

ALINA BELLCHAMBERS

The ORDER



of MASKS

INFILTRATE. EXPLOIT. DESTROY.

BOOK CLUB NOTES

ABOUT THE BOOK

TREACHERY. LOVE. MAGIC. VENGEANCE.

In the cut-throat Ravalian Court, alliances shift in a heartbeat and seduction is the prelude to murder. Only one thing is certain: not everyone will survive.

Circus performer Mira has spent her life on the run. She is determined to secure her future by competing in the deadly Trials and winning a place in one of the three magical royal Orders.

Princess Scarlett is fighting to withstand her half-brothers' sinister ambitions and seize power. Mira is the opportunity she's been waiting for – a dangerous outsider poised to cleave apart the very foundations of the Court.

As Mira and Scarlett navigate a glittering world of magic, court intrigue and forbidden romances, they must decide if they are co-conspirators or rivals in a bloody bid for the throne. Will they sacrifice everything – even their own lovers – for power and revenge?

'Death wasn't the end. It was just the beginning.'

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alina Bellchambers grew up in her family's bookstore and spent a childhood immersed in fantastical worlds. She now writes romantic fantasies featuring fierce female protagonists, morally grey characters, magic and seductive court politics.

Alina has a degree in psychology and writes on a forty-acre hobby farm in the picturesque Adelaide Hills of South Australia. When not typing in her study and drinking copious amounts of tea, Alina enjoys hiking with her feisty dog, connecting with her local community and travelling abroad.

The Order of Masks is her debut novel.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Caution: spoilers!

1. The world of Ravalia is one of conquest, colonisation, competition and power. How does it compare to other fantasy worlds? How does it compare to the world we live in? What makes it intriguing as a fictional setting?
2. Mira's intrigue with magic, despite her mother's caution, touches on the complexity of free magic and its policing within the empire. How does the portrayal of magic in the story reflect real-world issues of power, control, and societal fears?
3. How does the Ravalian Court adhere to traditional gender roles found in real life royalty and fantasy tradition, and how does the novel subvert this? Which characters are able to find their own path, and how?
4. The Trials are a cut-throat competition for a position in the court and access to magic. What does competing in the Trials show about Mira, Scarlett and Aric's characters? What makes stories about competition (such as *The Hunger Games*) so compelling?
5. Of the three Orders – Warriors, Artisans and Masks – which did you find the most interesting? Which has the most power? How does Zandri's role as founder and keeper of the blood rubies affect your understanding of the Orders?
6. Mira shifts between multiple roles, from circus performer to princess, Kalurian to Ravalian, Warrior to Mask. How does she handle her multiple identities in this book? Can she ever be 'herself'?
7. How does the novel portray Mira's quest for vengeance? What do you think is her primary motivation, and how does her relationship to vengeance change over the course of the story?
8. What do you think Scarlett was like before her death in the icy lake at the start of the novel? How does her new death magic transform or amplify her view of the world?
9. Scarlett is motivated primarily by a desire for freedom and control over her own life. Does this excuse her use of deception and violence to achieve her aims? Does she have any other choices?
10. Are any of the characters fully 'good' or 'bad'? Consider people at the Ravalian Court, as well as the Resistance. How does the novel depict the nuances of morality?
11. Family bonds are shown as being full of secrets, treachery and manipulation. Consider the lies between Mira and Celeste, or Scarlett's relationship with everyone in her family. Are there any positive family relationships in this story? Which resonated with you?
12. As family and as women disempowered by the court, Scarlett and Mira could have been true allies, but by the end of the book, they are very much enemies. What do you think prevented them from working together? How would it have changed the story? Do you think there is any chance they could work together in the future?

13. What does Mira see in both Cassius and Aric, as romantic and sexual partners? Who do you think is better suited to her? How do you see Mira's relationship with romance and intimacy?
14. At the end of the book, Aric transforms from Mira's love interest into Scarlett's right hand. Do you think Aric has truly let go of his feelings for Mira? What do you think he feels for Scarlett, especially after she brings his sister, Lillian, back from the dead?
15. Scarlett questions her ability to care, even for Severin. Do you think Scarlett is truly uncaring? Did she ever love Severin? If not, why was she with him?
16. Severin ultimately kills himself instead of letting Zandri kill him, hoping that this will break Scarlett's alliance with her mother. Do you think Severin really understands Scarlett? What do you think Scarlett would do with this information?
17. What is the significance of masks in this story, both literally and figuratively? Which characters used masks most effectively, or were unmasked by the events of the story?
18. How did having two narrators/main characters affect your experience as a reader? Were you equally interested in both Mira and Scarlett's stories, and why/why not?
19. How does the suspense built by secrets affect the reader's anticipation and engagement with the story? Which twists did you see coming, and which surprised you?
20. What do you think of Mira and Scarlett's endings in this book? What questions do you have for the sequel? How would you like to see Mira and Scarlett's characters develop?
21. The blurb for this book starts with: TREACHERY. LOVE. MAGIC. VENGEANCE. Do you think these words capture the essence of the story? If not, which four words would you use?