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The Rule of Four

By Ian Caldwell, Dustin Thomason



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An ivy league murder, a mysterious coded manuscript, and the secrets of a Renaissance prince collide memorably in **The Rule of Four**—a brilliant work of fiction that weaves together suspense and scholarship, high art and unimaginable treachery.

It's Easter at Princeton. Seniors are scrambling to finish their theses. And two students, Tom Sullivan and Paul Harris, are a hair's breadth from solving the mysteries of the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*—a renowned text attributed to an Italian nobleman, a work that has baffled scholars since its publication in 1499. For Tom, their research has been a link to his family's past—and an obstacle to the woman he loves. For Paul, it has become an obsession, the very reason for living. But as their deadline looms, research has stalled—until a long-lost diary surfaces with a vital clue. And when a fellow researcher is murdered just hours later, Tom and Paul realize that they are not the first to glimpse the *Hypnerotomachia* 's secrets.

Suddenly the stakes are raised, and as the two friends sift through the codes and riddles at the heart of the text, they are beginning to see the manuscript in a new light—not simply as a story of faith, eroticism and pedantry, but as a bizarre, coded mathematical maze. And as they come closer and closer to deciphering the final puzzle of a book that has shattered careers, friendships and families, they know that their own lives are in mortal danger. Because at least one person has been killed for knowing too much. And they know even more.

From the streets of fifteenth-century Rome to the rarified realm of the Ivy League, from a shocking 500 year-old murder scene to the drama of a young man's coming of age, **The Rule of Four** takes us on an entertaining, illuminating tour of history—as it builds to a pinnacle of nearly unbearable suspense.



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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Caldwell and Thomason's intriguing intellectual suspense novel stars four brainy roommates at Princeton, two of whom have links to a mysterious 15th-century manuscript, the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*. This rare text (a real book) contains embedded codes revealing the location of a buried Roman treasure. Comparisons to *The Da Vinci Code* are inevitable, but Caldwell and Thomason's book is the more cerebral-and better written-of the two: think Dan Brown by way of Donna Tartt and Umberto Eco. The four seniors are Tom Sullivan, Paul Harris, Charlie Freeman and Gil Rankin. Tom, the narrator, is the son of a Renaissance scholar who spent his life studying the ancient book, "an encyclopedia masquerading as a novel, a dissertation on everything from architecture to zoology." The manuscript is also an endless source of fascination for Paul, who sees it as "a siren, a fetching song on a distant shore, all claws and clutches in person. You court her at your risk." This debut novel's range of topics almost rivals the *Hypnerotomachia*'s itself, including etymology, Renaissance art and architecture, Princeton eating clubs, friendship, steganography (riddles) and self-interpreting manuscripts. It's a complicated, intricate and sometimes difficult read, but that's the point and the pleasure. There are murders, romances, dangers and detection, and by the end the heroes are in a race not only to solve the puzzle, but also to stay alive. Readers might be tempted to buy their own copy of the *Hypnerotomachia* and have a go at the puzzle. After all, Caldwell and Thomason have done most of the heavy deciphering-all that's left is to solve the final riddle, head for Rome and start digging.

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From School Library Journal

Adult/High School—A compelling modern thriller that cleverly combines history and mystery. When four Princeton seniors begin the Easter weekend, they are more concerned with their plans for the next year and an upcoming dance than with a 500-year-old literary mystery. But by the end of the holiday, two people are dead, two of the students are injured, and one has disappeared. These events, blended with Renaissance history, code breaking, acrostics, sleuthing, and personal discovery, move the story along at a rapid pace. Tom Sullivan, the narrator, tells of his late father's and then a roommate's obsession with the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, a 15th-century "novel" that has long puzzled scholars. Paul has built his senior thesis on an unpopular theory posited by Tom's father—that the author was an upper-class Roman rather than a monk—and has come close to proving it. While much of the material on the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* is arcane and specialized, it is clearly explained and its puzzles are truly puzzling, while the present-day action is compelling enough to keep teens reading. There is a love interest for Tom and a lively portrayal of Princeton life. This novel will appeal to readers of Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* (Doubleday, 2003) but it supplies a lot more food for thought, even including some salacious woodcuts from the original book as well as coded excerpts and their solutions.—*Susan H. Woodcock, Fairfax County Public Library, Chantilly, VA*
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From [The New Yorker](#)

A Princeton student has only twenty-four hours to complete his senior thesis—hardly the nail-biting stuff of thrillers, except that the thesis in question purports to solve the mystery of an erotic fifteenth-century allegory littered with ciphers and algorithms. (In the wake of the immensely popular "The Da Vinci Code," there appears to be no shortage of medieval codes waiting to be cracked by intrepid scholar-detectives.) As the student races to meet his deadline, mayhem engulfs the campus: a chase through steam tunnels beneath the grassy quads, an inferno at the school's toniest eating club, and nude frolics in the snow (this last not fiction but a real Princeton tradition). The authors, two recent Ivy League grads, keep up a frantic, somewhat

exhausting pace, but the most riveting action sequences take place inside the mind, as the hero wrestles with the manuscript.

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Holly Silva:

Have you spare time to get a day? What do you do when you have far more or little spare time? Yep, you can choose the suitable activity for spend your time. Any person spent their very own spare time to take a wander, shopping, or went to the particular Mall. How about open or perhaps read a book called The Rule of Four? Maybe it is to be best activity for you. You already know beside you can spend your time with your favorite's book, you can wiser than before. Do you agree with its opinion or you have some other opinion?

Nakia Schultz:

The event that you get from The Rule of Four is the more deep you searching the information that hide into the words the more you get interested in reading it. It does not mean that this book is hard to know but The Rule of Four giving you buzz feeling of reading. The writer conveys their point in certain way that can be understood by simply anyone who read the item because the author of this e-book is well-known enough. That book also makes your personal vocabulary increase well. Making it easy to understand then can go together with you, both in printed or e-book style are available. We suggest you for having this kind of The Rule of Four instantly.

Stephen Hancock:

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Carla Heyward:

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