



The Venus Throw

Steven Saylor

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On a chill January evening in 56 B.C., two strange visitors to Rome—an Egyptian ambassador and a eunuch priest—seek out Gordianus the Finder whose specialty is solving murders, but the ambassador, a philosopher named Dio, has come to ask for something Gordianus cannot give—help in staying alive. Before the night is out, he will be murdered.

Now Gordianus begins his most dangerous case. Hired to investigate Dio's death by a beautiful woman with a scandalous reputation, he will follow a trail of political intrigue into the highest circles of power and the city's most hidden arenas of debauchery. There Gordianus will learn nothing is as it seems—not the damning evidence he uncovers, not the suspect he sends to trial, not even the real truth behind Dio's death which lies in secrets—not of state, but of the heart.

The Venus Throw Details

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From Reader Review The Venus Throw for online ebook

Pamela McLaren says

Gordianus the finder is getting older; his sons are grown and out of the house and his daughter is now in her teens. So when an old friend, the philosopher Dio stops by his house in disguise and with an eunuch at his side and says that he fears for his life, Gordianus hesitates to get involved.

Shortly afterwards, his old friend dies and apparently it is murder. He is drawn into investigating the murder, as well as connected in the political intrigue. Who can he trust as people from both sides come to him?

As the trial nears, Gordianus ponders what he has learned and wonders what he is missing. The clues are not adding up and as the orators rise to debate the issues, can he finally solve Dio's death?

Kathy Davie says

Fourth in the Roma Sub Rosa historical mystery series set in ancient Rome and revolving around Gordianus the Finder.

My Take

It's sad to read of Rome's descent into such corruption. It started with such wonderful ideals, and now it's just a sewer. I hate to say it, but the U.S. seems to be following the same path.

Reading Saylor's Roma Sub Rosa provides a more personal look at why the Republic fell. It's one thing to read historic tomes and memorize dates, but to read even a fictional account of a family's life at such a time brings it down to a level that's more easily understood. I know it always makes the facts zing into place for me, giving me a better understanding of the *whys* and effects of war and political decisions.

"Character assassination is the cornerstone of Roman jurisprudence."

Think of it as a combination *Jerry Springer* and the *Enquirer* with its characters tossing rumors, gossip, and slanderous innuendo back and forth.

It's a bit Sherlock Holmesian the way Gordianus determines the identities of his visitors, and I continue to be impressed with Saylor's depiction of Roman culture, dress, food, and manners. No, it's not an area of expertise for me, but there is something about his presentation that just rings true.

Oh, I don't know why I'm surprised. Pedophilia is not a new vice, and the Romans, Greeks, and Egyptians certainly had different ideas about what was acceptable sexually. Do be aware that while there is no overt sex in this, there is a lot of talk of it in a pornographic sense. Hey, they're Romans... I must confess that I find the switching of sides and betrayals to be a worse deceit...and ain't *that* sayin' somethin'...eek...

For the most (and overt) part, it's all politics between Rome and Egypt. Who's in power and who's aiming for power. How they're going to grab power degenerates into sabotage and assassination against a group of Egyptian delegates as well as a trial between two Romans with all the salacious gossip and innuendo they can dig up or invent.

The Egyptians don't want to become a Roman colony, and the Romans are slavering at the thought of all the plunder it represents.

Hmmm, I didn't know Bethesda was such a social climber. At the start, she's referring to Clodia as an old whore, and near the end of the story, they're best friends. Eco has great fun giving his father a hard time.

This tale will twist back and forth, making a case for and against people, a shell game with an ending that is totally unexpected.

The Story

Gordianus is becoming more and more careful the older he gets, so when an old friend from Alexandria asks his help in staying alive, Gordianus turns him down.

The Fates however have a different idea in store, and when Gordianus returns from a visit with Meto, he is talked into investigating his old friend's death, a case that will involve seduction, lies, perversions, and poisonings. And a tremendous shock for Gordianus.

