



Four-Letter Word

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Eight friends. One game. A dozen regrets. And a night that will ruin them all, in this high stakes gripping story of manipulation and innocence lost, from the author of *Bleed Like Me*.

Chloe Sanders has wasted the better part of her junior year watching her best friend Eve turn away from her for the more interesting and popular Holly Reed. Living with her grandparents because her parents are currently serving as overseas volunteers, Chloe spends her days crushing on a dark-haired guy named Mateo, being mostly ignored by Eve and Holly, and wishing the cornfields of Iowa didn't feel so incredibly lonely.

But shortly after spring break, a new girl transfers to her high school—Chloe Donnelly. This Chloe is bold and arty and instantly placed on a pedestal by Eve and Holly. Now suddenly everyone is referring to Chloe Sanders as “Other Chloe” and her social status plummets even more.

Until Chloe Donnelly introduces all her friends to a dangerous game: a girls vs. guys challenge that only has one rule—obtain information by any means necessary. All the warning bells are going off in Other Chloe's head about the game, but she's not about to commit social suicide by saying no to playing.

Turns out the game is more complicated than Other Chloe thinks. Chloe Donnelly hates to lose. She's got power over everyone—secrets she's exploiting—and she likes to yank their strings. Only soft-spoken Mateo is sick of it, and when the game turns nasty, he chooses Other Chloe to help him expose everything Chloe Donnelly has done. But neither realize just how much the truth could cost them in the end.

Four-Letter Word Details

Date : Published May 15th 2018 by Simon Pulse

ISBN : 9781481497374

Author : Christa Desir

Format : Hardcover 416 pages

Genre : Young Adult, Contemporary

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From Reader Review Four-Letter Word for online ebook

Cierra Clark says

“Four-Letter Word”

By: Christa Desir

A game played with eight “friends” ending with a reward most people would want, a platinum favor. One night that leads to many regrets, leaving all of them at the police station. This fictional book is called “four-letter Word” by Christa Desir.

“Four-Letter Word” is written in first person of a seventeen year old girl named Chloe Sanders. She’s struggling to hold on to her relationship with her “best friend”, while she’s found a new best friend, Holly Reed. Living with her old-fashioned grandparents while her parents are volunteering overseas can be draining. Chloe has been crushing on a mysterious guy named Mateo throughout the year. One day at the lunch table a new girl named Chloe Donnelly came and sat with Eve, holly and Chloe Sanders. Chloe D claimed she was from chicago, already making herself much more interesting from anyone in their small town, she was not shy at all, very loud but friendly enough. Once Chloe felt like she had befriended all of them, earned their trust, she introduced the others to a game she played in chicago called “gestapo”. The games rules are; there are two teams, 4 boys on one, 4 girls on the other, each team chooses a team captain then the captain picks a four-letter word and whispers a letter into their teammates ears. Once everyone has their letter they have to try and get the other teams letter by any means necessary. Whichever team guesses the other teams word, each teammate from the winning team gets a platinum favor. The losing team has to do whatever the winning team wants, at least according to to Chloe Donnelly. The book is fairly action-packed it also is suspenseful because of the way the game is laid out, you never know what’s going to happen next.

Christa Desir wrote this book very well, she captured each characters personality very well and showcases eight very different people. At the beginning of the book I did not find it that interesting but towards a quarter way through the book, I could not put it down. This was definitely a page turner.

This book is would be perfect for late teens-young adults to read. It has stronger language and touchy topics that not all would like to read. Someone who likes a adrenalin and suspenseful book would enjoy this read.

Overall the author did a very well job on this writing this book and I will be recommending this to many of my friends.

Girl Anonymous says

This book was not enjoyable for me at all.

First and foremost, it really misses the suspense/“page-turning” factor. I understand that the audience is supposed to feel for the characters and want to know what happens to them, but most of the characters(with exception of a few) were just one sided and cruel(even with their secrets revealed—singing is not going to make me have sympathy for a cheater). Furthermore, this book doesn’t seamlessly transition opinions. Even though I do agree with a majority of the points the author makes in this book, it just felt like the story would be happening—insert opinion—and the story would continue. As much as I agree with a lot of what was presented, it just gets annoying and detracts from the story. And the ending is so underwhelming!! Would not recommend.

Mary says

Gillian Flynn meets Judy Blume in Christa Desir's latest YA work. An intriguing new girl shows up at high school and inserts herself into the lives of a group of friends. She introduces them to a new game and before they know it, secrets are being revealed, friendships are being torn apart, and lives are being turned upside down. Christa Desir once again gives us frank talk, real-world scenarios, and no apologies for telling it like it is. This is the book I wish I could have given to my daughter when she turned 12.

