

The Scorpio Races

Stiefvater, Maggie

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If I were to create a sensory thumbprint for Maggie Stiefvater's YA fantasy *The Scorpio Races*, I would blend together saltwater from a storming ocean, sand eroded from foaming shorelines, a buttery slice of cake, and farm grasses blowing in the rain. These items may sound like things one would find in a quaint cottage or whimsical bookstore, not in an action-packed teen novel. Yet, readers expecting the non-stop action and heroics of Katniss Everdeen will not be disappointed when cracking open this charming and surprisingly nuanced fable. While violence, gore, and foul language can be found, the story at heart is soft and melancholic. As readers of Stiefvater's other young adult series-the YA werewolf romance *Shiver* and Welsh mythology inspired supernatural mystery series *The Raven Boys*-will know, her books tend to be centered around characters and their lives. Fantasy and action instead take the backdrop to raw emotions, relationships, and familial drama.

The Scorpio Races is no exception. The premise is tantalizing: on a mysterious island, located off the coast of some unspecified country, horses emerge from the sea. These are not friendly fillies; they have dagger-sharp teeth and a thirst for saltwater and human flesh. Most residents are terrified of the water horses. However, community daredevils and tourists from around the world rally together every November for a grand and brutal event. *The Scorpio Races* are a death match on these lethal horses. The casualties are high for the bloody race, but

the prizes are enormous. The story centers around the enigmatic Puck Connelly, a tomboyish farm girl who loves to ride her horse Dove and bake apple cakes for her brothers. After her parents were tragically killed by a water horse years prior, she and her siblings have fallen on tough times. To prevent her family from being evicted, Puck must enter the races. The one obstacle? She is the first female to ride in the Scorpio Races...and she refuses to ride a water horse. Instead, Puck saddles up Dove to race against beasts that will be thirsting for both her and her ride.

But Puck is not alone in her determination for victory. Sean Kendrick, another orphan, is the island's residing champion. He tends to the water horses at a local stable, but hopes to someday leave and be free to ride his beloved horse Corr. Sean and Puck are both peculiar spirits, separate from their communities and tied together by their longing for a better future. For Puck, that is safety for her family. For Sean, that is a chance to be independent. The chemistry between these two is slow to burn, but readers will not deny the attraction blooming between lost souls. However, romance is not at the forefront of the story. Neither are the races, which only claim a few chapters at the very end of the novel. Rather, the story is about having dreams and desiring something greater, while also clinging to bittersweet memories. It is about the kinship formed between individuals, and the tribulations that interfere with their journey for happiness.

If you are looking for a story that will at once challenge you and engross you, pull on your heartstrings and stimulate your mind, this book might just be your cup of tea. I would recommend *The Scorpio Races* for middle schoolers who have grown tired of superficial characterization and would like to read a book that will offer them something deeper. Warning for prospective readers: this book starts out slow. But it is worth the wait. Like stepping your

foot into cold water, you must first take time to adjust before fully sinking into the atmosphere.

But once submerged, your patience will surely be rewarded.

Book Recommendations

1. *The Raven Boys* by Maggie Stiefvater

2. *Shiver* by Maggie Stiefvater

3. *Daughter of Smoke and Bone* by Laini Taylor

4. *The Grisha* by Leigh Bardugo

5. *And I Darken* by Kiersten White