The Characters

Gordianus the Finder is fifty-four now and still dips his toe in to investigate now and again. **Belbo** is still his bodyguard, although Gordianus is considering making him his doorkeeper soon. His daughter, Gordiana, nicknamed **Diana**, is thirteen now and as beautiful as her mother, **Bethesda**, was at that age. **Meto** is serving Julius Caesar in Illyria, and Gordianus wants to see his son. **Eco** is Gordianus' eldest son; he's taken over the majority of the Finding. He's married to **Menenia**, and they have four-year-old twins: **Titania**, and **Titus**.

Dio of Alexandria is the ambassador from Egypt and a philosopher with whom Gordianus once passed time and thought in debate when he lived in Alexandria (see *The Seven Wonders* , 0.5). **Lucius Lucceius** (his wife tells Gordianus the truth about that night and about her husband) and **Titus Coponius** are two of Dio's hosts in Rome. **Juba** and **Laco** are Lucius' kitchen slaves who are suddenly sent to the mines. **Philo** is Coponius' doorkeeper; **Zotica** is the slave who was abused.

Trygonion is a eunuch (a *gallus*) and a priest at the Temple of Cybele in Rome. He's also in love with Clodia.

Publius Clodius is Clodia's younger brother. He's a thug with a bad reputation. **Clodia** is a widow and notorious in Rome for her scandalous dress, affairs, and parties; **Chrysis** is her faithful, cheeky slave. Rumors abound as to how her husband, **Quintus Metellus Celer**, truly died. Marcus Caelius is her latest rejected lover. **Barnabus** is Clodia's doorkeeper.

Cicero has recently returned from exile, and he's rebuilding his house. **Tiro** is still his secretary.

Publius Asicius is the first to go on trial; he's a friend of **Marcus Caelius** who has an apartment down the road which he rents from the Clodii. *Bethesda thinks Marcus Caelius is hot, and we first met him in Catilina's Riddle*, 3, when he was spying on Catilina for Cicero. **Licinius** is another of Caelius' friends.

Lucius Sempronius Atratinus is seventeen and prosecuting Caelius to defend his father, **Bestia**. **Lucius Herennius Balbus** and **Publius Clodius** (a freedman with Clodia's brother's name) are his co-prosecutors.

King Ptolemy has been run out of Alexandria, leaving it in Pompey's hands. **Vibennius**, a.k.a., Busy Fingers, is part of a thieving team; he knows **Catullus**, a poet who is also in love with Clodia.

The Cover

The cover is dark with its navy background and a deep purple bare chest. To be honest, I can't tell if it's a man, a woman, or perhaps a eunuch.

The title is a gambling reference, a wager and trust in the goddess of love with *The Venus Throw*.

Tita says

Mais um livro da série Roma Sub-Rosa, desta vez o quarto volume.

Gordiano o descobridor é contactado por um antigo mestre egípcio, Díon, que lhe pede ajuda pois acredita que corre perigo de vida. Mas Gordiano recusa pois está de partida para ir visitar o seu filho Meteo. Quando regressa, descobre que Díon foi assassinado pouco depois de sair de sua casa e acaba sendo contactado por um conhecimento comum para que investigue o crime.

Mais uma vez, Steven Saylor criou uma excelente história, cheia de intrigas, segredos e venenos, em que Gordiano que tem fazer uso das suas capacidades para conseguir descobrir as provas do assassinato de Díon. Uma vez mais, rendi-me à história, que é bastante interessante e misteriosa que nos mantém sempre agarrados na tentativa de conseguirmos descobrir todos os mistérios antes de nos serem revelados por Gordiano.

Adoro ainda a forma inteligente como Saylor cria uma história policial aliada à Roma antiga, com todas aquelas movimentações políticas.

Uma série que recomendo para quem gosta de policiais e história.

