



The Tree of Death

Marcia Muller

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Hot-tempered curator Elena Oliverez threatens to kill her boss, Frank DePalma, when he orders her to put a particularly hideous piece of sculpture--donated by a wealthy patron of the new Museum of Mexican Arts--on display for the museum opening. So when someone kills Frank with the sculpture, Elena must conduct her own investigation to clear her name--or die trying.

The Tree of Death Details

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Author : Marcia Muller

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From Reader Review The Tree of Death for online ebook

Stacielynn says

I love Marcia Muller, so when I found this for \$1 in a used book store, I snagged it. Interesting direction she takes here, with the Hispanic heroine and the Anglo/Latino culture rift as a back drop. It wasn't up to her usual standards, but it was enjoyable. There is a lot to digest - a little simplistic at time, but it IS dated, so the reader must keep the era in which it was written in mind. I appreciate the emphasis on regional art.

Abbey says

BOTTOM LINE: An early work, this first novel of Muller's second series is decently plotted and has fairly good characters, but is unfortunately predictable all the way through. The Chicana second-in-command of a folk art museum finds herself caught in a web of deceit, embezzlement, and murder, and the handsome Anglo cop working on the case thinks she's the killer. Not Muller's best, but intriguing especially if, as do I, you like to follow an author's growth and changes in style through the years.

Elena Oliverez has come a long way - the granddaughter of an illiterate field worker, she's now the Assistant Director of The Museum of Mexican Arts in Santa Barbara. Their big opening day celebration is nearly upon them, and she's very busy, especially since most of the staff seems to be untrained and ill-mannered, and not much help, especially aesthetically, including her boss the museum's director. But most of the workers are willing, and she's hopeful the opening will go well. Alas, it most decidedly does not, as a VIP donor at the last minute wants to include a particularly horrible, incredibly kitschy Tree of Life, and the museum director overrules Elena and allows it to be set up in a place of honor. They have a quite loud altercation and things are not comfortable between them, but it gets worse - he is found murdered right by the exhibit (during the opening) and Elena was the only one who had access to that gallery at the time of his death.

A few stereotypes, but Elena is likable, her Mother is sharp and interesting, and the interactions among the staff members are intriguing. Unfortunately at times there's a strident tone that overwhelms the good plotting, reflective of the late 1970s-early 1980s period in which it was written perhaps. It doesn't spoil the story much, but does serve to date it rather badly. A what was at the time very innovative attempt at an ethnic female detective story that almost "works", and is fairly entertaining despite its flaws and current-day familiarity. Not quite a fem-jep suspenser, not quite a look at a to-me alternative culture, I liked "meeting" Elena and look forward to the second in series **THE LEGEND OF THE SLAIN SOLDIERS**, 1985. Upon reflection, it's amazing how much Muller and Pronzini have learned from each other as writers over the years, and its fascinating watching them each develop.

[note: I read the Curley large print, which has an unfortunate cover - looks as though the artist didn't read the story, and the blurb on the back gives most of the plot away! One, er. two of my Pet Peeves.]

Kim says

3.5 stars

MeXican curator Elena Alvarez.

Helen says

1st Elena Oliver- Okay, not great

Jean says

Fast-paced mystery, interesting characters,I'm not sure I like that the main character and narrator was the chief suspect. However, it was a fun read..combining art and mystery which sparked my interest.

Wanda says

The main female character is a museum curator and she is working on setting up the opening of a small Mexican museum when she comes into conflict with her boss the director of the museum. They have words in front of the other workers over a piece of art and when he is found dead the next day she is suspected of the murder. She works to figure out who the killer is and clear herself. In so doing she finds out a lot about the people she has worked with for awhile and doesn't like it.

She finds that someone is bringing in goods from out of country and selling them to buyers without the money going to the museum but the museum is financing the buying trips. The director was having an affair and is the one at the head of the embezzling scam and he has talked others into helping him. The cop assigned to the case doesn't seem to listen to what she has to offer. In the end she figures out who the killer is but puts herself in harms way to do it.

Michele says

a different flavor to this series - more mexican american art focus - she makes this character come alive too

Betsy says

I am a fan of the Sharon McCone series by Marcia Muller. That said, this book (not part of the series) was a big disappointment. The story line was simplistic. The characters were one-dimensional and changed behavior and attitudes abruptly with no good explanation. Skip it.

aPriL does feral sometimes says

Boy, is this a little fling of a mystery. If you need *something*, it's worthy to pass the time. It's an early Marcia Muller effort, and it shows.

Elena Oliverez, first person narrator, is starting her career as as curator of a Museum of Mexican Arts in Santa Barbara, California. She also begins her mystery career when her boss is murdered, and she is the primary suspect. Lt. Dave Kirk, homicide detective, despite being Anglo, is attracted to the Hispanic Oliverez, but she is worried more about finding the killer of Frank de Palma because it might cause the museum to close as well as get her arrested. Startlingly, the head of the Museum's board, chairman Carlos Bautista, appoints her the new director to replace de Palma. She learns of embezzlement and discovers boxes of art that she knew weren't the museum's. Someone connected to the museum is behind all of this and Oliverez is determined to find out what is going on.

Nell says

Very good mystery set in Southern California. MC is the curator of a Mexican Art museum who becomes the prime suspect when the director is found dead. Classic locked room mystery - several suspects and motives but how did s/he get in and out of the locked museum? Enjoyed this first in a series.

Robert Scott says

Elena Oliverez is curator of a museum of ethnic art in a California town. The unpopular director of the museum is murdered by being bludgeoned with an ugly ceramic tree that he insisted be displayed because it had been donated by a lady who made large monetary donations to the museum. EL has to solve the murder in order to save her own skin.

Ed says

#1 in the Elena Oliverez series. A member of the hispanic community in Santa Barbara, CA, Elena struggles against the machismo culture. Raised by a single mother to be independent, Elana has earned a degree at UCSB and has been working for the Museum of Mexican Art for the five years since then. This was Marcia Muller's fourth book, following three Sharon McCone mysteries, and expectedly, it's not as mature as later efforts. Elena seems to develop more of her own personality as the novel progresses. I look forward to reading the next two entries in the trilogy.

Elena Oliverez series - Elena, curator at Santa Barbara's Museum of Mexican Art, vociferously objects to the inclusion of a donated garish "arbol de la vida" in the grand opening at the museum's new location. Frank de Palma, sloppy and lazy director of the museum, insists that the gift by a wealthy benefactor be included. In a temper, Elena yells "Someone should kill you!" The next morning she finds the director dead, crushed under the donated statuary. It's murder, the museum's alarm is still set, and Elena has the only other set of keys. She looks to clear herself.