Teenreadsdotcom says

Chloe Sanders has moved back to her hometown of Grinnell, Iowa, after spending a period of time in Burkina Faso, Africa, with her parents, who joined the Spirit Corps in order to do humanitarian service abroad. Since moving back to Grinnell and living with her grandparents, Chloe has had a relatively mundane life --- that is until Chloe Donnelly comes to town. She encourages the now dubbed "Other Chloe" and her friends to play a word game called Gestapo. When the stakes rise and the player's secrets are on the line, Chloe Sanders and her crush, Mateo, team up to expose Chloe Donnelly.

The premise of FOUR-LETTER WORD sounds very intriguing at its surface, but ultimately it fell flat for me. Throughout playing the game Gestapo, all of the central characters' secrets are revealed in one way or another. Desir notes the nagging fear all the characters have of being discovered and the serious ramifications they would have to face if their private lives were to become public. Despite this intense build up, the resolution of the story is relatively anticlimactic. There were some twists or turns around the way that I was initially intrigued by that kept me reading, but I don't think they fit the suspenseful narrative that the author wanted to craft with this story. It feels like there is this disconnect between the intention and the outcome of the plot.

As a reader, I wanted to understand why Desir made the decisions she did in concluding her novel, but it felt like I was grasping at straws to find an answer. Logically, I would like to believe that Desir is trying to make the commentary that high schoolers tend to blow everything out of proportion. High school feels monumental. It's a time to discover your identity, form relationships and make decisions. At the time, any worse case situation feels like the end of the world. It's looking back on those moments that creates the realization of how small a fragment high school is in anybody's lifespan. As someone who has plenty of experience in this area, I think the message could have been better delivered.

This book also contains lots of sexual content. In high school, many teenagers are going through their first relationships. This obviously means a decent amount of exploration about sex and masturbation. As someone who gets really uncomfortable really quickly reading about these types of topics, I was cringing throughout much of the novel. I will say that I should have done more research before diving into a book that dealt with content that I do not enjoy reading. Regardless of the fact that this particular area of the novel was not my favorite, Desir does a masterful job of crafting an honest character arc that delves into this realm. According to her bio, Desir has been a rape victim activist for over 20 years. She has worked to provide advocacy services in hospital ERs and she has met and spoken with high school and college students about sexual violence, some of whom were even incarcerated survivors. All of this experience is naturally going to lend well in crafting a YA novel that speaks to these topics. The journey that Chloe goes through in being comfortable having sex for the first time feels real to the encounters that all teens have in going through this same struggle.

While I do not believe this book was perfect for me, I know that there is an audience out there that could really enjoy FOUR-LETTER WORD. This book tackles topics such as friendship, sexuality, relationships and fitting into social circles. I definitely got Mean Girls vibes from this read, which could make it worth picking up for those that are a fan of the movie or the Broadway show.

Reviewed by Gabby B., Teen Board Member

Darryn says

I received a temporary digital copy of this book from Netgalley for an honest review.

This was one of the most frustrating books I have ever read. The writing was good and the plot was original, until the end, but I pretty much hated every...single...character...

Chloe, the main character was probably the worst. She was so judgmental of everyone, when she, herself couldn't do anything wrong. She is supposed to be 17 years old, practically an adult but her character reads like a whiny 12 year old. I guess I could contribute that to her parents, who are the most selfish people ever, putting their own agenda ahead of their only child and practically bullying her into doing what they want.

The only redeemable character is Melissa, who Chloe treats like dirt and then uses her when she is feeling lonely. Not to mention the ending is really unsatisfying and seems like a huge let down after reading 400+ pages.

Carlene Inspired says

3.5 Stars

Four-Letter Word tells the alarming story of Chloe Sanders and her sort-of friends as they give in to the whim of the new girl, the seemingly larger than life Chloe Donnelly that gives narrator Chloe a new nickname, Other Chloe. New Chloe comes from Chicago, seems to know about everything, and uses a game to control the 7 friends. What seems to be a simple game becomes something much scarier when the truth is revealed, people will do anything they need to in order to protect their secrets. When the game turns nasty and the friends are turned against each other a plan is formed to shut Chloe Donnelly down, but the truth could cost them more than their secrets.

