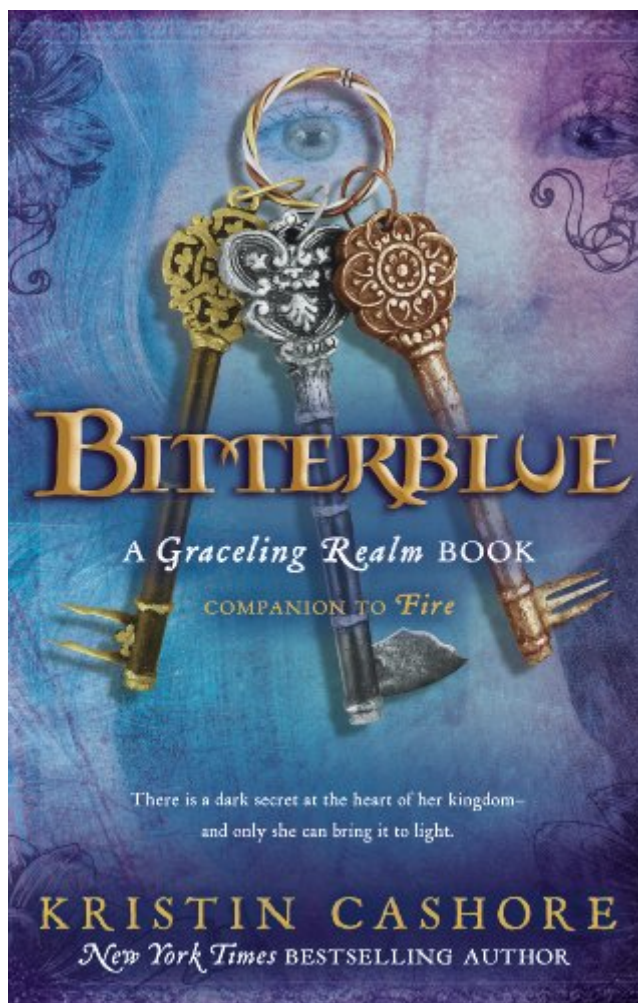


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Bitterblue (Graceling Realm Book 3)



Synopsis

Enter the Graceling Realm and let it work its magic in this unforgettable novel from New York Times bestselling author Kristin Cashore. When Queen Bitterblue took the throne of Monsea, she was a child, and her advisers ran the kingdom for her. Now she is beginning to question their decisions, especially how they handle the legacy of her father Leck, who ruled through his Grace—a special talent for mind-altering—and his taste for darkness and violence. Bitterblue needs to know Monsea's past to lead it into the future, so she begins exploring the city streets at night, disguised and alone. As she does, she meets two thieves, who hold a key to the truth of Leck's reign. And one of them, with a Grace that he hasn't yet identified, holds a key to her heart. Bitterblue is a gateway to the Graceling Realm that braids together magic, memory, and romance. Look for Kristin Cashore's highly-anticipated standalone novel, *A Jane, Unlimited*, coming out September 2017!

"Some authors can tell a good story; some can write well. Cashore is one of the rare novelists who do both. Thrillingly imagined and beautifully executed, *Bitterblue* stands as a splendid contribution in a long literary tradition." —The New York Times Book Review on *Bitterblue*

"Brilliantly detailed and brimming with vibrant and dynamic characters." —SLJ, starred review of *Bitterblue*

"There are some books that stick with you for years, and Kristen Cashore's *Fire* is one of them. Thoughtful, steamy and completely original, *Fire* is YA fantasy at its absolute best." —Sabaah Tahir, author of *New York Times* bestselling *Ember in the Ashes* on *Fire* A New York Times bestseller ALA Best Fiction for Young Adults A Publishers Weekly Best Book of the Year A Kirkus Reviews Best Book of the Year A BCCB Blue Ribbon Title

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Customer Reviews

It was nice being back in this world. This world is so rich and well developed and it's just high fantasy at its finest. I loved how this one brought together things from both Graceling and Fire and tied it all up. It may seem obvious, but Bitterblue was the star of the show. It was so wonderful watching her grow into a strong and wonderful queen. She was thrust into this role as a child and now it's time for her to truly step up and help heal the kingdom from the horrors Leck committed. I loved how strong Bitterblue became and that she was fierce and capable and smart. I of course also loved Saf. It's hard to not love Saf. He is impulsive and reckless, but he is also strong and brave and fiercely loyal. I think my favorite characters through were of course Po and Katsa. I just loved seeing them again. Graceling is forever my favorite of the series and that is really because of those two. Watching them together after so long just made my heart swell and my feels were in full fangirl mode. We especially get a lot of Po and it was wonderful. I remember loving Po, but it's been a few years since I've read Graceling and I had forgotten just how much I love him and how wonderful he is. As with any Cashore book, Bitterblue had a bunch of moving pieces and layers to the story and that is really what makes her books so great. I loved putting all the pieces together with Bitterblue and I was caught off guard quite a few times. All in all, I'm really glad I finally made time to finish off this series. Bitterblue was a great read and a great way to see some old friends again.

