



City of Silver: A Mystery

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In Potosí, the richest city in the Western Hemisphere, Inez de la Morada, the bewitching, cherished daughter of the rich and powerful Mayor, mysteriously dies at the convent of Santa Isabella de los Santos Milagros, where she had fled in defiance of her father. It looks as though the girl committed suicide, but Mother Abbess Maria Santa Hilda believes her innocent and has her buried at the convent in sacred ground. Fray Ubaldo DaTriesta, local Commissioner of the Inquisition, has been keeping an eye on the Abbess, who is too “Protestant” for his tastes, and this action may be just what he needs to convince the lazy, cowardly Bishop to punish her.

At the same time, Potosí finds its prosperity threatened. The King of Spain has discovered that the coins the city has been circulating throughout the world are not pure silver and is sending his top prosecutor and the Grand Inquisitor to mete out punishment. With the imminent arrival of the Spanish officials, many have reason to prove their loyalty, and keep hidden the crimes and sins they’ve committed. With her life at stake, Maria Santa Hilda finds herself in a race against time to prove the true cause of Inez’s death, aided by her fellow sisters, a Jesuit priest with a dark secret from his past, and a tomboyish girl who’s run to the convent to avoid an unwanted marriage. Together they will discover that Inez was not the girl she seemed, and that greed has no limits.

Annamaria Alfieri writes with astounding detail, showing an appreciation for the complexities and social nuances of this intriguing time in Latin American history when politicians, religious leaders, and an indigenous people all competed for power and survival in the thin mountain air of the Andes.

City of Silver: A Mystery Details

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From Reader Review *City of Silver: A Mystery* for online ebook

Perry Whitford says

In the heart of modern-day Bolivia used to stand the 17th century Spanish city of Potosi, fourteen thousand feet above the equator, built at the base of a mountain containing the world's largest silver mine. A largely forgotten place now, but in 1650, the year this mystery is set, the "*city had dominated the economic life of the planet for nearly a century*".

But that domination is under threat. It is discovered that the currency is being systematically debased, so the king sends a representative to investigate, Visitador Nestares. An Indian miner is killed for some confidential papers he was hiding and the daughter of the mayor mysteriously dies whilst seeking sanctuary in the convent, seemingly by suicide.

In *City of Silver*, first time novelist Annamaria Alfieri has created a well plotted locked room mystery within a wider political conspiracy, peopled with strong, believable female characters in what is essentially a man's world. Indeed the lead character, Sister Maria Santa Hilda, chose the convent to escape the only other option available to women of station, "*to marry the man of her fathers' choosing, to seal alliances, to secure property*".

As Abbess she has more autonomy over her environment than she would have had as a rich man's wife, but her influence is still confined to the abbey, and even then subject to the whims of the bishop, and of course the representatives of the Inquisition.

Alfieri clearly knows her time and place well, writes a smooth, simple prose which is highly readable, and keeps the pace up throughout while handling the incremental complications of the plot with a deft touch.

Add to that the insights into the lives of the women that accompanied the conquistadors and prospectors to this unlikely outpost of Spanish empire and you have all you need for an enjoyable historical mystery.

Betsy says

Talk about sense of place! Potosi in Alto Peru (now Bolivia) in the mid-1600s, one of the highest cities in colonial Spain. Bleak, isolated, windy, thin air. Always the thin air. Formed around the rich silver mine, the city runs on silver and is one of the empire's richest cities. In the middle of nowhere, the Potosinos think they're the center of the world. The Potosinos are like a great big dysfunctional family, always gossiping, fighting and plotting with each other. Enter the Inquisition and it all escalates to self-preservation level.

There are 3 deaths in the plot. The first is a silver miner, but no one with any power really cares. But it's a different story when the daughter of one of the most important families in Potosi dies, no one is sure if it's suicide or murder. And then another death follows. Every character in the book is quick to voice an opinion, and accusations fly. So many of them are plausible, I had no clue what the answer might be until the very end. *City of Silver* is a very satisfying mystery that kept me guessing and changing my mind all the way through.

Annamaria Alfieri clearly knows a lot about colonial Latin America and Potosi, and has done her research. I

know a fair amount about Latin America in this time period, and it all felt right to me. I looked up some specific events in the plot and they were historical.

Despite what some other reviewers have said, I thought this was a quick and absorbing read. I thought some of the characters were intentionally written to be flat, as befit the time and place. Note: The plot is somewhat complicated with a fair number of characters. I kept a bookmark at the list of characters in the front, and referred to it a lot during the first several chapters of the book.

Jane says

It's an emergency. Having read this, I must go to Potosi in Bolivia to see the most perfectly preserved Spanish Baroque city in the world. And what a story: naughty nuns, the Spanish Inquisition, incest, cross dressing, and a mountain of silver = what else does one need?

