

BURSTS OF FIRE

ADDICTED TO HEAVEN
BOOK ONE

SUSAN FOREST



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READER'S GROUP GUIDE

Questions and Topics for Discussion

1. The central character of *Bursts of Fire*, Meg Falkyn, is only seventeen when she suddenly becomes responsible for her two younger sisters. In what ways does she make life easier for Janat and Rennika, and in what ways does she fail at this responsibility? What dreams do you think Meg had to give up? How was she able to deal with her own grief at the loss of her mother, and of everything she knew?
2. At times, Janat comes across as selfish. In what ways does her selfishness suggest she is caught in a cycle of grief that she can't get past? In what ways is she simply a spoiled "princess"? In what ways does she act generously?
3. As the youngest sister, Rennika adapts more easily to the changes in their circumstances than her sisters. What external factors, such as her relationship with her mother, her age, the way she is sheltered, and so forth, and what internal factors, such as her personality and her appearance, help her to embrace the life of a peasant?
4. Huwen moves from being certain of his world and his role within it, to very uncertain. What circumstances cause him to question the morality of unfolding events? How does his relationship with his father change as Huwen ages?

5. Eamon behaves in ways that are counter-intuitive for a child: he engages in suicidal acts, sabotages his attempts at love, and withdraws from his family and friends. Why?
6. Wenid can be seen as a narrow, controlling individual, but how are his actions driven by what he considers to be the good of Shangril?
7. Uther occupies an unusual role in his family. How does his position as eldest bastard son to the High King give him more freedom to move in different social circles than other characters in the book? In what ways does his personality limit him in exploiting this niche? How was his personality shaped by his birthright and rearing? How important is his mother in his life?
8. Magic can be a powerful tool in Shangril. In what ways is it used for good, and in what ways is it misused? Why is suppression of magic difficult for royal forces to control? How is steam technology similar to magic?
9. Central to the political conflict in Shangril is power over who has access to death tokens. What are these, where do they come from, how are they used, and what is their significance? How is the afterlife more important to people of Shangril than their present lives?
10. Sulwyn describes a world in which a rising middle class of artisans and merchants are called upon by local kings for advice. How does this changing political and economic structure threaten Ormond? How much of this threat motivates Wenid in his advice to the High King?
11. Ormond precipitates the events of *Bursts of Fire* through bringing his son (his *second* legitimate son, not his heir) back from the dead. Is this an act of love, an act of love gone wrong, or an act of selfishness? How is his commitment to Eamon a misuse of power and a betrayal of his position as king of Arcan? Should he have let his son die?
12. Ormond's armies are never large enough to take on the combined might of the six other nations of Shangril, and yet he is surprisingly successful. How is he able to accomplish this feat? What modern world events mirror this military action?

- How does fear of war in today's world allow governments to force their will on others (neighboring countries; their own citizens)? How much of this condition is related to denial, lack of foresight, desire to maintain the status-quo or other factors? Does this mean we should stop seeking peaceful solutions?
13. Because Wenid, and by extension Ormond, fear the power of magiels, magic-users are persecuted. How is it possible for people with no magical power to suppress those who are able to use magic? What modern parallels do you see to this process? How are people muzzled by using their own psyches against them?
 14. The story ends with the three sisters' reunion. With this comes a change in their relationships with one another, and their understandings of their world and their place within it. At the same time, neither they nor the rebels have achieved a defeat of the High King. In what ways would more closure be satisfying? In what ways is the open-endedness of this book realistic?
 15. *Bursts of Fire* is Book 1 of the Addicted to Heaven series, and as such, deals with some aspects of addictions. Wenid's use of glim on Gweddien and Janat are obvious examples, but what other addictive substances and behaviors are evident in the book?
 16. In what ways do the characters in the book take a moral view substance use? For instance, in what ways is substance use celebratory, accepted and encouraged, and in what ways is it condemned? How closely does this reflect the modern world?
 17. In Shangril, there is no law against the use of substances (alcohol, glim, magical herbs, etc.). They are used for cooking, healing, recreation and magic. How is this system functional, and what reasons might there be to regulate it? Does the answer to this question change when substances can be concentrated and intensified, as magiels do in Shangril, and as chemists do in our world?