Moshe Mikanovsky says

Another great tale of Gordianus the Finder, the Roman politics and intrigues, plot twists, murders, lawyers and their brilliant orations, slaves and sexual appetites and what not. The past with all its glory comes to life.

Beatrice Gormley says

I liked this and all of Saylor's Roma Sub Rosa mysteries, but then I'm a sucker for ancient Rome, and Saylor really knows it, as if he'd spent a few years there in the Peace Corps. Saylor's P.I., Gordianus, is sympathetic and entertaining.

Cáitlin O'ruadhán says

The short and the sweet of it is that if you ever loved Catullus, read this book, for Saylor brings one of THE greatest, and certainly Rome's greatest, poet of love vividly to life. And Saylor's sensuous portrayal of Clodia Pulcher makes you feel much like Catullus felt for her, and that is no mean achievement!

Leonardo Etcheto says

Very good, a great invocation of the world. The story was a little too convoluted but quite interesting. The main annoyance is that saylor has his character be extra dense sometimes so as to supposedly maintain the surprise, but often the outcome is fairly obvious and has been foreshadowed. Still I very much enjoyed this book, Rome was a crazy place at the end of the Republic.

Simon Mcleish says

Originally published on my blog here in November 2000.

The Venus Throw is probably the best of Saylor's series of novels featuring Roman private detective Gordianus the Finder. Once again, its subject is one of the famous cases for which Cicero was an advocate at the trial. Rome in the first century BC was a fascinating place, full of interesting people and tumultuous events leading to the formation of the Empire. It is a good illustration of the Chinese curse about interesting times; it was a supremely dangerous place to be, as unscrupulous men and women played political games for really high stakes.

The particular trial in The Venus Throw involves some of the most colourful characters of the time, Clodia and her brother Clodius, immortalised as Lesbia and Lesbius in the poems of Catullus. Coming from a distinguished patrician family, the Claudii, they had changed the spelling of their name so that Clodius could sound more plebian, mark working class, and attract the popular vote in elections. The pair were famous for their licentiousness as well as for their beauty, and were rumoured to be incestuous lovers. The devotion and disgust Clodia in particular could inspire is one of the major inspirations in the greatest of Catullus' poems.

Gordianus is involved because part of the trial is connected with the murder of the Egyptian philosopher Dio. occurred on a night when Gordianus was leaving Rome to visit his son Meto, on the staff of Julius Caesar in Illyria; Gordianus feels personally involved not just because Dio was an old friend whom he had met in Alexandria in his youth, but because the philosopher had come to visit him that evening in fear for his life.

Investigating what happened to Dio at Clodia's instigation leads Gordianus in all kinds of directions, including wondering what Clodia's interest is. Dio was in Rome as part of a delegation from Egypt trying to influence Rome's interference in that country's affairs, but the members of this party have gradually been killed off, presumably at the instigation of exiled Egyptian king Ptolemy, now living in Rome. But the difficulties are to prove this, and to work out which of the various Roman political factions are involved.

The background, always one of Saylor's strengths, is particularly well drawn in The Venus Throw; the characterisation of Catullus is one reason for this. The sense that the reader has of being involved in events is one of the strongest of any historical novel I have ever read. The characters, the new ones in this novel (especially Clodia and the brilliant, disillusioned Catullus) as well as the established series ones, are vivid and believeable. The puzzle is difficult, well presented and sensibly thought out. This is historical detective fiction at its best.

Chiggins1066 says

I've read almost all of Saylor's Roman mysteries (save for *Myst of Prophecies*), and I think this one is the best. In this novel, the author turns his attention towards Alexandria, and the crisis facing the Ptolemaic dynasty. We will remember from history that an unofficial Alexandrian delegation tried to reach the Roman senate (which included the philosopher Dio), only to be assassinated outside of Rome. Since the delegation was against Ptolemy, he has long been suspected. But Saylor offers a fictional alternative that will surprise most readers.

