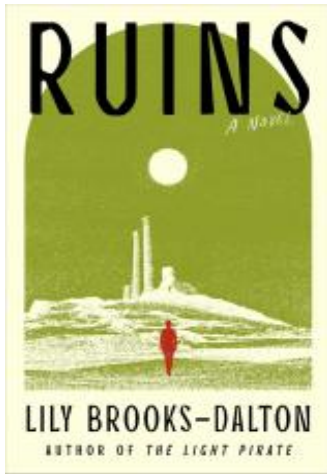


Ruins

by Lily Brooks-Dalton



About the Book

From the critically acclaimed, bestselling author of *THE LIGHT PIRATE* comes a powerful, deeply resonant novel about an ambitious archaeologist in pursuit of a rare artifact from an ancient civilization that would change not only her life but potentially society at large.

Professor Ember Agni is a rising star in archaeology, trying to balance an unfulfilling career in academia and a crumbling marriage, all while pursuing her true passion: unearthing a lost empire that no one else believes existed. Just as she's about to give up on the ambitious expedition she spent a decade trying to fund, a message arrives from overseas. A former student claims to have found something extraordinary --- an artifact that hints at the forgotten world lying beneath history's tidy surface.

With vindication finally within reach, Ember risks everything for the sake of discovery and undertakes an odyssey that will either make her name or ruin her. Driven by unwavering faith in her vision of the past, she challenges the limits of her nation, her colleagues and herself in order to exhume the missing pieces of how humanity began. But as she journeys deep into an untouched wilderness, in dogged pursuit of a dead civilization, she collides with the wreckage of her own life.

On the brink of either discovery or destruction, Ember must choose who she wants to be and to what kind of world she wants to belong.

Discussion Guide

1. How does the idea of 'ruins' permeate the novel --- literally and figuratively?

2. What drives Ember? Where do you think her ambition comes from?
3. Ember's passion for archaeology was born with the realization that "history was both a thing to be found and a thing to be made." How does this belief relate to instances of her being dishonest or unreliable? And how does it relate to the passages of her academic writing on the role of the historic record?
4. How does Commonwealth compare to our society today? How does Ember's hunger for exploration reflect the capitalism and colonialism we are familiar with?
5. Ember has decided she doesn't want to be a mother. "It was as if the fact that she didn't want to try for another child made her a monster." As if her resistance to the idea of motherhood was akin to dysfunction? Does this condemnation of women who choose not to have children feel familiar in our own culture?
6. How might have Ember's childhood and her relationship with her own mother affected her relentless prioritization of work over marriage/family?
7. What do the excerpts of Ish's writing reveal about his character, health and obsession with Ember? How do they reflect on Ember's own obsessions?
8. The archaeologists' mission is to unearth as much as they can about what pre-Crisis civilization looked like. What present-day artifacts would reveal the most about your life, identity and community if they were unearthed thousands of years from now?
9. When Cami falls and inadvertently finds the underground cavern, there is debate among the archaeologists over what it could be: a sewer, a crypt, an aqueduct, human transportation. What do you think it is?
10. At the end of the book, Ember surveys the dying embers of the archaeologists' fire. What did this scene mean to you?
11. How did you think about the three sections of the book: Artifacts, Structures and Formations? What were these archaeological concepts revealing about the themes of the book?
12. Time seems to move differently in each of the three sections. What is the duration of each chapter, and how do these units of time change over the course of the book? What is the effect on the reader?

Author Bio

Lily Brooks-Dalton is the author of the national bestseller *THE LIGHT PIRATE*, which was the runner-up for the Dayton Literary Peace Prize, a #1 Indie Next title, and a *New York Times* Editors' Pick. Her previous novel, *GOOD MORNING, MIDNIGHT*, was the inspiration for the film adaptation *The Midnight Sky*, and her memoir, *MOTORCYCLES I'VE LOVED*, was a finalist for the Oregon Book Award. Her work has been translated into 20 languages, and she is a recipient of the PEN America L'Engle/Rahman Prize for mentorship. Her latest novel is *RUINS*.

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