Cheryl says

Inez de la Morada is the daughter of Francisco Morada, the Mayor of Potosi. Potosi is a city of many riches. Inez has found the man she wants to marry. Her father disapproves of her choice. Inez seeks shelter at the convent, Santa Isabella de los Santos Milagros. Mother Abbess Maria Santa Hilda takes a liking to Inez and watches over her. When Mother Abbess Maria goes to check up on Inez, she finds the young woman dead. Inez's death does not go unnoticed, especially when her father is the Mayor. Soon Mother Abbess Maria finds herself in the middle of an investigation that has people looking at her as the prime suspect. She must learn the truth about Inez's death before it is too late.

City of Silver is Annamaria Alfieri's debut novel. She really made the characters come alive in this book. The only issue I had was there were so many characters coming at me very fast at the beginning and this translated to me having a bit of a problem keeping all the various people apart. From the beginning the reader knows what really happened to Inez. What I did enjoy through was seeing how this story would play out. It reminded me of a Spanish soap opera. The vivid picture Ms. Alfieri painted for me was so rich in culture that I could excuse getting a little lost. If you are looking for something new to read than give City of Silver a try, it just might sparkle for you.

Elli says

City of Silver by Annamaria Alfieri really was a fast moving, intensely drawing book. It's set in 17th century Peru and definitely a mystery. Very quickly two murders happened and one in particular badly needed solving for reasons of political comfort. First came an Inca miner doing some under-the-table work for some unidentified someone, then the daughter of a wealthy family which opened other questions making people quite uncomfortable. The setting is an era of strict rules, which at least publicly are to be almost slavishly

followed, and personal roles were well defined. Individuals were easily and willingly sacrificed to what is considered the common good. The Big includes the aristocracy, wealth and church, and goes down by degrees determined by birth circumstances, degree of white blood, and wealth and power...how useful you are, with pretty much the indians at the bottom. Slavery is, both in reality and in essence...with degrees and hierarchies in all areas of life including the church. Silver is important, both to the residents of Potosi (a difficult place to live with the extremely high altitude) and to the wealth of the Spanish crown. The mine may have been over-mined and suspicions have arisen as to quality. And representatives of the inquisition and the king's personal representative with total powers as representative of such such are arriving. People are scared. Also possibly a time for underhanded personal vendettas. And this all introduced very close to the beginning, so no spoiler. A very enjoyable book with lots of action.

Jason Golomb says

"Potosi had a Spanish soul: proud, greedy, cruel, and noble. It had beauty. Grandeur. Chaos."

Potosi is the location of Alfieri's terrific historical mystery, "City of Silver". This murder mystery is set in 1650 in the then Peruvian city nestled against a silver-rich mountain that made the city one of the wealthiest places in not only the new world, but the entire world.

The story revolves around the discovery of girl found dead in a room of a convent. She's naked, the door is locked, there's no other entrance, and no apparent cause of death. Threaded through this mystery is the arrival of the King's emissary investigating whether the coinage produced at Potosi is being blended with lesser metals. Not only could this spell financial disaster for the Potosi community, but the church's representative of the Inquisition in New Spain is arriving as well.

While things may seem a bit melodramatic, the story pulls together very very well. Alfieri's world is vividly reproduced, and maintains a genuinely New World feel. She absolutely nails the tone and voice of the era. There are shades of Gary Jennings' New World in Alfieri's Potosi, and the characters are strongly built, but not as boldly as Jennings' worlds of the Aztec.

The characters are strong and familiar. Padre Junipero and Abbess Maria are both bastions of the religious communities in Potosi, but have deep seated dark secrets that led them to the Church and led them to this city far from their homes in native Spain. The local representative of the church's Inquisition is full of bile and takes irredeemable joy in sending sinners to the auto de fe. Cliched, perhaps, but the character development moves at an appropriate pace and, with only one exception, did I find their back stories conclude less dramatically than foreshadowed.

I have no reservations in recommending this read to fans of both historical fiction and historical mysteries.

Doris says

A good mystery set in a historical silver city, with conquistadores and Spanish Dons and Donas. The mystery was sound, the solution believable, and the villain caught.

However, the writing was difficult to read - it tended towards pontification. Perhaps because of this, I was unable to get deep enough into the story to feel that the chief villain was really all that bad. I was left with a feeling that the victim was aiming for trouble that started with her grandfather, and that the main cast was made of spoiled little rich girls.

Rounded up from a 2.5 to a 3 for historical accuracy.