While I can't imagine myself ever giving in to a game like this, Christa Desir brings the game and the characters to life in Four-Letter Word. I ached for Other Chloe as she dealt with typical and non-typical teenage drama, I wouldn't know what to do in her shoes. Though the believability of the novel is a bit far-fetched, the way the friends treated each other was very accurate. I actually liked the dramatization of the game, this idea that people, especially teenagers, would do nearly anything to both keep secrets and to uncover them. Chloe is the sort of girl who hasn't figured it all out yet, unaware that her naivety is actually a good thing in many ways. She's both independent and codependent, her role created by her so-called friends and the lack of parental supervision. The secondary characters include her previous best friend Eve, Eve's present bestie Hollie, Other Chloe's crush, three other boys, and of course, New Chloe. Each is very well developed and had distinct voices and characteristics even when only being described by Other Chloe. The interactions Other Chloe has with her friends are impactful and very true to reality, at least from what I can remember of high school.

As for the game, it's twisted and not something I would've come up with or been willing to play at that age. It reveals a lot about the characters and about teenagers in general. The ending was lackluster for me and for me, I think a novel of this style should leave a lasting impression and Four-Letter Word just didn't for me. I think Christa Desir did a stunning job portraying the age group and the secrets they feel are most important. The things the teens were willing to do though, it's a bit harsh and a little sad too, as they came across as trying so hard to be adult at an age where they shouldn't have to worry about these things. The teens had a proclivity to make things sexual and that added an even more adult feel to the novel. Ultimately, I would have to categorize this as New Adult or even Adult.

I enjoyed the mystery and thriller aspect of Four-Letter Word, as well as the bits of coming-of-age tale that we got from Chloe. The characters and their secrets were interesting and allowed for a complex novel that kept me fairly engaged.

ARC provided via Netgalley.

Mandie Baxter says

It's been a long time since I sat down and read a book in one sitting. But this one had me up until 1 am because I couldn't stop reading. It was so good!!! I remember hearing about it years ago and couldn't wait to jump in. Well worth the wait. It's also been a long time since I met a main character who was so painfully awkward, but in a good, realistic way.

PinkAmy loves books, cats and naps says

3.5 STARS

Security and a sense of belonging aren't Chloe's strongpoints. When new girl named Chloe arrives in school and dubs her "OtherChloe", Chloe feels even more left out. New Chloe proposes a game girls against boys with the prize being Platinum Favors, Chloe becomes even more alienated. And the stakes are too high. Too high for some.

Chloe and the other teens' biggest mistake is that they all have, but don't listen to, the voice inside their heads that says 'Stop. Proceed with caution.' She doesn't have friends, but frenemies that treat her poorly including her former best friend. Chloe wants too much not to lose the girls she considers friends that she overlooks the signs of her unhappiness with these girls. Her progressive parents are away saving the world so Chloe lives with her genteel but Fox News loving grandparents. Though her mom gave her sex-positive education, sometimes before she was ready, Chloe is a virgin and in no way ready to have sex. She's strong in her convictions not to do anything before she's comfortable. Her character was so complex, somethings maddening, often huggable and occasionally lovable. I had a great deal of empathy for her even at her most unlikable moments.

I didn't buy into the game 4 Letter Word. Two teams of four boys or girls each get one letter of a word and the object is to get letters from the other teams by any means possible, the subtext is that the means are sexual. I loved word games as a kid, but didn't know any other of my peers who played Scrabble for fun. I can't picture teens being gung-ho excited about a word game even if the "any means necessary" was the real plot. I also didn't buy into NewChloe having such social power so quickly (even though readers later learn why she wields the power). All eight kids have secrets, mostly tropes.

I enjoyed Christa Desir's writing and struggled between 3 and 4 stars. The number of times I couldn't imagine most teens acting as they did in the book kept my rating at 3. I do think teens will enjoy FOUR-LETTER WORD and recommend it.

Tara says

Chloe and her friends live in a small town in Iowa. When new girl, Chloe Donnelly shows up and proposes a game, a girls vs guys challenge that seems fun and exciting, Other Chloe and her friends are excited to participate. As the game gets more serious, trust and friendships shatter.

I have very mixed feelings about this book. I loved the mystery and the twisted elements of the game seem totally plausible for high school. There are several high school students who be totally into reading this book. However, the extensive focus on graphic and gratuitous sex make it so that I would never purchase this book for our school collection, nor would I recommend it to students. Overall, I think it was a good premise for a mystery that tried to go in to many directions.

I read an ARC from NetGalley.

Maria Katsulos says

Do you ever finish a book and think that it has possibly garnered five stars, but the more you think about it, the more it shows its true, albeit still very interesting, colors? For me, that was Four-Letter Word by Christa Desir.

