

Book Review: The Bone Queen
By Will Shindler

Thanks to NetGalley and St. Martin's Press for this advance reader's copy, in exchange for an honest review. "The Bone Queen" is scheduled for release on February 3, 2026.

This debut horror-thriller started off like gangbusters, with a woman racing through the woods to escape her pursuer, only to throw herself off a cliff rather than succumb to the evil chasing her.

Fast-paced, very upbeat.

But it was a slow, downhill grind from then on.

The premise of the story is divorced mom Jenna travels from her home in London to the shores of Athelsea island in search of her 16-year-old daughter, Chloe, who has run away. Chloe had been acting strange for several weeks. Jenna has no idea why. And it's only through the electronic devices (laptop and phone) left behind that Jenna learns where Chloe went.

But why Athelsea?

Jenna checks into a B&B in the village of Ravensgate and begins her search.

Almost immediately, mystery develops as Jenna interacts with the villagers. She learns the legend of the Bone Queen, a vengeful woman who it seems appears every 22 years and terrorizes the villages.

Soon, human bones wash up on shore, and several villagers who appear to share a secret thought to have been buried long ago are murdered one by one.

Periodic chapters provide a flashback or backstory to the events leading up to Chloe's disappearance, as well as events from 22 years ago that may hold the key to the recent murders and revenge-seeking Bone Queen.

But here's the thing. For a horror/murder mystery, I found nothing scary in the narrative. People were being murdered, sure, but there was nothing frightening about the incidents. Some graphic language doesn't a horror scene make.

The characters were also quite boring. I never cared what happened to them, especially when they repeatedly did stupid things. I mean, why would you drink something given to you by the same people who kidnapped and previously drugged you? That's just dumb.

There was also little suspense, and the narrative was void of surprises. It was predictable, and the ending was about as anticlimactic as can be. So while the premise was interesting, the narrative never fully delivered.

Two-and-one-half stars (rounded down to two where necessary) for "The Bone Queen." It just left me unfulfilled.

And you can check out all my reviews at my Raised on Reading (www.raisedonreading.com) book blog.