

Artifact: A Jaya Jones Treasure Hunt Mystery**Gigi Pandian**

Gargoyle Girl Productions (Aug 28, 2012)

Softcover \$14.95 (285pp)

978-1-938213-00-7

In her fast-paced and entertaining debut novel, Gigi Pandian brings readers into a world full of mystery and history.

This first book in the Jaya Jones Treasure Hunt Mystery series introduces the protagonist, a woman in her late twenties who was born in India and now lives in the San Francisco Bay Area. Having just completed her first year as a tenure-track professor, she gets sidetracked during summer break when she learns her archeologist ex-boyfriend, Rupert Chadwick, was killed in a car accident in Scotland. The same day, she receives a package from Rupert with a piece of jewelry and a mysterious message. Jaya recognizes the jewelry as a possible Indian artifact and, in an attempt to identify the origins, enlists the help of Berkeley scholar Lane Peters.

Jaya and Lane both embrace the role of amateur sleuth. Their treasure hunt leads them to London, where two years earlier Jaya first met Rupert when she was conducting her dissertation research on the early foundations of British India. Although it had been more than a year since she had seen Rupert, and she seemingly had no remorse over the breakup she initiated, Jaya still feels a sense of responsibility to fulfill his last wishes. She also suspects Rupert's death could be connected to the treasure. As secrets are revealed, hints are provided along the way to tempt readers to solve the mystery right alongside Jaya.

Well-developed characters paint a vivid picture throughout the book. Likable but quirky secondary and peripheral characters, including Jaya's amusing Russian landlord, a best friend who is a magician, and an adoring next-door neighbor who considers Jaya a fellow poet, help keep the tone of the book light and fun, rather than overly graphic or dark.

Winner of the Malice Domestic Grant, which helps fund unpublished writers creating in the tradition of Agatha Christie novels, Pandian focuses her narrative on the process of researching a problem and solving a mystery. Weaving in bits of Indian history, including jewels and artwork, she also explores broader academic themes, such as the nature of theory and the need for patience to properly research any issue.

As with classics in the genre, this first book in the Jaya Jones series will appeal to readers who enjoy delving into a complex puzzle.

MARIA SIANO (Fall 2012)

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