Four-Letter Word honestly had one of my favorite expositions of the books I've read so far this year. As a recent high school graduate, I thought that the way Desir wove in the different conflicts and characters in Chloe Sanders' life was pretty seamless -- nobody was dropped in without explanation, and nearly everyone proved important to the story in some way or another. With the exception, of course, of antagonist Chloe Donnelly. I'm sure nearly every high schooler has run into Chloe Donnelly's particular brand of bully: they put on a front like they're much cooler and more mature than everyone else, while simultaneously encouraging everyone to put logic and rational thought aside and join them in some harebrained scheme or another, that is going to end up getting everyone in trouble but the bully herself. In Four-Letter Word's case, this scheme is called Gestapo. Yeah, you read that right, like the Nazi secret police. That word definitely came out of nowhere as I was first reading it, and I think Desir pretty effectively achieved her goal of making the reader as deeply uncomfortable with the game as Chloe Sanders is. There's basically no bigger red flag than someone calling a "game" after the Gestapo, even if it is, as Chloe S. kept trying to remind herself, just a word game.

But because this is high school, and because Chloe Donnelly has the magnetism that all high school mean girls seem to have, Chloe Sanders and her friends get wrapped up in the game before they know what's happening. And up to this point, I think I was totally on board, plotwise. I hated Chloe Donnelly, and I think that for the majority of the book, Desir wrote her soooo realistically. She was so easy to dislike. But then, as the game progressed, and it became clear that the way to win was to trade secrets (and sexual favors, which I'll get to in a minute). This is where, to me, the plot started to go kind of haywire. Chloe Donnelly knew things about the other players that nobody else did, even though the group of seven native Grinnell students had known each other longer than this newcomer. Some of the things she could have Googled (view spoiler) and some of the things she could have just stumbled upon (view spoiler). The part that didn't make sense to

me is how Chloe Donnelly could have known that (view spoiler)There were definitely some parts of Four-Letter Word that had my heart racing, turning the pages like crazy to find out the next twist, but the ending just wasn't one of them. Coupled with the total lack of resolution for all the characters I was rooting for, it made the book -- which was definitely on the long side for the story Desir was trying to tell -- seem unfinished.

Finally, my last issue with Four-Letter Word isn't an issue with a writing so much as it is in putting it into the Young Adult category. I think Desir really captured the strangeness and newness of being, well, a young adult, but her references to sex edged on gratuitous and were definitely graphic. With the proper warning, I think this book could be great for mature young adults, but it's definitely not something you'd find in a school library. In my opinion, putting this into the "new adult" category better represents the story and its author.

Four-Letter Word comes out May 15, 2018 from Simon Pulse (Simon & Schuster) in the US.

Disclaimer: I received an advanced readers' copy of Four-Letter Word at the Texas Library Association Conference 2018. This has in no way affected my rating, review, or opinion of this book. Some of the links in this review are affiliate links.

Come Visit Me At The Falling Shelf!

Lindsay says

When Chloe Donnelly becomes the new kid of the high school and infiltrates her group of friends, Chloe Sanders' life makes a drastic turn. Her parents have been living in Africa doing volunteer work for a few years so Chloe lives with her Fox News obsessed grandparents. Her best friend Eve is pulling away from Chloe and focusing more on Holly, a newbie to their group of about a year. Chloe Donnelly becomes part of this skewed group, and soon these four girls along with four guys are roped into playing a game called Gestapo, a game that is more menacing than fun.

This started off strong and I was interested until the 25% mark and then things grew repetitious and languid. Chloe suffered from severe anxiety where she continuously chewed off her fingernails and blurted things out. There wasn't a filter between her thoughts and mouth, so she would spout out inappropriate things multiple times a day. She also went off on unnecessary tangents that had nothing to do with the story line as she gnawed off her nails that somehow managed to grow back by the next day. Her so called best friend Eve was manipulative and attention-seeking while Holly was arrogant and callous. Eve, Holly, and Chloe Donnelly regularly referred to Chloe Sanders as "Other Chloe", proving that she was insignificant. And instead of walking away from this toxic group of friends, Chloe put up with all the drama and manipulation since she was desperate for their approval.

Her love interest Mateo was an absurd backstory. Up until the involvement in Gestapo, Chloe attempted to engage in conversations with him, but Mateo always shut her down and avoided her. Out of nowhere they profess their interest in each other under the night sky in the middle of Gestapo and despite not interacting at all for a few days, the next time they meet they proclaim their love for one another.

