



# THE DEVIL'S QUEEN

by Jeanne Kalogridis

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## *A Conversation with Jeanne Kalogridis*

**Could you tell us a little bit about your background, and when you decided that you wanted to lead a literary life?**

I was a shy, scrawny, unpopular kid with frizzy hair and thick glasses; since I had no social life, I read. I adored dark fantasy and science fiction, and I was writing my own stories as soon as I could hold a pencil. My mom and sisters were always dragging me to the mall on weekends, so while they shopped, I hung in the local bookstore. I think the defining moment for me came when I picked up a copy of Ray Bradbury's *The Illustrated Man* in a Waldenbooks. His writing was so beautiful, so lyrical... I decided then I wanted to write like that.

*"I was writing my own stories as soon as I could hold a pencil."*

**Is there a book that most influenced your life? Or inspired you to become a writer?**

*The Illustrated Man*, by Ray Bradbury. And his *Martian Chronicles*. When I worked on my first novel, I bought new copies of those two books and consciously tried to imitate his style.

**Who are some of your favorite authors?**

Angela Carter, Margaret Atwood, and Dan Simmons (especially *The Terror* and *Drood*, both historical novels).

**Who are some of your favorite historical figures?**

My namesake, Joan (in French, Jeanne) of Arc—yes, she was deluded, but she kicked butt and made a man a king. I read a lot of biographies of strong women when I was growing up; I admired Marie Curie, Elizabeth Blackwell (first female M.D. in the United States), Elizabeth I, Boudicca (who gave the Imperial Roman army a run for its money), Jane Addams, and Susan B. Anthony.



There are, of course, fascinating men. I always adored Leonardo because he was passionately interested in *everything* and pursued knowledge without the encumbrance of a formal education. Vlad the Impaler is another favorite of mine, for much grislier reasons, as is Cesare Borgia.

**You have already authored two historical novels about Renaissance Italy, *The Borgia Bride* and *I, Mona Lisa*. What was the inspiration for *The Devil's Queen*?**

While writing *I, Mona Lisa*, I learned a lot about the Medici of Florence. The more I read about Lorenzo's great-granddaughter, the notorious French queen Catherine de' Medici, the more she fascinated me.

**Do you scrupulously adhere to historical fact in your novels, or do you take liberties if the story can benefit from the change? And to what extent did you stick to the facts in writing *The Devil's Queen*? How did you conduct your research?**

I'll answer the last question first: I rely on documented online sources, books, and experts. (I scour the Internet, dusty used bookstores, and libraries for rare/out-of-print books.)

To answer the first and second questions: I do my utmost to adhere strictly to recorded fact, but in the case of Catherine's long, eventful life, I realized that I would need to write four books instead of one to cover everything! Clearly, the story needed to be condensed—but I didn't do so by changing any events. Instead, I chose to omit some facts—such as the fact that Catherine actually had ten children rather than the five who appear in the novel. I chose the children who actually had the most impact on history and their mother's life... and thus, the story. Otherwise, the plot would have lost its pacing and dramatic focus.

## About the Author

*“[Catherine]  
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**What is it about Catherine that you hoped to reveal to your readers?**

Historians have accused her of being one of the most malevolent monarchs to sit on a throne—which was far from true. She was, in fact, one of the most insightful and intelligent rulers in history. I wanted to show how her horrific childhood and ensuing need for security and love resulted, ultimately, in the circumstances that gave rise to the tragic St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre.

**Are you currently working on another book? And if so, what—or who—is your subject?**

Always! I’m writing about another Italian Catherine. Caterina Sforza (1463–1509) was the daughter of the Duke of Milan. Although she was pampered and indulged as a child, she grew up to become one of the most famed Renaissance warriors of all time. She (almost) single-handedly managed to hold off Cesare Borgia’s massive army for months; her bravery and her refusal to behave “as a woman of her time ought” were amazing. She’s still famed in Italy for her daring exploits and lifestyle.

**Much of the plot of *The Devil’s Queen* revolves around astrology and Catherine de’ Medici’s birth chart or natal horoscope, as well as those of her family members. How much of this was historically accurate? How did you do your research?**

I’ve collected books about Renaissance magic for twenty-five years, so this was an area already familiar to me. But to do Catherine and the novel justice, I brushed up on Renaissance astrological magic by taking a course in the subject and reading the same authors Catherine would have studied in her day. None of the spells, astrological charts, or references to stars came from my imagination; they were the result of careful research.

I hired two different astrologers to cast the charts of Catherine and her sons, so with luck, they’re completely



accurate. (I also cast them myself using my computer—I'm definitely not the math whiz Catherine was!)

**It has been said that Catherine's natal horoscope was one of the worst anyone could possibly have. Can you explain why?**

When the first astrologer I visited cast Catherine's chart, he actually gasped aloud in horror. Just for fun, I'd told him only that the subject was a long-dead queen who was the heroine of my novel. He told me she had a Grand Cross—four planets aligned at ninety degree intervals from each other, so if you connected them with a pencil line, you'd draw a square-armed cross.

Trust me, you don't want a Grand Cross. You will be up against very, very difficult forces, and have conflict after conflict without being able to resolve it.

