut tropes. Her daughter, Neferure, is usually depicted as a frail wallflower who dies young as a result. Neferure here is no shrinking violet, and whilst she still dies young, it is due to her strong-willed and forceful actions. The book also shows Hatshepsut and the concubine as allies, at least initially, and Thutmose II as not nearly as much of a bad guy as most Hatshepsut novels portray him as. This provided me with an interesting and fresh take on events, compared to the Hatshepsut books I've read up to this point. And, to some extent, the above-mentioned historical inaccuracies are forgivable precisely because of how far back this book was written. The modern e-book edition contains a second author's note dating from 2015, in which Tarr highlights the latest research and says that she would've written the story differently had she known, particularly the relationship between Hatshepsut and her step-son, and the manner of Hatshepsut's end.

As far as style of writing goes, it has a mature, competent baseline that reminds me of Stephanie Thornton's *Daughter of the Gods*, but it is at once different. Thornton has a skill for creative description that, while she doesn't use it consistently, reminds me a lot of Pauline Gedge and is something I feel she should use more. Judith Tarr lacks that creative flair, and her prose never excited me, but it was solid throughout, and I noticed that she has an interesting penchant for throwing in archaic words here and there. I thought the pacing was good, one of the better ones among Hatshepsut novels actually. A lot of focus is spent on building up the early dynamic between Hatshepsut and Senenmut, so it feels like the book earns their relationship rather than just flinging these two characters together because that's just what Hatshepsut novels do. At the same time, it doesn't seem to take away from a meaty section of the book spent on Hatshepsut as pharaoh, which I feel should always be the core of any Hatshepsut story.

One final point is that I felt Tarr portrayed basic societal attitudes better than either Stephanie Thornton or Libbie Hawker's books, which at times felt a bit mirror-like in their reflection of modern values. Tarr is starker about the treatment of women, and the huge gulf between royalty and commoner – and she's right. I feel that too many ancient Egypt novels recently have failed to understand the chasm of status, wealth, and social circles. I note that a few reviewers felt that Tarr doesn't portray Hatshepsut very well in this book, that the character is too aloof, but for me it was an accurate measuring of that vast distance, and as far as I can see Hatshepsut, although a main character, isn't supposed to be the protagonist. This is actually Senenmut's story, and I thought it did a pretty good job of telling it.

Could the book have been better? Yes. As I said, the writing never really amazed or enraptured me, although it was pleasantly competent throughout. Occasionally the book veered into over-the-top, hackneyed stock characters, probably because it drew from those three very outdated hypotheses about Hatshepsut. However, the pacing was good, the ambience was fairly well done, the characters were mostly well-developed and earned their pay-offs, and the novel does offer a few fresh twists that I haven't seen in other Hatshepsut novels before.

**7 out of 10**

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