



The King's Intelligencer
by
Elizabeth St. John

Reader's Guide

The King's Intelligencer is a gripping historical novel set in 17th-century England, delving into espionage, political intrigue, and the secrets that shape nations. The story follows Franny Apsley, daughter of Allen and Frances Apsley, as she navigates the dangerous world of secret intelligence work for King Charles II and the Duke of York. In the wake of the discovery of the bones of the missing princes in the Tower of London, Franny embarks on a quest to uncover a truth that could change the fate of the nation.

Discussion Points

1. **Franny Apsley as a Protagonist:** Franny is a strong and complex character who becomes deeply involved in secret intelligence work. How does she balance her personal beliefs with her duty to the crown? How does her role challenge the traditional expectations of women in the 17th century?
2. **The Historical Context:** The novel is set during the Restoration period, a time marked by political tensions and intrigue. How does Elizabeth St. John weave historical events into the story, and how do these events shape the characters' decisions? Which historical aspects stood out to you most?
3. **Espionage and Secrecy:** Espionage plays a central role in the plot. How does the theme of secrecy shape the relationships between the characters, especially between Franny and those she works with in intelligence? How does this secrecy impact trust and loyalty?
4. **The Discovery of the Princes' Bones:** The discovery of the bones of the missing princes in the Tower of London becomes a pivotal moment in the story. How does this event drive the plot forward, and what are the implications for Franny and her family? How does the mystery of the princes' fate connect to the broader political situation in England at the time?
5. **Family and Loyalty:** Franny's loyalty to her family is a recurring theme throughout the novel. How does her relationship with her parents, particularly her father, shape her? What role does family loyalty play in the decisions she makes, and how does it conflict with her role as an intelligencer?
6. **Political Marriage and Power:** The novel includes several political marriage negotiations for Mary Stuart. How do these negotiations reflect the power dynamics at court and the personal sacrifices made for the sake of politics? What does this reveal about the intersection of personal desires and political duty?

7. **The Role of Women in the Story:** In a time when women had little power, how do the women in *The King's Intelligencer* navigate their world? Which female characters made the most impact on you, and how do they challenge or reinforce the expectations of women in this historical period?
 8. **Moral Dilemmas:** Throughout the novel, Franny faces moral dilemmas as she uncovers secrets that could threaten her family and the throne. How does she reconcile her own values with the demands of her intelligence work? Are there moments where you questioned the choices made by the characters?
 9. **Franny's Character Arc:** How does Franny evolve throughout the story? Do you think she achieves her goals, and if so, at what cost? What lessons can readers learn from her journey?
 10. **The Impact of Historical Fiction:** How does *The King's Intelligencer* deepen your understanding of the Restoration period? What did you learn about the politics, espionage, and social dynamics of the time? How does Elizabeth St. John use historical events and figures to craft her narrative?
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Themes to Explore

- **Espionage and Political Intrigue:** Delve into the covert world of 17th-century intelligence and how espionage influenced the course of history.
 - **Loyalty and Betrayal:** Examine the complex relationships between family, country, and duty.
 - **Power and Gender:** Understand the challenges and power dynamics that women face in a patriarchal society, especially in a time of political unrest.
 - **Historical Revisionism:** Explore how history is written and the role that uncovering hidden truths plays in shaping national identity.
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Final Thoughts

The King's Intelligencer is a thrilling historical novel filled with suspense, mystery, and rich historical detail. Franny Apsley's journey offers insight into the complexities of loyalty, duty, and the hidden world of political intrigue. Although St. John's novel is based in the 17th-century and draws heavily on her own genealogy and historical materials, consider how this story reflects the complexities of the time it portrays and the timeless nature of secrets, loyalty, and political power which still reverberate in today's world.