The big reveal was predicted at the beginning. There wasn't any suspense. Chloe spent much of the time chewing her fingernails, complaining about her parents living in Africa and the way Eve treated her, and then pining over Mateo. The game was even more of a back story than the Mateo instant love, and ending was rushed with multiple questions unanswered.

This was a tremendously long read that left me thankful when I finished.

I received an ARC of Four-Letter Word from Edelweiss.

Taylor says

** Age warning!! **

This book is the fucking best. OK EVEN AFTER ALL THAT, I STILL WANNA PLAY GESTAPO WITH MY FRIENDS. but the practice fun version not the actual version that ruined their lives. ANYway this book was PERFECT it was full of DRAMA and I was living vicariously through them and soaking in all their drama without having to go through it myself because i love it but don't want it for myself just want to hear about other people's. well, characters (since theyre not real LOL). Two words: sex & secrets. Another word: FANTASTIC. It was super nice reading a book with the ~content~ this one had because usually they'll dance around the topic or make it super cringy by being indirect and its usually bad but this one was straightforward with it (SUPER straightforward) and it was great. The romance plotline? AMAZING. Mateo and Chloe? THE BEST. I almost cried at the end.

the only thing i didnt like was her "hair curtain"what. just,, everytime she said she hid behind her hair the mental picture in my head/the movie going on in my mind about the book would like record screech and get weird and i kept picturing Cousin Itt from Adams Family so that was eh. but thats the only thing. I LOVED THE REST.

still want to punch holly though. not as much as i want to punch eve. not as much as i want to punch CHLOE DONNELLEY . fuck that hoe.

Straight up DEVoured this book in 2 days. "just one more chapter" is the BIGGEST lie ever. its now midnight (again). the past two nights i was supposed to go to bed early. that obviously didnt happen LOL. recommended song: Party favor by Billie Eilish. 5 stars. read this now. unless you dont like sex & secrets then dont but you are seriously missin out dude. extremely very addicting book

Angel Graham says

I hated this book. The only redeeming character was a secondary. Melissa. The game was stupid. The new Chloe was off her rocker from the get go. All the primary characters were just nasty. I wasted time and money on this book.

Dewey says

The blurb from the cover is a pretty accurate description of the book...the plot centers around this group of eight students playing multiple games of Gestapo, things progressively getting more tense until everything blows up, Chloe Donnelly ends up missing, and the other seven teens are implicated in her disappearance..dun dun dun!

Obviously I did not enjoy this book, but good lord, where do I even begin?

Main character Chloe is boring, sanctimonious, and incredibly judgmental. Even more irritatingly, most of her judgement is sandwiched in her self-pity over how everyone else is sooooo mean to her. Basically the

entire book is her keeping up a running mental commentary of how useless and beneath her the people around her are, interspersed with self-satisfied reminders of how patient and tolerant she is. I don't understand if Desir wrote her as an unsympathetic character on purpose, but I couldn't stand her. Some particularly cringe examples of her awfulness:
(view spoiler)

As if her preachy, hypocritical, self-satisfied judgement toward everyone else weren't enough, pretty early on in the book (view spoiler)Jesus H Christ, really? Are we supposed to like her?!

Moving past Chloe being the worst, this whole story was stuck in her head, and I feel like nothing got developed properly. It would be better, and maybe Chloe would even have seemed more likable, if more character and plot development had been described rather than narrated in Chloe's stream-of-consciousness litany of the faults of others and why nothing was her fault. I'm not averse to first person point of view, but this whole book was Chloe's self-narration, and not only did her mental voice get old fast, the limited description available meant that none of the other characters got any real development. Why should I care about Mateo when all I'm given about him is what benefits Chloe? What's the point of showing the soft side of douchebag Cam when it goes nowhere and leaves us picturing him as an irredeemable asshole? And finally, we spend the entire book on these games and trying to figure out what is going on with Chloe Donnelly, and then all that mystery is revealed in an epilogue? Really?(view spoiler)

I read this book because the description and title were intriguing, but it was like reading the diary of a selfish, spoiled, overly-critical asshole, with absolutely no payoff at the end.

Jamie says

* I received an e-galley from Netgalley in return for an honest review.*

4.5

Wow, so I read this in one day. And I'd kind of be surprised if you could do it any other way because it just keeps going. You are always wondering what is really going on and what is going to happen next. Wasn't as thrilled with the ending, kind of a let down, so that's why it is only a 4.5.

Chloe is having friend issues with Eve (her former bestie) and Holly when the new Chloe shows up after Spring Break. This new Chloe introduces their friends to a game that will turn all their worlds upside down.
