



## Rituals of the Dead

*Jennifer S. Alderson*

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**Rituals of the Dead** Jennifer S. Alderson

**Art, religion, and anthropology collide in Alderson's latest art mystery thriller, *Rituals of the Dead*, Book three of the *Adventures of Zelda Richardson* series.**

Art history student Zelda Richardson is working at the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam on an exhibition of bis poles from the Asmat region of Papua – the same area where a famous American anthropologist disappeared in 1962. When his journal is found inside one of the bis poles, Zelda is tasked with finding out more about the man's last days and his connection to these ritual objects.

Zelda is pulled into a world of shady anthropologists, headhunters, missionaries, art collectors, and smugglers – where the only certainty is that sins of the past are never fully erased.

Join Zelda as she grapples with the anthropologist's mysterious disappearance fifty years earlier, and a present-day murderer who will do anything to prevent her from discovering the truth.

## Rituals of the Dead Details

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Author : Jennifer S. Alderson

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## From Reader Review Rituals of the Dead for online ebook

### **J C Steel says**

Rituals of the Dead is a tense mystery thriller that combines the sedate world of Dutch museums with a decades-old murder on the far side of the world. Zelda Richardson is an American expatriate, working as an intern to support her Master's thesis in Amsterdam, when her research starts dragging up details that don't quite mesh with the official version of events. Her off-books work almost costs her her internship, and that's only the beginning of the trouble. Can Zelda figure out how the facts tie together before the consequences catch up with her?

Author Jennifer S. Alderson has a unique gift for taking a setting that should be incredibly tranquil, and smoothly weaving in the oddities that make her case until the calm of the academic atmosphere is well and truly overturned. Zelda isn't a hardboiled and capable detective; in fact, she's the opposite; timid and willing to allow people to treat her badly in case standing up for herself causes her to lose her position, but driven by curiosity to investigate the threads that don't quite tie in. The world-building in this series is also outstanding, built on detail but without beating the reader over the head with a litany of research. Fans of mystery and crime will definitely enjoy this book.

Reviewed for By Rite of Word.

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### **Elizabeth Lloyd says**

Zelda Richardson is an adventurous heroine who loves to solve mysteries. She needs to succeed in her placement as an intern at the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam but the work involves Asmat Bis poles from Papua New Guinea, totems made for the spirits of the dead, whose evil looking faces seem to be leading her into danger.

Seven crates have been discovered unopened for 50 years in the archive depot of Rotterdam's Wereldmuseum. As Zelda and the more important staff from the museums observe, the crates are unpacked, revealing not just Bis poles, but also human remains of the head-hunting Asmat culture of what was then Dutch New Guinea. But the most intriguing discovery is the leather-bound journal of Nicholas Mayfield, a wealthy American anthropologist who went missing in 1962.

Interspersed with Zelda's transcription of the journal and her investigations, are passages from 1962, where we discover the frustrations and difficulties Nicholas had experienced while trading in Dutch New Guinea, hindered rather than helped by experienced Dutch anthropologist, Albert Schenk. Albert is now Director of the Wereldmuseum and he seems to be a thoroughly unpleasant, arrogant individual.

Soon, Zelda is alarmed when two people close to her are murdered. She continues with her task of transcribing the journal and researching the background of the Bis poles for an imminent exhibition, but she keeps information close to her chest and, at times, is unwise in those she chooses to trust.

This exciting story is also an education about a culture of which I knew very little. The actions of colonial powers, the church and collectors of artefacts is called into questions but there is also our moral dilemma of whether to exhibit treasures from the past or return them to their source. But don't let this put you off; you

will be on the edge of your seat wondering if Zelda will take one risk too many as well as wishing to discover what actually happened to Nicholas Mayfield. A thoroughly good read.

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### **Pamela Allegretto says**

Jennifer Alderson's first-hand experience and meticulous research make this well-written novel a fascinating read. Her attention to detail is bound to captivate anthropology fans. It also poses the moral question as to who owns the rights to ancient artifacts and how they should be treated. The protagonist, Zelda Richardson, is an engaging, ethical researcher that readers will easily applaud. My compliments to Jennifer Alderson for another enjoyable read.

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### **Robbie Cheadle says**

In *Rituals of the Dead*, Zelda Richardson, an American art history student living and working in Amsterdam, is again drawn into a strange mystery. Her accidental involvement in the mystery has the potential to threaten her life and the lives of selected people around her.

