

The King's Jar: A Dani O'Rourke Mystery

Susan C. Shea

Top Five Books (May 1, 2013)

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A tightly written mystery set within a whirlwind promenade through the world of fine art, as seen through the eyes of a museum fund-raiser.

A celadon funerary jar, ancient and priceless, goes missing from the Devor Museum, and antiquities expert Rene Bouvier, who was the last person working with the jar, is found dead. Discovered in the turbulent, underdeveloped country of Kenobia, the jar was to be the central piece in the Devor's fast-approaching new exhibition. It is also central to the theme of a dinner Dani has planned for the museum's patrons, whose pockets she taps on a regular basis, as well as dignitaries and even royalty. These VIPs will want to know that the museum management is sound and that the jar is safely tucked away in the Devor's most secure vault.

No matter that Kenobian government officials, the local police, and the FBI are investigating the murder and the theft, Dani can't resist taking on the role of sleuth. Her life becomes steeped in political intrigue, the scheming machinations of the rich, and occasionally, unsettling danger. At the same time, she is still being lovingly hounded by her ex-husband, the charming and wealthy Richard Argetter III. Dani is no stranger to the intricacies of prenuptial agreements that, not by coincidence, figure strongly in this tale.

Readers will enjoy trying to work out the questionable provenance of the celadon jar and identifying the characters who can be trusted—or not. After all, Dani herself is suspicious of one of her love interests, the popular, rich, and well-connected anthropologist Simon Anderson. Then there are the McBeels, who are vying for ownership of the jar for their own devious reasons. The Kenobians want the jar back when their government is more stable and when they have built their own museum, but the Devor's board of directors are loath to part with it.

Shea provides a handful of easily relatable characters, particularly Dani and her staff. At the same time, the story takes readers on a fun ride through a world that is to many "how the other half lives." With over twenty years as a nonprofit executive, Shea brings real-world experience to her story.

But what shines most in Shea's writing is her wry wit, which will have readers snorting, and hearty humor, which will have them laughing out loud, such as: "He fixed me with a look that would have meant serious dungeon time in another age."

The King's Jar is a smooth, enjoyable read with enough action and thought-provoking content to keep the pages turning. Readers who enjoy authors like Janet Evanovich will gravitate to Shea's work, and they will no doubt snap up the next installment of the Dani O'Rourke series of mysteries as soon as it hits the market.

PATRICIA MORROW (Summer 2013)

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