

The Vanishing Deep

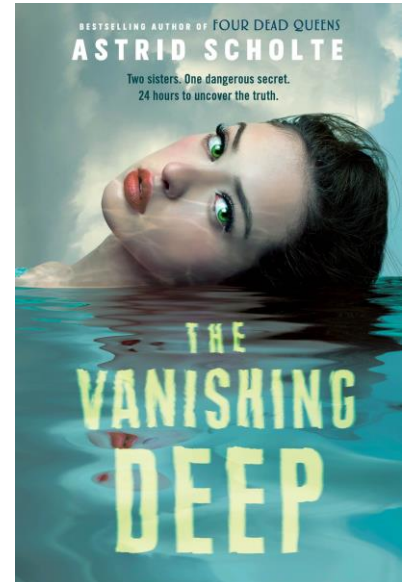
By Astrid Scholte

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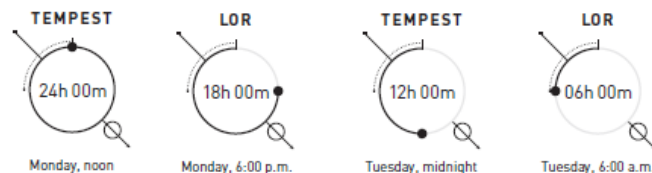
Recommended for 13 years and over



Summary

Seventeen-year-old Tempest, known as Tempe, was born into a world of water. When the Great Waves destroyed her planet five hundred years ago, its people had to learn to survive living on the water, but the ruins of the cities below still called. Tempe dives daily, scavenging the ruins of a bygone era, searching for anything of value to trade for Notes. It isn't food or clothing that she wants to buy, but her dead sister's life. For a price, the research facility on the island of Palindromena will revive the dearly departed for twenty-four hours before returning them to death. It isn't a heartfelt reunion that Tempe is after; she wants answers. Elysea died keeping a terrible secret, one that has ignited an unquenchable fury in Tempe: Her beloved sister was responsible for the death of their parents. Tempe wants to know why.

But once revived, Elysea has other plans. She doesn't want to spend her last day in a cold room atoning for a crime she insists she didn't commit. Elysea wants her freedom and one final glimpse at the life that was stolen from her. She persuades Tempe to break her out of the facility, and they embark on a dangerous journey to discover the truth about their parents' death and mend their broken bond. But they're pursued every step of the way by two Palindromena employees desperate to find them before Elysea's time is up – and before the secret behind the revival process and the true cost of restored life is revealed.



Astrid Scholte is an expert at building suspense and making the reader care about her characters and what will happen to them. One noteworthy technique she uses here is the simple countdown, where chapters open with the hours and minutes left before a major event occurs. Her use of alternating narrators – Tempest and Lor – helps the reader better understand both characters, their motivations and their relationship, as well as the complex and fascinating watery world in which they live. Additionally, her exploration of the ethical dilemmas associated with this world makes *The Vanishing Deep* a distinctly unique and satisfying experience.

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Use in the curriculum

The Vanishing Deep can be read as an exciting adventure by students 13 years and older. As a class text at Year 9 or 10, it would lead to discussions of the environment, technological advances and scientific secrecy. It is suggested that *The Vanishing Deep* be studied:

- As an English text:
 - as an example of Australian speculative fiction;
 - as a basis for a writing exercise in imaginary world-building;
 - as part of a Literature Circle studying genre.
- In Humanities/SOSE/Politics classes as an adjunct to the study of environmental issues, social and economic sustainability, and socio-political organisation.
- In Health classes to discuss the ethics of scientific prolongation of life.

Themes

Fantasy	Mystery	Dystopian futures	Environmental change
Family	Sacrifice	Dealing with grief	Conspiracy 'Playing God'

Discussion questions

Did the first chapter of *The Vanishing Deep* hook you? Were you compelled to move straight to Chapter Two? Analyse your reaction to Chapter One by asking questions such as:

- were you intrigued by the world depicted and how it came to be?
- did you immediately care about the narrator and her motivations?
- did you want to find out more about the mystery of her parent's death?