Zelda is working as an interim at the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam on an exhibition of bis poles from the Asmat region of Papua. When a number of sealed crates from the early 1960's are discovered and opened in a public forum, the personal diary of Nick Mayfield, a well-known American anthropologist who disappeared at that time, is discovered in one of the crates. The Tropenmuseum decides to photograph the diary before returning it to the Mayfield family. Zelda is tasked with assisting with the photography and also with translating the diary into Dutch.

The reader embarks on an exciting journey with Zelda as she slowly translates the diary and learns Nick's story in the months running up to his disappearance. She becomes embroiled in a ring of criminality from the 1960's that reached between Papua and the Netherlands. Zelda's discoveries are most unexpected and could shake the Amsterdam art world to its core.

I enjoy Jennifer S. Alderson's writing and have read the previous novel in this series. The author has a very good working knowledge of the art world and the value and appeal of various art works. I enjoyed learning about Papua during the 1960's and finding out about the art works created by the Asmat people. The author weaves this interesting information into her story without making it cumbersome and the reader is drawn into Zelda's world in a very realistic and natural way.

I enjoyed learning more about Zelda and seeing how her character developed in this third book in the series. I felt that the author did a good job of showing some growth in her maturity and ability to cope with adverse circumstances.

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### **Lucia Davis says**

Great read! I loved learning about the Asmat culture—the art—and how life was in Papua in the sixties. This time, Zelda gets drawn into the mystery concerning the fate of a young American explorer, who disappeared in that area at that time. Zelda still works in Amsterdam, a city dear to my heart, which for me gave it that

little extra. Very enjoyable and recommended!

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## **ChillwithabookAWARD With says**

Rituals of the Dead by Jennifer S Alderson has received a Chill with a Book Readers' Award.

[www.chillwithabook.com](http://www.chillwithabook.com)

"Very interesting and thought provoking, the author clearly researched as well as using her knowledge of the Asmats and this was evident throughout the book."

Pauline Barclay  
Founder of Chill with a Book Awards

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## **Bobby Underwood says**

The third entry in the museum and artifact-themed Zelda Richardson quasi-cozy mystery series has much to offer those fascinated with other cultures, especially primitive ones. Like Lover's Portrait, the second in the series, there are intermittent flashbacks woven throughout the present day narrative which have a direct correlation to what's happening now. The author has done a good job in making the flashbacks to Nicholas Mayfield's expedition in 1962 as interesting as the present day narrative of Zelda's involvement with an exhibition about the Asmat culture. Because Mayfield disappeared mysteriously, the reader already has one mystery, and more are added when crates stored for decades create more mysteries than they solve.

Bis Poles, old bones that shouldn't be there, a belt buckle and a discovered journal Zelda is charged with transcribing for the Tropenmuseum of Amsterdam are only a few elements of this mystery. The author does a good job of bringing the reader into this world, showing the conflicts between governments and museums in regard to exhibits and ownership of artifacts. She does an even better job of making it all interesting, and flow well. While there is no breathtaking pace, a likable protagonist, and the developing mystery — amidst the museum setting, and in the past — is all entertaining enough and interesting enough to keep the reader turning pages.

Zelda photographs and catalogs items while transcribing a journal they hope will help answer some of the questions surrounding Mayfield's expedition, and his mysterious disappearance. It turns out that someone close to home was part of that expedition, but their reaction to the discoveries are unexpected, creating another mystery. Up to this point, this is definitely cozy mystery country, but then there is a brutal murder, and the journal is gone. The sudden violence, though committed offscreen as befits a cerebral cozy, is very well done, and has an impact for the reader. This is where I had a minor caveat, however.

It's done so well, you expect it to take the story — Zelda — in that direction. Yet, we quickly get back into the day-to-day work on the exhibit, alternating between flashbacks of the ill-fated expedition of young and wealthy Nicholas Mayfield. While that isn't a bad thing, as it's all interesting, the impact of the murder was muted somewhat, the opportunity to ratchet up the tension smothered a bit in the day-to-day goings on for this reader. By the time there is a second murder, it was difficult to recall the first, and recapture the impact. It's a minor caveat, however, since this is an entertaining and interesting read in this genre. It did make the finale a bit flat for me, however, but I suspect those who love the cozy genre will be very pleased.