Kavita says

In the period of Spanish colonisation of the Americas and the terror of the Inquisition, a local Peruvian man is murdered in the mine. He holds a secret that could shake the foundations of the City of Silver, Potosi in the Principality of Peru (now in Bolivia). His death mostly went by unnoticed, but when a second death takes place in the convent of Santa Isabella de los Santos Milagros of a rich and young noblewoman, the daughter of one of the most powerful men in the city, things begin to unravel.

Who killed Santiago? Who killed Inez? And why? Who else is in danger here? This is the mystery part. The book is also pretty well-researched and brings out the utter disregard for the local Peruvians that the Spaniards displayed. But other than killing them in mines and treating them as chattel, does one of the conquistadors have a more sinister plan? Or does it only matter if the victims were Spaniards?

The terror of the Spanish Inquisition is also vibrantly displayed. The Catholic Church has lost its hold on many countries. Now, faithful (and fanatical) Catholics are desperate enough to instigate the Inquisition in a bid to keep their faith alive. This means targetting anyone who is not following the rules as they think ought to be followed. When this fanaticism is mixed with greed, racism, and sexism, it forms a pretty potent mixture, just enough to wipe out the progressive Abbess Maria Santa Hilda. Or is it? Is there really a God who gives justice to women?

There are dark secrets everywhere, from the mayor of Potosi to the Peruvian miner, to the young women in the convent, not to mention the Abbess herself as well as Father Junipero. These secrets drive the story and bring forth a conclusion that is slightly unbelievable, even if it is apt. I enjoyed the story very much but the conclusion was rather far-fetched. I do think Annamaria Alfieri is a good writer though, and I want to check out her other mysteries, especially if they are set in Bolivia.

Wendy says

Set in 1650, Potosi Peru. City of Silver: A Mystery beautifully blends a mystery, historic Catholic doctrine, 17th century sexism and racism.

As it IS 1650, women are expected to obey their men and do what is what they are told or Else. The Spaniard occupiers treat the Peruvian natives like slaves or worse. However, that does not mean all of the women or natives are like sheep, on the contrary.

Annamaria Alfieri does a excellent job portraying the Catholic Church and all its pageantry as well as the culture and mind-set of Peru. It is a well written, interesting historical novel. I will be reading more of her books.

Potosi is apparently part of Bolivia now. The book is set in the 17th Century, then Peru.

Aguess says

Set in Potosi the center of silver mining in the Western Hemisphere in the seventeenth century, this story is rich in historic detail and in intrigue. Told mainly through the voices of a number of women - rich wives of powerful mine owners, nuns, young women hiding in the convent to gain control over their lives, this is intricate web stretched to breaking by the complexities of desire, for money, power, and sex.

John says

Good little historical mystery set in Potosi, the focal point of Spain's colony during the 17th century due to it's incredible wealth of silver. The characters are intriguing, period details vivid, and it makes me long to revisit this charming town in Bolivia that I visited so long ago.

Mickey Wyte says

I really enjoyed this book. Annamaria Alfieri brings to the written page the sound and feel of 1650 Peru with a literally talent that brings to my mind Isabel Allende. Alfieri shows a vast knowledge of the period yet she does not write in a pedantic manor.

Her characters are well rounded. The story flows with every turn of the page.

I highly recommend City of Silver to those who enjoy well written historical fiction.

Em says

solid right through the end with nice twists along the way. a completely fine ride.

Richard Derus says

Rating: 2.75* of five

An historical mystery set in seventeenth-century Peru, certainly an unusual choice for an author, was completely irresistible to me the day I stumbled across it in the liberry.

Sadly, I ended the 315-page read wishing I'd resisted. It's not a bad book, really, but it's ponderous. The pacing problem that plagues many an historical mystery was amply demonstrated here...murders happened, but seemingly without emotional affect or effect. It's startling to me that the murder of a young woman in a convent could elicit such a small response from me. I was more moved by the death of a miner.

I found the characters in the book hard to get into, feeling little kinship with the POV Sister Maria Santa Hilda and less with her fellow Spanish Potosinos. Simply couldn't be bothered to learn their names, even...I gave them letters in my head, and after "F" gave up entirely...but gravy on toast, lady, could you have found a glummer, less scintillating group of people to write about?!

Overall not recommended.

Ravishankar Srinivasan says

Fantastic historical fiction set in Potosi and a murder mystery in a convent - sign me up!

The author has portrayed every day life and the grandeur of the famed city of Potosi brilliantly. The corruption of the clergy and the cruelty of the inquisition along with Spain's colonial greed is clearly laid out and serves as a reminder for many latin american nations dependent on just a single source of wealth (I am looking at you Venezuela) and how it corrupts the human soul.

Thoroughly engrossing read and will look forward to more works from this author