The Roman poet Catullus is also introduced in this book, and Saylor does a delightful job bringing this character to life. The poet is cynical and comical, and certainly one of the author's most memorable figures.

Chandini says

This book starts with a good deal of humor when the philosopher and the eunuch disguise themselves as a man and a woman respectively. Like when Bethesda tells Gordianus about the various obscene speeches and rhymes that were made in the Forum while he was away visiting with his son Meto: "Judges, I do not point the finger of guilt - I point at the guilty finger!" in reference to a case Marcus Caelius prosecutes where he brought up the deaths of the defendant's wives, possibly from having a poison, aconitum or panther's-death, touch a woman's genitals. Perhaps it to offset the darker side of the novel. This must be one of the most heartbreak of all of Saylor's *Roma Sub Rosa* novels. Even the part where Gordianus is walking around trying to make sense of everything he's learned and his own feelings about it are perfect - the confusion, the anger, the guilt without knowledge of wrong doing... It's very relatable to say the least.

It is about the power and weakness of women in ancient Rome and even now. The mysterious Great Mother Festival for women, the reason behind the strange looks between Bethesda and Diana and Dio, Clodia hiring Gordianus, Gordianus being ordered out of the house by Lucius Lucceius but his wife over riding that to talk to Gordianus, especially when Clodia and Bethesda talk, etc. Catullus talks about what makes Clodia strong "her beauty, her pride, her love of pleasure" and how it can be turned against her makes me think of "slut shaming" today.

Summary

Clodia, the notoriously beautiful sister of populous rabble rouser Clodius, hires Gordianus to find out who killed Dio, a philosopher who once taught Gordianus when they were both in Egypt. Dio comes directly to his old pupil but Gordianus and his elder son Eco are about to leave for a trip to visit his son Meto so he couldn't help Dio until he returned. When he and Eco do return to Rome they learn that Dio is dead, apparently poisoned. Soon after the Clodii bring a case against Marcus Caelius for the attacks on the Egyptian delegation and the murder of Dio.

Characters

Gordianii Household:

Gordianus - Called 'The Finder' main character who comes from a plebian background but has built a good life with an unconventional family in a home in an expensive neighborhood through his investigative work, plus a bit of good luck.

Bethesda - originally Gordianus' concubine but now his legal wife and mother of his daughter who shows her dislike of the philosopher Dio

Eco - Gordianus' elder adopted son who has followed in his father's footsteps to become an investigator

Meto - Gordianus' younger adopted son who started life as a slave and is now a soldier in Caesar's army and personal writer for Caesar's memoirs

Gordiana - 13 year old daughter of Bethesda and Gordianus who looks just like her mother with her long black hair, dark eyes and olive skin

Belbo - trusted slave and bodyguard of the Gordianii but is getting a little too old to protect them as he used to, acquired in one of Gordianus' previous cases

Menenia - Eco's wife and mother of the twins Titania and Titus

Others:

Dio - Alexandrian philosopher who once taught Gordianus and comes to Rome with an Egyptian delegation to try to get the Senate to recognize Queen Berenice rather than King Ptolemy, then to Gordianus after attempts are made on the ambassador's life

Trygonion - eunuch dedicated to Cybele, the Great Mother who comes with Dio to seek Gordianus' aid, in service to Clodia

Lucius Lucceius - host to Dio in Rome where Dio's taste testing slave is killed, friend of Pompey

Titus Coponicus - Dio's next host in Rome, a tall, imposing, wealthy, educated student of philosophy

Vibennius - a shady man who is known as 'Busy Fingers' both for his thieving and the so called 'massages' he has been known to give at the baths. All of his schemes are helped along by his son

Historical Characters (and their servants):

Publius Asicius - handsome indulgent young man about town who would do anything to further his career, in debt to Pompey. Prosecuted for attacks on the Egyptians and acquitted.