The astrologer explained that one planet (Jupiter) represented Catherine, and the others represented three powerful men who thwarted her at every turn. No matter what good she tried to achieve, these three forces undermined her efforts. Tragedy was the inevitable result.

Eerily enough, one of the planets happened to be her husband's astrological "ruler"—and the two others were the rulers of her two malevolent sons, each of whom became king. Catherine was charming, diplomatic, and exceedingly intelligent—far more so than her husband or sons, whose mental and emotional deficiencies vexed her at every turn. I believe their failings, not Catherine's, ultimately led to the massacre; Catherine struggled to right their wrongs and prevent civil war, but she was unable to control the situation.

The astrologer also said—without knowing anything else about Catherine's background—that her chart revealed that she lost her parents in early childhood, and faced a massive catastrophe during her life, as a result of the Grand Cross.

## *About the Author*

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**In your research of the astrological charts of Catherine and her family and the superstitions of the time period, what was the most interesting/surprising/shocking thing you learned?**

Even though I enjoy reading about Renaissance magic and related matters, I’m a skeptic; I approach it the way an anthropologist would approach learning about the magical beliefs of an ancient culture. But I admit, I was shocked when I came across the link between the star Algol and the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre.

Since ancient times, Algol has been associated with the violent shedding of blood on a mass scale; the Chinese called the star “the Heaped-Up Corpses,” and the Arabs called it *al-ghul*, “the demon” star. Renaissance magicians and modern-day astrologers believed it to be the most evil star in the heavens, predicting great catastrophe.

Algol rose and made an extremely bad aspect with the planet Mars (associated with war and bloodshed) less than an hour before the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre began. Catherine surely knew this—she made use of several astrologers, including her favorite, Ruggieri, and always checked their mathematical calculations against hers (which were always right).

To learn more about Catherine's favorite  
black magic spells, dark charms,  
and mysterious incantations, visit  
[www.stmartins.com/thedevilsqueen](http://www.stmartins.com/thedevilsqueen).



Ruth Miller

*About the  
Author*



### **Catherine de' Medici: A Timeline**

- April 13, 1519      Caterina de' Medici is born
- October 28, 1533      Caterina marries Henri
- January 19, 1544      Catherine's first son,  
François, is born
- March 31, 1547      King François I dies; his son,  
Henri, becomes Henri II of France
- June 27, 1550      Charles-Maximilien is born
- September 19, 1551      Edouard-Alexandre is born
- May 14, 1553      Marguerite (Margot) is born
- July 10, 1559      Henri dies; his fifteen year-old son,  
François, becomes François II  
of France
- December 5, 1560      François II dies; his brother,  
Charles, becomes Charles IX  
of France
- August 18, 1572      Catherine's daughter, Margot,  
marries the Huguenot king,  
Henri of Navarre
- August 23, 1572      The St. Bartholomew's Day  
Massacre begins
- May 30, 1574      Charles dies; his brother, Edouard,  
becomes Henri III of France
- January 5, 1589      Catherine dies





## *Recommended Reading*

*Catherine de' Medici:  
Renaissance Queen of France*  
Leonie Frieda

*Renaissance Warrior and Patron:  
The Reign of Francis I*  
R. J. Knecht

*Beneath the Cross:  
Catholics and Huguenots in  
Sixteenth-Century Paris*  
Barbara B. Diefendorf

*Memoirs of Marguerite,  
Queen of Navarre*

Reading  
Group  
Gold



*Keep on  
Reading*



## Reading Group Questions

1. What did you know about Catherine de' Medici—either from your own studies, or as portrayed in popular film/television adaptations—before reading *The Devil's Queen*? How, if at all, did this book teach you about, or change your impression of, this important chapter in French history?
2. What do you see as Catherine's most and least admirable qualities?
3. To what extent do you think Jeanne Kalogridis took artistic liberties with this work? What does it take for a novelist to bring a "real" period to life?
4. Discuss the nature of fact versus fiction in *The Devil's Queen*. You may wish to take this opportunity to compare it with other historical novels you've read (as a group or on your own).
5. Catherine was orphaned at an early age, raised by an unaffectionate aunt, imprisoned for years, and misused by her cousin, Ippolito. What possible impact could such traumatic events have had on a child's character? How do you think they affected Catherine?
6. What made Catherine capable of the ritual murder of an innocent? Was she evil at heart, or was her act understandable, if not justifiable?



7. Wicked, bloodthirsty, scheming...many adjectives have been used by historians to describe Catherine de' Medici's character. What words would you use to describe her?
8. Take a moment to talk about Catherine's roles—as a prisoner, a marriage pawn, a princess, a queen, and later a regent—in Renaissance society. How was Catherine different from other women of her era? Do you think she was a “woman ahead of her time”?
9. As an astrologer and practitioner of magic, Catherine believed in fate. Do you believe that she could have taken a different course of action to avoid the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre, or was it inevitable? If not, what steps could she have taken to stop it?
10. Why do modern readers enjoy novels about the past? How and when can a powerful piece of fiction be a history lesson in itself?
11. We are taught, as young readers, that every story has a moral. Is there a moral to *The Devil's Queen*? What can we learn about our world—and ourselves—from Catherine's story?

*Keep on  
Reading*