My only other caveat, has to do with the romantic side of the Zelda Richardson mysteries. In the previous entry, Lover's Portrait, the reader got to know and like Zelda's friend, Friedrich. The narrative very much appeared to be building toward a romance between them. The author went another direction, however, which is fine, and the Friedrich character was relegated to "friend" status. I assumed at the time — and believe I commented about it in my review of Lover's Portrait — that this was probably to keep Zelda free for future books. And that's exactly what I got here with the Jacob character. But...

My first issue was that Friedrich here didn't figure in much, and a few times came off as sort of immature. My second was the blandness of Zelda's relationship with Jacob. When it came up, I actually had to go back to remember who he was in the story. The relationship of Friedrich and Zelda in Lover's Portrait was engaging — even if inevitably disappointing. I felt at the time that it was an opportunity missed, because there was such charm there. Here, I neither liked nor disliked Jacob, and it didn't have the same charm or backstory as the one in Lover's Portrait. Like the climax, it seemed a tad artificial, just a tiny bit perfunctory.

I have to stress these are ticky-tacky caveats, and not ones I'd allow to affect my rating. The audience for this will most likely find it extremely enjoyable. I did as well. I guess what I'm saying, is while I really liked Rituals of the Dead, I liked Lover's Portrait a tad more. Rituals of the Dead is a fine read in the cozy mystery genre. But while it is perhaps more technically polished than the previous entry, I thought Lover's Portrait had a bit more heart. Still, I'm giving this four stars (probably 4.2 for me) because it succeeds as an entertaining read in this genre, and I enjoyed it.

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### **Rosa Fedele says**

Another cracking novel by author Jennifer Alderson. I adored her previous art mystery, The Lover's Portrait, and was once again quickly drawn into the adventures of her naive and slightly off-beat protagonist, Zelda. Again, Alderson has researched her subject thoroughly and the technical descriptions of what actually happens at the Tropenmuseum were quite intriguing. I especially enjoyed the flashbacks to the wilds of Papua in the 60's and learned so much about the Asmat culture - I hadn't even heard of Bis Poles until now! And my macabre side loved the explanations of how exactly to clean flesh off human bones ... something every gal needs to know ;) An excellent read.

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### **Mary Angela says**

If you're looking for a mystery jam-packed with art and history, look no further. History comes alive as Alderson interweaves the past (the disappearance of an archeologist in 1962) with art student Zelda Richardson's present assignment (a museum exhibition of bis poles). Being a lover of history, I enjoyed learning about past and present Dutch history while trying to solve two mysteries. Zelda is a fun and inquisitive sleuth! I look forward to going on more adventures with her.

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### **Jacqueline (Fall In Love With The Sound of Words) says**

This is the third instalment of the Zelda Richardson novel by Jennifer Alderson. Honestly, they just keep getting better! I was so happy to continue with Zelda's story. She is completely relatable and just wanting to graduate her masters program and then work in museum research...clearly that is too much to ask...

Zelda has once again, through no particular fault of her own, become embroiled in another mystery. This time as she is taking notes for the Troppenmuseum's Bis Pole exhibition, a journal belonging to none other than Nick Mayfield, an anthropologist of sorts that went missing decades earlier, is found. As the people around Zelda begin to die and her life is threatened, she must race to solve the mystery before anyone else gets hurt.

I have continued with this series from the very beginning, and it just keeps getting better. Zelda keeps getting stronger as a character. I still feel that she is incredibly relatable in that she isn't infallible. She continuously makes mistakes that she must fix, and I think that this is completely human. She has really done some growing up from her first adventure, she has found her niche. With that said there is still room for her to grow as well, and it is great following along on her journey!

The plot in this one, I have to say isn't my favorite. I enjoyed the mystery in *The Lover's Portrait* much more. I had a little trouble with the 'bad guys' in the end. I was confused by a few incidents that didn't make sense to their characters, but it was also such a minor thing that it was easy to move past it for me. However, the story itself was intriguing. I had never even heard of Bis Poles or the Asmat, so score of Alderson in teaching me something new!

I highly recommend the series starting with '*Down and Out in Kathmandu*'. I will be continuing with Zelda's stories until there isn't any more left. I'm in for long haul. :)

I received this novel from the author in exchange for an honest review. My thoughts are completely my own.