Marcus Caelius - now a neighbor of Gordianus on the Palatine Hill, got Gordianus involved in the battle of wits between Cicero and Catalina in Catalina's Riddle, friend of Publius Asicius, a little over 30 years old, uncommonly handsome, like Publius he is one of the "charming quick witted young men with good backgrounds but uncertain prospects, notorious for their complete lack of scruples, witty and well educated with a taste for hard drinking and scandalous poetry, affable, ingratiating, and never to be trusted."

Bestia - man who is prosecuted by Marcus Caelius for bribery, but also accused of the murder of his wives by putting poison on his hands before pleasuring them

Publius Licinius - supposedly Marcus Caelius' man who was to hand over poison

Pompey -'The Great' commander of an army which pacified the East, is trying to take control of the Egyptian situation for his own benefit, fights against Caesar and Crassus both

Gaius Julius Caesar - the founder of a dynasty trying to conquer Gaul during this book. He is also trying to control the Egyptian situation, or at least get some bribes out of King Ptolemy since his finances are ever shakier though his list of military victories grows. He is well known for historical Memoirs, which he dictates to others, including Meto, for them to write

Marcus Tullius Cicero - kind of launched Gordianus career (as well as his own) when he hired Gordianus to investigate the patricide case of Sextus Roscius in Roman Blood. He is an exceptionally clever orator who was once consul of Rome and patron of Marcus Caelius (see Catalina's Riddle) but was later exiled. He uses his words as smoke and mirrors to get the people to believe what he wants rather than bribery (like Crassus) or impressing them with his military might (like Pompey or Caesar)

Marcus Crassus - richest man in Rome, known for his greed above all. One time (and again?) mentor of Marcus Caelius. He once hired Gordianus to find out who killed his cousin in The Arms of Nemesis

King Ptolemy - Egyptian ruler known as The Piper because he is only skilled at playing the flute, not governing a country. He is lazy, self indulgent and licentious. He has fled to Rome because his people are angry at how he is increasing their taxes to bribe Rome. Some think that his rule is illegitimate because the previous Egyptian ruler, Alexander II, left a will leaving Egypt to the Senate and the people of Rome but the Egyptians want to stay separate so they demand a ruler who will not give in to Rome like King Ptolemy does when he gives large bribes to Caesar and Pompey who can bribe the Senate and the soldiers into calling King Ptolemy the legitimate ruler of Egypt and restore him to his throne. But now it may be too late, his daughter Berenice has been named Queen of Egypt.

Clodia - widowed half-sister of Publius Clodius, notorious for her many lovers possibly including her own brother(s) according to gossip and Marcus Caelius, at least for a time. She hires Gordianus to look into Dio's death.

Quintus Metellus Celer - deceased, Clodia's late husband and cousin, father of Metella

Metella - Clodia's 13 year old daughter from her marriage with Quintus

Chrysis - Clodia's auburn haired hand maiden

Barnabas - Clodia's door man

Publius Clodius - a mid-30s patrician from a long line of patricians but also feared as a "rabble-rouser and exploiter of populist resentments." He heads a gang of tough strong-armers of the lowest class. Once friendly to Cicero but now his enemy. "His political tactics were crude, relentless and often violent." Frequently political allies with Marcus Caelius but they have a falling out during this novel

Milo - Rival of Clodius with his own gang of ruffians challenging Clodius for control of Rome's streets, Pompey's enforcer

Gaius Valerius Catullus - a thin young man with a hunted expression and a sharp, witty tongue. A poet who wrote many poems about his love for "Lesbia" who many think was Clodia

Lucius Sempronius Atratinus - the son of Bestia (the guilty finger) who was prosecuted by Marcus Caelius and now prosecutes Caelius in his turn

Lucius Herennius Balbus - heavy set friend of Bestia, second prosecutor in Marcus Caelius' trial

Publius Clodius (freedman) - ex slave of Publius Clodius which is why he has the same name and third prosecutor in Marcus Caelius' trial

Gnaeus Domitius - presiding judge over Marcus Caelius trial

Fernando Delfim says

"Os Deuses adoram surpreender os homens com o inesperado - e são famosos pela crueldade do seu regozijo."

