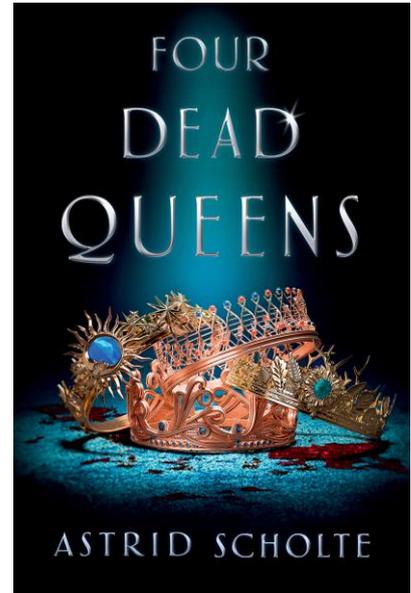


Four Dead Queens

By Astrid Scholte

March 2019 ISBN 9781760524418
Paperback – 432 pages
Recommended for 13-18-year-olds



Summary

Four Queens. A divided nation. A ruthless pickpocket. A noble messenger. And the murders that unite them.

Seventeen-year-old Keralie Corrington is one of Quadara's most skilled thieves, but when she steals an unexpectedly valuable package from a messenger she is soon entangled in a conspiracy that leads to all four of Quadara's queens being murdered.

With no other choices and on the run from her former employer, Keralie teams up with Varin Bollt, the Eonist messenger she stole from, and together they race to discover who has killed the queens. But when dark secrets threaten their reluctant partnership and put everything at stake, Keralie and Varin must use all their daring to stay alive and untangle the mysteries behind the nation's four dead queens.

Four Dead Queens is written for anyone who likes fast-paced, thrilling mysteries where the plot takes them on twists and turns, and keeps them guessing up until the very end. It's written in the tradition of escapist blockbuster fiction and deals with issues parallel to our own world. It has a strong female lead character and plenty at stake.

Use in the curriculum

Using *Four Dead Queens* in the classroom or a school reading group could lead to rewarding discussions about politics and political systems; prevention of war; philosophical approaches to life; psychological differences, 'personality types' and 'lifestyle choices'; family issues; segregation of populations to prevent war; mind control; given the final revelations, whether the protagonist is a genuine 'unreliable narrator' and where responsibility for actions begins and ends; medical use of living people and rationing of rare or expensive drugs; freedom and self-determination; hunger for power; the values associated with each of the four worlds in the book and whether, between all four worlds, they accurately reflect the sum of human values and activities.

As an English text, *Four Dead Queens* provides:

- an example of a mystery thriller
- an example of fantasy fiction – but without magic
- an excellent example of world-building
- an excellent example of fast-paced plotting with numerous twists

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- a study of the embedding of clues to a mystery without giving the solution away
- a study of how writing style can convey urgency and action
- a study of shifting points of view and their contribution to the plot and characterisation
- a study of the literary role of 'scapegoat'
- a study of characterisation, in particular the attribution of motivations that drive the plot and the reader's changing perception of particular characters

Themes

- power and wealth
- choice and self-determination
- criminality
- loyalty and betrayal
- manipulation
- moral limits of scientific investigation

Related texts

The Ruined trilogy by Amy Tintera, Bloomsbury Publishing 2012

Red Queen series by Victoria Aveyard, HarperTeen & Orion 2015

Three Dark Crowns by Kendare Blake, HarperTeen & Macmillan Children's Books 2016

The Cruel Prince by Holly Black, Little, Brown Books for Young Readers & Hot Key Books 2018

Six of Crows duology by Leigh Bardugo, Henry Holt and Co. & Orion Children's Books 2015

Throne of Glass by Sarah J Maas, Bloomsbury Children's Books 2012

The Priory of the Orange Tree by Samantha Shannon, Bloomsbury Publishing 2019

Author's inspiration

'The inspiration for *Four Dead Queens* actually came in a dream. I was sitting in an 18th century carriage when a futuristic silver car drove by the window. When I woke up, I wondered in what kind of world such different technologies would coexist.

'I also had an image in my head of four queens sitting in a circle, back-to-back, discussing a murder. I wanted to explore the idea of four collaborative rulers of one nation, and how that would affect the government, the people, and the queens themselves.

'I'm a pantsner, which means I write by the seat of my pants and don't outline or plan my books. That meant that I didn't know who the murderer was until around the mid-point of the first draft. This allowed me to uncover the mystery as the reader would. I then went back and placed the hints so that after the reveal, the reader could re-read to see the clues were there for them to find.

'My background in film, visual effects and animation has shaped the way I tell stories, and I aim to capture the story as it appears like a movie in my mind. I want the reader to feel as though they are along for the ride and as immersed as possible.



— Astrid Scholte



Discussion questions

1. *Do you think people can change?’ I asked. ‘Or do you think we’re destined to follow a certain path?’* (p. 321).
 - Map how Keralie’s character changes over the course of the novel.
 - What are some of the key events that cause her to change from self-centred thief to someone who risks her life for others?
 - Do you think the Keralie who appears in the early parts of the novel shares any character traits with Arebella? Might they be two sides of the same coin?
2. Retell the story from Mackiel’s point-of-view. In your retelling make sure you describe what has happened in your childhood to make you seek power and how you really feel about Keralie and Arebella.
3. Read the opening section of Chapter Six and discuss the literary techniques used to intensify the drama of the scene. [*Hint: discuss the impact of short, sharp sentences, vocabulary, alliteration, italics and similes*].
4. Why do you think the author decided to use first person narration for Keralie’s part of the story but third person narration for all other characters? Might this have something to do with the major ‘plot twist’ revealed towards the end of the novel? Explain.
5. Astrid Scholte says that she didn’t know who the murderer was until the mid-point of the first draft. ‘This allowed me to uncover the mystery as the reader would. I then went back and placed the hints so that after the reveal, the reader could re-read to see the clues were there for them to find.’ How many ‘hints’ can you find in the novel?
6. Classroom discussion:
 - a. Which of the four quadrants would you choose to live in and why?

OR

- b. Does Quadara’s political system always serve the best interests of its citizens? Give examples from the book where citizens benefit and examples where they do not.
7. The publishers of *Four Dead Queens* describe it as a high fantasy novel. Find a definition of this genre and give examples of characters, settings and events in the novel that prove or disprove this definition.
 8. After reading *Four Dead Queens* turn to the cover of the novel.
 - Consider the title and cover design. Why do you think the designer and publisher decided to use that particular mix of font, colour, composition and framing? What mood is evoked by the cover and is this an appropriate mood for the novel that follows?
 - Devise an alternate title for the novel and design a new cover.

The author

Raised on a diet of Spielberg, Lucas and Disney, Astrid knew she wanted to be surrounded by all things fantastical from a young age. She's spent the last ten years working in film, animation and television as both an artist and manager. Career highlights include working on James Cameron's *Avatar*, Steven Spielberg's *The Adventures of Tintin* and *Happy Feet 2* by George Miller. She's a visual writer and aims to capture the vivid stories that play like movies in her head. When she's not writing, she's painting her favourite fictional characters and obliging her furry overlords, Lilo and Mickey. She lives in Melbourne.