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### **Amy Shannon says**

Magnificent

First, I'm a big fan of Alderson's, and I've read her other books, *The Lover's Portrait: An Art Mystery*, *Down and Out in Kathmandu: Adventures in Backpacking*, and *Notes of a Naive Traveler: Nepal and Thailand*. I was impressed by the first book and continued to love her work. When I heard about this one, *Rituals of the Dead*, I was already excited to read it. Now, with all that said, I need to dive right into this story. Even when I like or love an author's work, I never have any preconceived notions about whether or not I will like the book or not. From chapter one, I was drawn in, very curious about Nick and wondering where he or his life would fall in to the life of Zelda. Alderson is a grand writer, and I like her writing style. Her research and knowledge are shown within the story, and her characters. I like Zelda, and always have, and this book brings more depth to her character, and sets her on a new mystery. I love that she's human, and has to prevent herself from getting sick in the most presence of the most gruesome scenes of death and decay. Look forward to more. Simply magnificent, filled with intrigue and suspense, and a lot of wonder!

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### **Janice Richardson says**

It isn't often one holds their breath while reading. As I finished the last chapter of *Rituals of the Dead*, all I could think was wow. Just wow.

In Book 3 of the Adventures of Zelda Richardson, Zelda is serving her internship at the Tropenmuseum. An

upcoming display of artifacts from New Guinea leads to the discovery of skeletal remains and a diary from a wealthy explorer/collector who disappeared in the 1960's.

History comes alive in this story as Zelda photographs the diary, unearthing a story of murder, greed, missionaries and artifacts. It is not a book one puts down easily. The characters are carefully crafted, engaging you from page one. Alderson takes you from past to present and back again seamlessly as you follow events Zelda has yet to unravel.

Book 2 in the series, *The Lover's Portrait*, an award winning work, was my favourite read of 2017. *Rituals of the Dead* will undoubtedly be my favourite of 2018. It too is destined for well-deserved awards. Alderson's work is entertaining, engaging, and educational, all that a reader could ask and more. Zelda matures and grows with each volume in the series.

It was a privilege to be a beta reader for *Rituals of the Dead*, to be one of the first to read this exciting work.

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### **Jenni says**

Everything I like in a mystery: Compelling characters, international settings, a mystery steeped in culture and history. Immersed in the debate currently taking place in the international art world, the theft of artifacts and demands by indigenous people for their return, the novel presents various sides of these issues for the reader to consider. All in all, this is a very satisfying mystery that left me with much to ruminate on.

I have not read the other books in the series yet. This worked well as a standalone mystery, but I will definitely seek out and read the first two novels in the series.

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### **Dora Ilieva says**

“Rituals of the Dead” was given to me for an advance review and it just blew me away. I’ve read other books by Jennifer S. Alderson and am quite familiar with the quirky naivete of Zelda Richardson, the main character in Jennifer’s thrillers. This book sees Zelda in the centre of an anthropological mystery where her trusting, yet inquisitive nature, which makes her so endearing to the reader, could potentially spell the end of her life. The pace is fast without being hectic; the intrigue unfolds steadily, sustaining the reader’s interest to the very end.

I enjoyed every single line of the book, but my favourite parts were the flashbacks where the author offers a glimpse of a culture that I know very little about. The chapters set in Papua and New Guinea, the insights into the life and rituals of the Asmat people are, in my opinion, priceless.

I recommend the book to everybody who is interested not just in thrillers, but in cultural exploration as well. And if you want to witness the growth of the main character, I recommend that you read “Down and Out in Kathmandu” and “The Lover’s Portrait”.

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### **Christina says**

Interesting mystery crafted well within the plot, with culture and themes running throughout the narrative (and just on the right side of preachy).

Zelda decides to relocate, but she becomes embroiled with a mystery surrounding some artefacts seems to

spill into the present, with a team member being murdered. The questions mount and so does the tension...

The pace was good, the writing tight. The dual timeline, too, was handled well. The art, history, and suspense all blended well within the story, with no single element overcrowding the plot at the heart of the novel. The tension built well, and the ending ... well, I'll take a leaf out of the author's book and build up the suspense... and let you find out for yourself. Recommended

\*Thank you to the author for my free review copy via #RBRT.

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