"As coisas raras e belas que a riqueza e o poder podem comprar não passam, muitas vezes, de decorações que escondem o modo como essa riqueza e esse poder foram adquiridos."

"A oratória serve para as ocasiões em que não existem factos."

"Se viveres o suficiente, perceberás que eles nunca acabam (problemas com as mulheres)"

Inês Beato says

Mais um volume extraordinário da série Roma Sub Rosa, protagonizada por Gordiano o Descobridor. Com muito mais mistério e acção que o livro anterior, "O Mistério de Catilina", este "Lance de Venus" mantém o leitor completamente agarrado à história e na expectativa até ao final surpreendente, passando, durante as investigações, pelos meandros da política e dos tribunais da Roma Antiga.

Acho fantástica a forma como Steven Saylor consegue combinar ficção e factos históricos, bem como misturar personagens reais com personagens ficcionadas, baseando-se em relatos, discursos e cartas da época que chegaram até aos nossos dias para construir os seus enredos.

É um autor para continuar a seguir, sem dúvida!

Mike says

Another good read from Saylor. I was on the fence re a 4 star rating (leaning toward something a little less, mainly because it dragged a bit in the middle) -- but once again he pulled it off at the end. You know its a good mystery when you think you've figured it out several times along the way, but at the end the real solution surprises you and also makes complete sense . . . all the clues were there from the get go, you just didnt see it.

Also classic Saylor in bringing Ancient Rome to life along the way -- and another historical trial with Cicero for the defense, with excerpts/adaptations from Cicero's arguments.

If you're a Saylor fan - you'll love it. If you've not real Saylor yet - but enjoy a good mystery and/or enjoy historical fiction re ancient Rome - then its worth a read (although you might want to start with the first of his Gordianus books -- Roman Blood).

Bruce says

"Take a winding pathway to the foot of the Palatine, to a spot just behind the Temple of Castor and Pollux. Turn left. Proceed down the narrow alley (stinking of urine, and black as pitch at night) that runs behind the buildings on the north side of the Forum. As the slope of the Palatine curves away on the left-hand side, letting the alley open a bit, you will come to a cluttered area of little workshops and warehouses south of the Forum, east of the cattle markets and the river. Look for the little pillars which name the shops and businesses. As you draw near to the ninth signpost you will see the pool of light cast by the lamp hung outside, welcoming those who cannot or will not sleep, and who cannot or will not stop drinking, whoring, and gambling. This is the place which Catullus called the Salacious Tavern." (p. 174).

Atmospherics. That was my favorite passage and favorite aspect of this book. (Start off positive, right?) This was, in part, why I thought I was reading Saylor. Unfortunately, this is about all the atmospherics you'll get. Since this is a mystery, I'll go light on plot synopsis. Basically, The Venus Throw derives its storyline from the murder of the Egyptian philosopher-revealed-violent sexual deviant Dio as Saylor has reconstructed it from Cicero's real defense of Marcus Caelius. Save for the context, there's less Roman history on display than Roman literature, as Caesar, Crassus, and Pompey play distant backdrop to Catullus' poetic depictions of his beloved Lesbia, the patrician Clodia.

So why only two stars? As with his short stories, it comes down to superficiality. For me, Saylor fails to meet even the most rudimentary of expectations, squandering opportunities aplenty in pointless pursuit of a straightforward plot. Hoping to be steeped in the exotic underworld of ancient Rome? Alas, my lead example is unique to the book. In general, Saylor's investigator simply fineses, as in, "I spent the day snooping." Might we nonetheless visit an elite estate along the banks of the Tiber or parade through the urban streets? No, the hero will be confined to a tent or an enclosed litter.

