

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

*The Wild Beasts of Wuhan* by Ian Hamilton

1. Do you agree with the statement “beneath the suave veneer of most art agents is a twisted, demented soul willing to sell his crippled mother into whoredom if the price is right”? Why or why not?
2. Rice says “My predecessors always believed that sustaining the credibility of the firm was our primary goal. Without trust, we have nothing. So if from time to time they needed to shade the truth for the sake of the greater good, they were prepared to do that.” How has Rice redefined “the greater good”?
3. Ava loves the British TV show *Prime Suspect* and “identified with Helen Mirren’s character. It wasn’t Jane Tennison’s persistence, smarts, indifference to chauvinism, or toughness that appealed to Ava’s sense of herself; it was the fact that no matter how many people were around, Tennison was essentially alone — and she was okay with being alone.” What does this observation say about Ava’s own relationships, personal life, or choice of career?
4. By Chapter 29 of the novel, Ava has a solution in place. With another seven chapters to go, what did you expect might still go wrong, at this point?
5. Ava cried three or four times during the Gong Li film *To Live* but not, apparently, after the executions of Edwin Hughes, Lisa, and their customer. The executions fit into a complex web of betrayal that pervades the story. What was the first betrayal? What was the worst betrayal?
6. What does trust mean in the context of Ava’s work? What does it mean in the context of the art business?

7. After the murders, why does Ava ask May Ling for their regular thirty percent commission rather than the twenty percent commission they had agreed to?
8. Considering May Ling, Nancy, Helga, and Ava herself, what kind of power do women wield in Hamilton's novels? What are the limits to their power?
9. Ava describes Glen Hughes as having "dead" eyes, "not so open, not in the least curious" like his brother's. How do you think Glen became this way?
10. How can Ava justify getting involved "in a fraud, even if to correct the first fraud"?
11. The only people that Ava physically hurts in this novel are the Russian sailors who try to assault her. Why doesn't Ava want an apology from them?
12. Uncle hints to Ava that he may be retiring from their business soon and says that May Ling would make a good replacement for him because of her *guanxi*. What does *guanxi* mean? Is Ava developing her own *guanxi*?