



# HONOUR AMONG GHOSTS

SEAN WILLIAMS

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**Format:** Paperback

**Recommended for:** 8-12 years

**Themes:** Fantasy, friendship, mystery, magic

**Applicable to learning areas:** English language, literacy and literature, visual literacy

## Summary

When Athelbert Fan is thrown in jail for thievery, his daughter, Penny, is convinced he has been framed. Someone else must have stolen the gold cup from the crabby magistrate's home and put it in with her father's tools. But who could it be? Setting out to prove his innocence, Penny forms an unlikely foursome with the magistrate's son, a young traveller and a magical scribe's apprentice. Soon they discover even more crimes – and it's always the rich being burgled and the poor being blamed. Before long the whole town is in uproar, until a mysterious inspector arrives ... but can he be trusted? It's up to the young quartet to untangle the truth and put things right.

## Author's motivation

'*Her Perilous Mansion* began with a dream and was built out of places I visited in Ireland, while living there in 2018. In 2020, just before the pandemic, I was back in Ireland researching small villages, with a view to writing this "sidequel" to *Her Perilous Mansion*, which hadn't quite come out yet. Instead of a story about kids trapped in a house, I wanted to tell a tale about kids (and a whole village) snowed-in during a series of thefts conducted by ghosts. That is what became *Honour Among Ghosts*.

This element of entrapment is important to these books. Kids (and adults) can feel trapped in the societies around them, to the point where it seems there's no escape. I want to keep the possibility of hope alive, in all its forms. Having emerged from a long period of depression, that message is important to me too.'

– Sean Williams

## Suggestions for Classroom Discussion and Application

### Cover

- Before reading the story, examine the front cover and write a short paragraph explaining what genre of book you expect this to be, who it might be about and what sort of things you think might occur to characters in the novel? Think very carefully about some of the visual clues present on the cover, such as, the tilted angle of the image and title, the sense of movement created by the angle of the children's arms and legs, and the lines radiating from the girl's apron in the foreground and the title and the buildings. Look closely and you'll see that the children are running down a narrow alley, with tall buildings on both sides. What sort of mood does this create?

### Title

- Why do you think the book might be called *Honour Among Ghosts*? Can you think of a more common saying that begins with Honour Among....? How might this more common saying influence your understanding of the title here? Visually, does the *font* used in the title create a ghostly sense and what sort of ghosts do you think the book will feature: frightening or friendly ones? Does your answer compare or contrast with the front cover image?

### Chapter One

- Did the first chapter of the book hook you? Were you compelled to move straight to Chapter Two? Analyse your reaction to Chapter One by asking questions such as:
  - What mystery has been revealed?
  - When is the story set?
  - Why might Penny and Colm's friendship be described as unusual?
  - What might 'charmed' coal be?

### Chapter Seven

- How does this chapter differ from preceding chapters? Is the mood of this chapter more intense as a result? In your own words, explain how this chapter made you feel.

### Metaphor

- A *metaphor* is a figure of speech comparing two unlike things without using the words *like* or *as*. An example of a metaphor is the sentence, 'The world is a stage, and all the men and women merely players on it.'. To make the same sentence a *simile* you would need to change it to, 'The world is a like a stage and all the men and women like players on it.'.
- Sean Williams is a master at creating evocative metaphors and similes to bring his writing to life and make it more creatively imaginative. 'You two are a pair of shoes tied tight at the laces...' (p 25) is an example of one of his metaphors. 'Mab's breath puffed from her mouth and swept behind her like ponytails of white hair.' (p 62) is a simile. Find as many other metaphors and similes as you can in the text.

## Personification

- Personification is a way of describing an object by giving it human attributes. Sean Williams most notably uses this to emphasise the wintery setting of the novel and everyone's urge to stay inside and keep warm. He describes icicles in *Honour Among Ghosts* as, 'frigid fingers that tugged at the eave of the small home...' (p 16), while later they are, 'hanging like sharp teeth from every overhang.' (p 117). (a) Find three examples of personification in the novel. (b) Explain how the personification of the weather added to the novel's mysterious, claustrophobic and ominous mood.

## Characterisation

- List as many adjectives as you can for each of the main characters? For instance, you might say Mab is *ambitious*, Colm is *loyal*, Penny is *generous* and Niclas is *cunning*. For each adjective you use find examples of things that character says or does as proof of their characteristic. For instance, Mab is ambitious because she dreams of studying at the University of Wonders.
- Do Mab, Penny, Niclas or Colm change as the story progresses? Give examples of changes in each character and why these changes occur.
- Does one change more than the others, do you think?

## Show Don't Tell

- According to the website, *Twinkl*, Show Don't Tell is 'a creative writing technique that allows the reader to experience the story and characters through actions, thoughts, sensory details, and feelings, rather than just a factual description'. For instance, in the sentence, 'Mab stared open-mouthed at the ghost of her dead mother.', (p310) we are *told* that Mab's dead mother has suddenly appeared but we *interpret* that Mab's response is extreme surprise because of her 'open-mouthed' stare.

Read the following extract and explain what Sean Williams is showing the reader rather telling them here.

*...Penny looked at Colm, who was looking at Niclas, who was looking at Mab. There was such feeling in Niclas's look, a feeling echoed in Colm's own heart, and it hurt him to see it. Sensing someone staring at him, Niclas raised his eyes and smiled at Colm, who glanced awkwardly elsewhere – and noted Penny's regard. She sent him a sad smile, guessing what ached in him, and wished that all the world's yearnings could be healed with a single spell. Colm frowned, unable to interpret her expression at all. (p 310)*

## Theme

- Consider this extract from the text and answer the question below:

*Slowly, his disillusionment with that role grew. Too great became the difference between those who had much and those who had little. Too often was he asked to conceal deceitful acts that would enrich one by taking from another. Too deeply did he come to regret his complicity in abetting their thievery from the many by the few. (p 79)*

- How is the idea that a just society is one in which wealth is distributed fairly borne out by each of the following: (a) the ghosts in the novel (b) Niclas and his fellow travellers (c) Mab's father, the Firebrand (d) Colm's mother, the magistrate (e) and the book's title, *Honour Among Ghosts*?

### Compare and Contrast

- Sean Williams describes *Honour Among Ghosts* as a 'sidequel' to his book *Her Perilous Mansion*. Read the earlier novel as an extension exercise and make a list of similarities and differences between the world-building, characters and events in both stories.

### Book Review

- Write a book review for *Honour Among Ghosts*. In the review make sure you include the book's title and author, as well as a brief summary of the story. Pay particular attention to whether you found the story and characters compelling, were intrigued by the ideas in the book and whether the story stayed with you after you finished it.

## About the Author

Sean Williams is a multi-award-winning, #1 *New York Times* best-selling author for readers of all ages. With over four million published words, in the form of series, novels, short stories and poems that have been translated into multiple languages for readers around the world, he has worked with visual artists, dramaturges, composers and other writers on collaborative works that include stories set in the Star Wars and Doctor Who universes, original series created with Garth Nix, and a science-fiction musical performed at the National Museum in Canberra.

In 2017, he was the recipient of the Australian Antarctica Division's annual Arts Fellowship. His most recent novels *Impossible Music* and *Her Perilous Mansion* were nominated for the Ethel Turner Prize for Young People's Literature and the Patricia Wrightson Prize for Children's Literature respectively. Both are Children's Book Council of Australia Notable Books.

As well as being a senior lecturer at Flinders University, he writes articles about creative writing; composes music that has been released internationally and commissioned for exhibitions, live performances, and the stage; and cooks a mean brussels sprout.