Gordianus has limited introspection -- he confesses that the thoughts and attitudes of those closest to him are a mystery, but apparently not enough of one for this detective to engage. Nor does he bother exploring his own motivations. (Contrast Martin Cruz Smith's rich Arkady Renko or John Le Carre's three-dimensional book trader in *The Russia House* or his uber-spy *Smiley*.) Gordianus is devoid of witty repartee as Saylor acknowledges, with other characters accusing the (stoic?) detective of lacking a sense of humor. (Contrast Gregory MacDonald's *Fletch* and *Flynn*, the biting satire offered by most of Elmore Leonard's characters, the spoof- Dashiell Hammett voice that Rex Stout's Archie Goodwin plays off his spoof Sherlock Holmes Nero Wolfe.) Gordianus even lacks the distinction of superhuman competence (evidenced in Wolfe, Conan Doyle's Holmes, Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot, Edgar Allan Poe's Auguste Dupin) that might inspire gasping admiration. Cardboard characters often make dull books, and Gordianus the Finder, Saylor's fictional detective, is less a character than a plot device. Even with such limitations, Saylor might have achieved artificial redemption. Heck, even Isaac Asimov manages to generate some interest in his wafer-thin R. Daneel Olivaw mysteries by ending each chapter with a cliffhanger. Saylor lacks even that.

So why bother? Perhaps, taking Catullus as a direct inspiration, Saylor meant to set up this novel as an exploration of Venus, sort of an ancient Roman *Aspects of Love*. But even this opportunity for literary pretension is tossed aside; Saylor rattles it off in a simple paragraph: "What is this madness which poets call

love? What power compels a man to thrust himself against the lacerating indifference of a woman who no longer loves him? What drives a woman to see the absolute destruction of a man who rejects her? What cruel appetite makes a man of rational intellect crave the debasement of his helpless partners in sex? How does a eunuch, supposedly impervious to love, become enamored of a beautiful woman? Is it natural for a brother and sister to share a bed, as we are told the gods and goddesses of Egypt sometimes do? Why do the worshipers of the Great Mother emasculate themselves in religious ecstasy? Why would a woman steal a lock of her lover's pubic hair to cherish as a keepsake?" (p. 189) But this is an outline, not an analysis. Again, contrast Cruz Smith, Philip Kerr's Wittgenstein killer of *A Philosophical Investigation*, or the tortured introspections undertaken by William Bayer's *David Bar-Lev* of the exquisite *Pattern Crimes*. See what more nuanced novelists can do within the mystery genre?

From the three I've read to date, Saylor's books are as thin as screenplay treatments, bare elaborations of history-as-mystery. If that's your thing, *Venus Throw* isn't bad. For those seeking verisimilitude, Saylor even throws in his primary source material (Cicero's defense, which is interesting in isolation, but ultimately completely irrelevant since both Cicero and Caelius fall outside the arc of protagonist and action). Unfortunately, with cardboard characters, little introspection or exploration, and de minimis scenery to enjoy, this book lacks much of anything else to recommend it. From my view in the mystery arena, I give it a thumbs down.

Aapo says

Antiikin Roomaan sijoittuva dekkari. Tarinassa hyödynnetään paljon ihan oikeita henkilöitä ja tapahtumia, esim. Cicerolla on keskeinen rooli asianajajana. Hänen puolustuspuheensa, jota riittää sivukaupalla, tuskin on kuitenkaan alkuperäinen, mutta oletettavasti mukaillee hänen useita säilyneitä puolustuspuheitaan.

Varsinkin alkupuolella tuntui olevan vähän liian paljon henkilöitä lukijan muistettavaksi. Siitä huolimatta pakko sanoa, että teoksessa hyödynnetään taitavasti historiallista tutkimustietoa eikä tarina pahasti kangistu historiallisuuteensa. Oikeastaan toivoin, että Roomaa olisi kuvattu enemmän ja eläväisemmin.
