



Strange Alchemy

Gwenda Bond

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Strange Alchemy features a unique solution to the Roanoke mystery in a YA paranormal thriller.

Gwenda Bond's *Strange Alchemy* solves the historical mystery of Roanoke with a thrilling YA adventure tinged with romance and supernatural intrigue.

In modern-day Roanoke, the island is once again rocked by 114 people suddenly vanishing in one fell swoop. Outcast teenager Miranda Blackwood finds herself swept up in the mystery after her father is murdered and the truth behind her own lineage comes to light. A strange ability pulls another teen into the mix—Grant Rawling, the local boy sent away to reform school—and the duo's unique shared history ignites the conflict. A powerful enemy rises, an army gathers, and the fate of the island and possibly the nation rests in Miranda and Grant's hands.

Strange Alchemy teases out a central mystery while building a realistic relationship between the two leads. Both exist on the fringe of the community, but for vastly different reasons. Miranda's troubled family and rumored connection to a historical traitor brand her as a freak, while Grant's strange ability and tendency to stir up trouble force him from the island completely. As the two cope with and attempt to overcome a powerful enemy, their bond strengthens believably despite the strange circumstances.

While some of the background players are flat, the majority are vivid, which creates a strong cast of characters for the main conflict to act against. Characters speak with unique voices, and the points of view that alter from one chapter to the next allow for multiple takes on a given situation. The prose benefits from short staccato-like sentences and snappy dialogue that never lets the action drag, even during the more contemplative scenes—all of which layers tension as the story races toward the inevitable conclusion.

Strange Alchemy features a unique solution to the Roanoke mystery in a YA paranormal thriller with strong characterization, realistic dialogue, and a suspenseful final battle.

JOHN M. MURRAY (July/August 2017)

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