This is the best YA fantasy I've ever read about the Rwandan genocide. It's a story about Queen Bitterblue, who came abruptly to her throne at age 10. She is now 18 and still trying to deal with the toxic fallout of her father's reign. Her father Leck was a twisted, evil, sociopath who could literally convince anyone of anything. That pain was pleasure. That love was pity. Anything, and he used

this power to try to rebuild his fantasy world, without, of course, counting the cost to anyone. Hundreds died. Her advisors have convinced Bitterblue that the only way for the kingdom to get past this horror is to issue a blanket amnesty for everything that happened in Leck's time, and try to forget it, as a country. The problem is that the country can't forget, and the people who committed atrocities are terrified that the information will come out, and the people who were victims can't just get over it without acknowledgement. Bitterblue is helped by more experienced characters from the previous books, but mostly, she is successful because of her dogged determination to do the right thing, and her skills at making friends. She has a whopping case of imposter syndrome, which is understandable. "They understood the world and how to mold it. If she could keep them near, one day she'd wake up and discover that she'd become strong that way too." A budding monarch could do worse. She is forced to understand that the damage done to the country and the people can't be ignored out of existence, and the most important person in the kingdom may be the librarian. Eventually, through heartbreak and peril, she emerges with a new understanding of her own privilege and the perils of being isolated from many viewpoints. In the end, she decides that education and knowledge preservation are important, and then she founds the first royal institute of peace and reconciliation. That's not quite what it's called, but the concept is the same. It's hard to work together as a country if no one has ever acknowledged that they were the perpetrators and/or the victims. I think about Rwanda, and Serbia, and South Africa, and I think about how Leck could make good people do terrible things. I think about the way so few genocidal outbursts involve people making a deliberate decision to massacre their neighbors, but something flips in their mind and a voice comes on the radio and it's all machetes and fear and death. My favorite quote from this book: "Bacon improved things dramatically." Because no matter how terrible your night has been, the addition of calories and protein will probably help you deal with it. My favorite Grace is the ability to direct someone else's dreams. Read if: You are interested in the aftermath of bad government, you love ciphers and hidden languages and spunky queens. Skip if: You are looking for something totally escapist. You have issues with people not taking responsibility for your actions. You can't read about past torture.

After reading the negative reviews on this novel, I wanted to set the record straight for those considering reading it. First and foremost, this is Kristin Cashore's third novel, an extension of the stories begun in *Graceling* and *Fire*. These books tell the stories of two wildly different young women: Katsa, a Graced killer, and Fire, a beautiful human Monster. Each of these first two books differs greatly in tone, since *Fire* is a much more fragile girl than Katsa, who is wildly independent

and self-sufficient. Bitterblue is named for the main character, Queen Bitterblue, who is yet another unique heroine. The books do not need to be read in order for readers to enjoy the stories, though this order does present some unique insights into the development of Leck's character. Fans of Cashore's work (myself included) have been anticipating Bitterblue for a couple of years now, and I think that many readers, especially teens, were expecting Bitterblue to be as action-packed as the first two novels. These readers may find themselves disappointed, as this is the tale of a queen who (mostly) plays it safe, remains within her city, and has no special talent for fighting or mind control. Aside from having been born queen, Bitterblue is a normal human being, which is actually rather refreshing, since readers are not Gracelings or Monsters themselves. It gives us an idea of what it feels like to muddle through the Seven Kingdoms world without special, inborn talents. Though this change of character yields very different results from her first two books, it demonstrates Cashore's stylistic nimbleness and prevents her from following the same formulaic, cookie-cutter structures as other authors. I think that many of the people who dislike this book do so because they anticipated a series like *The Hunger Games* or *Harry Potter*, in which the story is one continuous arc unified by a single main character. This is not Cashore's yarn and I, for one, love her for it. On the other hand, one way in which all three characters are similar is their sexual freedom, which is refreshing and necessary for young women to see and understand. As a twenty-something woman who has spent her fair share of time feeling that sexuality was for boys only, I can honestly say that the care with which Cashore treats the topic of young feminine sexuality is careful, honest, and liberating. Very few YA authors allow female characters to actively participate in their own sexuality, which is too bad. In our post-feminist age, the repression of women's sexuality serves as a patriarchal yoke under which women still struggle despite our supposedly liberated status. All of Cashore's heroines make active choices with regards to romantic companionship; both Fire and Katsa are presented with young men whom they could marry who are acceptable candidates in that they are rich, handsome, and friends, but the chemistry just isn't right, and so each young woman walks away. Meanwhile, Katsa, Fire, and Bitterblue all pursue matches who are men they truly respect and with whom they feel a compatibility of spirit, regardless of rank and convenience. Furthermore, marriage is not pressed as a required state for feminine sexuality to take place, but is offered as a possible state of being for couples who feel comfortable with that level of commitment. I know that this take on marriage and sexuality will be bothersome to some readers, but I feel that this is a conversation that in our *Twilight*-obsessed world is too often overlooked, to the detriment of young women the world over. The other reason why I loved Bitterblue was because it is a mind-bender. It's like reading a *Sherlock Holmes* novel in some ways, because little hints and clues from the very first chapter

carry over throughout the remainder of the novel. Bitterblue faces betrayal in the present and specters of her family's past, and Cashore does not shy away from these touchy subjects, even though it would certainly have been easy to do so. Yes, there are certainly moments in the novel which most readers will find uncomfortable, but Cashore is willing to take her readers into the dark recesses of the human spirit in order to shed light and prove that tragic histories are not prophecies of future doom. I think that many teens with troubled pasts will find Bitterblue's struggles validating and reassuring because the novel promises that there can be peace after terror. Overall, Cashore is an author of incredible dexterity. Her work reminds me of Tamora Pierce's writing in many ways (an author she herself claims as a source of great inspiration), and I anticipate only great things from her in the future, whatever characters and universes she chooses to bring to life.

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