

Pearinella

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An interesting, readable update on ancient alchemy, this murder mystery will appeal to science, as well as history and literature, buffs.

Bringing alchemy into the twenty-first century, *Pearinella* begins with a mysterious woman, the titular Pearinella, a visiting scholar with what might be the famed Philosopher's Stone in her possession. Her enemy, the envious Marcel, is hot on her heels, determined to unlock the alchemical secrets Pearinella possesses. But when the stone goes missing after Pearinella's fatal fall from a rooftop, only casual student Jason and Pearinella's cousin, Professor Abigail Stibium, have a chance of making sense of the intrigue. Part murder mystery, part tour through the world of alchemy, this book will interest anyone who enjoys legend and lore.

Alchemy isn't necessarily a popular subject in a modern context, but its history gives modern chemistry a surprising amount of color. *Pearinella* is rife with details on the ancient practice, including terms, beliefs, goals, and trivia. Contrasted with a backdrop based in present-day academia, the mysticism of alchemy seems surprisingly pronounced and wild. Even the famed Isaac Newton, according to this text, was a serious alchemist. Any student of chemistry will find this an interesting play on the history of their profession.

The mystery revolves more around why Pearinella dies rather than who kills her. In fact, the murder scene is one of the earliest in the book. This keeps the book's overarching theme in line with the subject matter; in many senses, the characters are trying to determine the reasons behind the reaction that they witnessed in the same way that a chemist (or alchemist) might try to figure out why two substances react in a certain way.

Slow pacing dampens the thrill of the chase, however, and dialogue tends to get muddled in the particulars of alchemy. While Atlantis, crystals, and the Philosopher's Stone are all fascinating conversation topics, *Pearinella* will be a hard sell for mystery fans interested in a fast, plot-driven thriller. On the other hand, fans who read for conspiracies will revel in the exploration of this arcane corner of mystical science.

The romance between Jason and Abigail builds believably, and the characters are distinct. They are a credible team both as mystery-type snoopers and as a courting couple. Though the book is technically written in the third person, Jason's inner dialogue frequently punctuates the text with his musings on both the relationship and the mystery.

Awkward language pervades the book, but not so seriously as to impede comprehension. Fans of Clive Cussler and Tom Clancy might not even notice the odd run-on sentence or dropped comma. A few unusual formatting choices, such as the use of the Comic Sans typeface to indicate that a character is speaking in French, are certainly eye-catching, but not necessarily bad choices. Alchemical symbols at the start of each chapter give the book an interesting visual component.

An interesting and readable book, *Pearinella* might interest academics, especially scientists with an appreciation for history and literature.

ANNA CALL (November 21, 2014)

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