Now consider elements within the chapter that might have made you react that way. How has the author used setting, dramatic action, narrative voice, conflict and mystery to propel readers into Chapter Two?

POV

Why do you think the author decided to use alternating POV (points-of-view) when telling the story? How might the novel have changed if she had told the story entirely from the one POV of either Tempest or Lor.

“‘We’re here to take away your grief.’ She smiled gently. ‘And one day, I hope to eradicate death altogether, so there will be no more suffering.’” (p. 54)

- Retell Lor's story from Nessandra's POV, detailing the motivations for her research and her feelings for her son before and after his accident on the mountain.

Building Suspense

Why do you think the author chose to begin chapters with a day of the week, time of day, and hours and minutes remaining? How did this technique effect your reading of the novel?

Metaphor

“‘What will happen once nothing remains below?’... ‘We give and get nothing for free.’” (pp. 149-150) Which is the more sustainable economic system – the Equinox or the Island Cavalcade?



In the classroom...

- In what way could these two systems be a metaphor for the state of our contemporary world, the threat of climate change, and a possible solution for the future?

Classroom discussion

Spend a lesson discussing some of the big ethical issues explored in *The Vanishing Deep*:

'Was it easier for death to strike you down without warning. Or was it better to know when death would strike, so you could use your last hours, months, years, to be with the people you cared about?' (p. 142)

- If it were possible to bring someone back to life for 24 hours would you choose to?
- What would you want to do if you were revived and knew that you had only 24 hours?

'It wasn't easy to let the people you love go. It wasn't easy to face grief.' (p. 394)

- If you knew someone needed to die to bring a loved-one back from death permanently – as Nessandra knew when she brought Lor back and sacrificed Calen – would you still choose to do it?

If you could ask three questions of Nessandra, Elysea or Qera what would they be?

Genre

YA (Young Adult) novels typically feature a character's coming-of-age, explore emotional highs and lows (first love, family and friendship issues) and fundamental themes such as death and good versus evil.

- Do you think *The Vanishing Deep* is a typical YA novel? Give examples of characters, settings and events in the novel to prove your opinion.

'I'd barely known Lor, but I knew, like he had, that we could've meant something to each other. Whether it was fate or luck that had connected us, he was gone. Truly gone.' (pp. 391-392)

- What was your reaction to Lor's death at the end of *The Vanishing Deep*? Would you prefer him to have survived or do you think this was a more satisfying ending?

Visual Literacy

After reading *The Vanishing Deep* turn to the cover of the novel. Consider the title and cover design.

- Why do you think the author chose that particular title for her novel?
- Why did the book's designer and publisher decide to use that mix of font, colour, composition and framing for the cover?
- 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.

Further reading

Four Dead Queens by Astrid Scholte, Allen & Unwin 2019

Margo Lanagan's supreme mastery of imaginary world-building is demonstrated in her short story collection: *Singing My Sister Down and other stories*, Allen & Unwin 2017.

Dystopian adventures set in a near-future:

When We Wake and *While We Run* by Karen Healey, Allen & Unwin 2013 & 2014

Munmun by Jesse Andrews, Allen & Unwin 2018

How to Bee and *The Dog Runner* by Bren MacDibble, Allen & Unwin 2017 & 2019

Author's inspiration

'The initial spark of inspiration actually came from *The Real Housewives of New York City*. The show is a guilty pleasure of mine, and in an episode, one of the housewives mentioned that she wished she had one more day with her late husband. The idea stuck with me and I wrote it in my journal back in 2015. However, it wasn't until early 2017 that I started writing about a facility that could provide the service of reviving your loved one, but only for twenty-four hours. I then started developing the concept of a waterlogged planet that is essentially deceased, as the backdrop for the story.'

— Astrid Scholte

About the author

Raised on a diet of Spielberg, Lucas and Disney, Astrid Scholte 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 lives in Melbourne, Australia, with her fiancé and two cats, Lilo and Mickey. Her debut YA novel, *Four Dead Queens*, is an international bestseller.

You can find Astrid posting about books, cats and Disney on Twitter and Instagram @AstridScholte

